

**Counter-  
Cultural  
Perspectives of  
an Organic  
Intellectual:  
Selected Works  
of  
Rudolf C.  
Heredia**

***Volume I***

**SOCIO-CULTURAL  
PERSPECTIVES:  
PLURALISM AND  
MULTIPLE  
IDENTITIES**

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**SOCIO-CULTURAL  
PERSPECTIVES:  
PLURALISM  
AND  
MULTIPLE IDENTITIES**

*Written by:*

**Rudolf C. Heredia**

*Compiled and Edited with:*

**Priya D'Souza**

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Volume I— Socio-Cultural Perspectives: Pluralism And Multiple Identities

Contact the author at *rudiheredia@gmail.com* to reproduce any articles.

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# GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO COUNTER-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES OF AN ORGANIC INTELLECTUAL: THE SELECTED WORKS OF RUDOLF C. HEREDIA

This collection brings together essays and presentations that span some five decades of my work. These are in the overall discourse of the social sciences and though I have trained as a sociologist my perspective is more interdisciplinary. This is really the only way contemporary social issues and questions can be approached if they are to have any relevance today.

A continuing thread that runs through this collection. It represents an ongoing venture to bring a critical reflection on social issues that engage activists in the field. Thus, rather than indulge in 'ad hoc' responses, they can create a praxis of action-reflection-action in the tradition of Paulo Freire. Hopefully, this interaction between the 'desk and the field' will enrich both, activists to more effective action on the ground and theorists to a more critical appreciation of the underpinning ideas.

The collection is divided by common overall themes into separate volumes to provide a coherent unifying perspective to each volume. While each essay has its own specific context and topic, yet given the time span they cover, some overlap and repetition across these volumes is inevitable. However, we have tried to exclude this within the volume itself, unless there is a different nuance in the presentation that justifies its inclusion despite the overlap.

The articles selected for a particular volume follow in the order of the date of their publication (or of writing, if the piece wasn't published). This is to give an idea of how the theme developed in my discourse on it. Hopefully, the discourse itself is open-ended, so the reader can take it forward in various directions, that are only implied in this selection.

Rudolf C. Heredia

The following are the subdivisions of the collection.

- I. Socio-Cultural Perspectives: Pluralism and Multiple Identities
- II. Socio-Political Perspectives: Contradictions and Complementarities
- III. The Development Debate: Growth and Equity
- IV. Religion and Society: Secularism and Its Discontent
- V. Ecological Concerns: Environmental Sustainability
- VI. Hermeneutics of Dialogue: Discourses on The Self and The Other
- VII. Education: The Dual System
- VIII. The Tribal Question
- IX. Gandhiana: Essays on A Yuga Purush
- X. Globalisation And Its Discontents Globalisation
- XI. Jesuitica: For the Jesuit Parivar
- XII. Miscellaneous Articles
- XIII. Book Reviews
- XIV. Poems
- XV. Homilies

# **INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME I SOCIO-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES: PLURALISM AND MULTIPLE IDENTITIES**

The issues around socio-cultural pluralism concern how a society and its subgroups cope with 'difference' which inevitably poses a question to the relationship of the 'self' the other. Accepting difference as complementary and enriching is a necessary condition for an overarching consensus that unifies the diversity; rejecting difference leads to an imposed uniformity that can only impoverish society and its groups. Given that in any society we all have multiple identities to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the complexity of the network of social relationships in which we are nodes. Pluralism requires unity in diversity for a consensual society or rather diversity in unity. The essays in this volume approach this issue from variously nuanced perspectives.

Today our cultural diversity is threatened by a majoritarianism that seeks to flatten minority cultures into a single communal uniformity. This will fracture rather than enhance the unity of our peoples in the common good of all. The essays in this volume flag this danger and hopefully will help to create a counter discourse to anticipate and overcome this.



# 1. **DIALOGUE IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA: A PERSPECTIVE FROM THE SOCIAL SCIENCES**

Written in the late 1990s

I. INTRODUCTION: A CONSTRUCTIVE INTERROGATION

II. PLURALITY AND PLURALISM

THE PROBLEMATIC CONTEXT

CONTEMPORARY COMPLEXITIES

TRADITIONAL APPROACHES

THE CONTRIBUTION OF DIVERSITY

PLURAL SOCIETIES

UNIVERSALISM AND PARTICULARISM

III. THE CONTEXT FOR TOLERANCE

TRUTH AND DIVERSITY

THE SOUTH ASIAN SCENE

DIMENSIONS OF TOLERANCE

LEVELS OF UNDERSTANDING

COMPLEXITY AND CHALLENGE

IV. THE HERMENEUTICS OF DIALOGUE

DIALECTICS AND DIALOGUE

DOMAINS IN DIALOGUE

V. COMMON GROUND TO HIGHER GROUND

LIBERAL JUSTICE

INTRA-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

AN EQUAL DIALOGUE

VI. CONCLUSION

REFERENCES

## Abstract

This essay is an exploration of the many facets of dialogue in the socio-cultural context of India, from a multidisciplinary perspective. The essay walks one through the complexities involved.

### I. Introduction: A Constructive Interrogation

A viable and sustainable perspective on dialogue must be premised not on a walled-in consciousness of a colonised mind, nor the rootless wonderings of the uncommitted spirit, rather it must be a serious quest for a mutually enriching encounter. Romanticising our own traditions and worldviews, and then isolating ourselves within, or aggressively imposing them on others, are both defensively inadequate, or unfeasible and violent responses to the eco-political and religio-cultural challenges we face today.

Gandhi's aspiration can provide us with our best starting point here:

I do not want my house to be walled on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any of them. (*Young India*, June 1921: 170)

Thus, the presumptions on which this presentation is premised are as follows. Plurality is an inevitable given in our world. This plurality is multi-dimensional. It includes social and political, cultural and religious traditions. The challenge for us is to evolve an integrated 'pluralism' out of this 'plurality', not just a peaceful co-existence, but an enriching encounter. Tolerance is the precondition and dialogue the only feasible approach to inevitable conflicts and contradictions in our violent and conflict-ridden world.

This presentation begins by defining the terms 'plurality' and 'pluralism' and describing the difference between them, sets the context for tolerance, examines the hermeneutics of dialogue, and finally in the context of our Constitutional ideals for justice and aspirations for equality it sketches a common ground for an equal dialogue.

## II. Plurality and Pluralism

‘Plurality’ is the multi-dimensional social reality, and correspondingly pluralism, which includes various and diverse understandings, is a response to plurality. It is important to clarify and fine-tune the understanding of these concepts, lest our response be inadequate or even counter-productive. In fact, the great apprehension about pluralism is that it ends in relativism, which is certainly not an inevitable or necessary consequence.

### ***The Problematic Context***

All pluralism in society is eventually, founded on the polarity between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ among different persons and diverse groups. These cannot simply be wished away, for the ‘other’ always poses a question to the ‘self’, that will not go away. One can ignore the question only for a while, for the questioning cannot be so easily negated, unless one destroys the questioner. History bears witness to how dominant persons and groups have eliminated subordinate ones in massacres and genocides, or forcibly assimilated them through miscegenation or ethnocide.

But where such brutal solutions cannot be attempted, either because of the realities on the ground or the ethical ideals in our culture, then, tolerance can be our only viable human response. Obviously, our understanding of tolerance, especially in a pluralist society, will have many dimensions and distinct levels. Hence the need for a dialogue between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’, one that moves through these dimensions and levels of tolerance to a fulfilling and enriching encounter of the self and the other.

### ***Contemporary Complexities***

The prevalence of pluralism in our post-modern world is more than a reflection of our present *sitz-im-leben*. It is one of the persistent givens of the human situation. It has at times been repressed by overt and/or covert violence, but only at great human cost. But then again such repression only makes for an unstable equilibrium that cannot last very long. To our reckoning, in the measure in which societies have attained uniformity and solidity, there is always a corresponding unmeasured



subterranean quantum of diversity and confusion that resists integration into such a homogenised, monolithic social order.

One could, mistakenly it seems to us, consider this resistance to be a matter of unfinished business; or, more correctly we would urge, interrogate such resistance in a search for an underlying explanation, which will help us to understand the human foundations of diversity and pluralism in its more basic aspects, before we go on to consider the multiple dimensions of their social consequences and finally our responses to them.

The complexity of our modern world cannot be contained in any single Weltanschauung (Rahner 1969: 26), nor can a dominant one be imposed in a free and open society. But the problem of 'the one and the many' in the West goes back to ancient Greek philosophy. Intellectual answers have ranged from strict monism to complete scepticism, while social responses have varied from dictatorial totalitarianism to libertarian anarchism.

In the modern world, pluralism has emerged both as a mode of intellectual analysis and a normative doctrine (Kariel 1968: 164). This Western pluralism was first premised on the individual's freedom of conscience but soon the necessity of intermediate groups to affirm and protect such freedom was realized.

Any human grasp of reality is necessarily constrained by intrinsic human limitations. This need not mean an inevitable ethical relativism. However, if the dignity and freedom of the individual is to be respected, then this must necessarily be expressed in a social pluralism. Because the individual cannot be sacrificed to the group, nor a subordinate group to a dominant one, pluralism cannot simply accept the utilitarian 'greatest good of the greatest number', that Bentham argued for; nor even the democratic 'tyranny of the majority', that de Tocqueville cautioned against; much less the socialist 'party-vanguardism' of Lenin's democratic centralism.

Rather within a framework of individual and group rights, pluralism is ultimately premised on the acceptance of differences, whether these arise from individual choices or from group diversity. This implies that individuals must have their freedom guaranteed, just as groups must have their culture protected.

### ***Traditional Approaches***

Now in some traditional societies, at first reckoning there may seem to be less support for such an understanding of pluralism. But a more careful and critical reading of tradition may reveal a helpful

basis to build on. Thus traditional Indian society tended to be more ascriptive in assigning status to individuals and groups. Moreover, interrelationships were in principle hierarchically ordered rather than competitively stratified. In such a social system, individual choice could be exercised only within prescribed limits that derived more from the functional role the individual played in society, than from an understanding of the human person's inviolable dignity and inalienable rights.

Yet a plurality of groups was accepted and integrated into a social hierarchy where each had its protected niche. However, this pluralism was not premised on either individual freedom or social equality. Rather it was based on a bonding of individuals in the group, and of groups in society.

The pressures of social change are now displacing group claims on individuals by an assertion of the individual's rights and replacing co-operative group interrelationships with competitive ones. The resulting sense of loss and of insecurity, of uncertainty and disorientation that such changes imply, for both individuals and groups, has precipitated tensions and conflicts that are explosive and violent, to the point where they seem uncontainable within our social system!

### ***The Contribution of Diversity***

But we cannot simply negate our traditions to ease the weight of the past on our present situation. Rather we need to critique our traditions radically and draw on them as resources to understand and respond creatively and constructively to our present crisis.

This is precisely what Gandhi did with his construction of ahimsa and satyagraha. We must do this with the Jaina concept of *anekantavada* (the many-sidedness of truth) and *syadvada* (the interrelatedness of all things); with the Buddhist outreach in *sarvabhutadaya*, (Universal compassion); with the Advaitic relativising of *mayavada* and *avidya*; the Upanishadic ideal of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*, (the Universal family); with the materialistic rationalism of *Charvaka*; with the religious pluralism, the *sarva-dharma-samabhava*, of the *Sufi-bhakti* heritage of our *sant-kavis* (saint-poets), etc.

To be sure such a construction of tradition is already being contested by an opposition to pluralism that is increasingly

authoritarian and fascist, uninhibitedly ethnocentric and chauvinistic. This we must challenge not by a denial of our past but by a critique of it, not by a flight from the present crisis but by an encounter with it, not by an escape into utopia, but a realistic provision for our future.

The basic foundation for all this must be a radical acceptance of the reality of pluralism in all the multi-faceted dimensions of its religious culture and of its political economy. This can then become the point of departure for a committed response. For acceptance cannot be creative or constructive if it is merely uncritical and passive. In other words, just as a critical modernity must interrogate tradition to construct the present, so too must a renewed tradition challenge modern pathologies with an alternative understanding of normality and not just glorify our past. (Saran 1989)

It is our contention that in the final analysis the trajectory of our response to pluralism must begin with acceptance of difference and a respect for other identities and reach out to live and celebrate diversity as parts of a larger organic whole. (Kothari 1989: 20)

### ***Plural Societies***

Most modern societies are inevitably plural because of their complexity and scale. But plurality has characterised other societies including traditional ones. Plurality implies separate and distinct social groups coming together in some kind of more inclusive social order. We can distinguish two dimensions to such plurality. Structural plurality implies 'a social structure compartmentalised into analogous, parallel, non-complementary but distinguishable sets of institutions'. (Van den Berghe 1967: 67)

Cultural plurality implies different cultures or sub-cultures with their distinctive individual and collective identities within an overarching civilisational unity, where distinctive identities are contained in a larger, layered one.

Structure and culture are necessary dimensions of any institutional system in society. Hence both these dimensions will be present in any plural or composite society. However, in a particular context one or the other may be the more pertinent. Thus in the 'mature Western democracies' plurality is more structural, whereas in post-colonial societies, especially in South Asia, plurality is quite decidedly more cultural. And more often than not it is the cultural dimension that is more resilient in the segmentation and compartmentalisation of a plural society. However, there is an obvious interaction between the two. On the one hand, it might be

easier to work out unifying structures when there is cultural consensus, on the other, it might very well be that the functional integration of structures in fact brings about greater cultural consensus. But once again in particular contexts one or the other may be the more problematic. The implications of this interaction for educational policy in a plural society needs to be further probed.

Now if group diversity is one pole in a plural society, then a more inclusive unity, that holds these together will be the other. Without the first there would be no plurality, without the second there would be many single, not one composite society. Moreover, this larger unifying social order will also have a structural and cultural aspect. Structurally it is often the market and the polity that integrates diverse groups in a common social order. Culturally a common religion, language or older tradition can become the basis for a more inclusive civilisational unity. We need to further explore how far such structural and cultural pluralities pertain to Indian society.

Often the tension between these two polarities of unity and diversity has been dealt with by emphasising one and abandoning the other. Thus homogenisation is often seen as a solution for a plural society, imposed by an authoritarian government or a hegemonic class or group, sacrificing other minority groups. The history of the nation-states provides ample evidence of this. On the other hand, diversity could be permitted to a point where segmentation and compartmentalisation into groups can no longer be contained under an over-arching social order, so then these groups begin to seek their own separate and distinctive collective destinies and identities. The Balkanisation of empires can be instructive here. Both these approaches ultimately amount to a negation of plurality, though they seek the resolution of the unity-diversity tension in different directions. Pluralism, however, seeks to resolve this tension differently. While unity in diversity was once official policy in India, today pluralism is under a menacing threat.

### ***Universalism and Particularism***

One viable way of coping with plurality would be within the politics of recognition. (Taylor 1992: 25) This involves both the politics of Universalism and the politics of difference. The first is premised on human rights of individuals and the equal dignity of all citizens, and therefore is committed to enforcing equal rights for all. The second is premised on cultural rights, and is responsible for

ensuring the unique identity of each cultural group. In the first individual rights, in the second collective ones are privileged.

Pluralism then is a way of coping with a plural society, that attempts to reconcile the polarity between Universalism and particularism by affirming both: an 'equal dignity' for all citizens, and an 'unique identity' for each group. Such pluralism must be founded on a deep and comprehensive understanding of tolerance, as the basis of a workable 'politics of recognition', that includes the 'politics of Universalism' and the 'politics of difference'. (Taylor 1992) But then again only to the extent that such identities are defined positively is any reconciliation for real tolerance possible. This is really the only viable option in a society as resiliently diverse as ours.

### **III. The Context for Tolerance**

One can distinguish several levels of tolerance. This is necessary because no dialogue is possible without a common and mutually agreed-upon level of tolerance. Often dialogue collapses precisely because levels of tolerance are so different that people talk past, rather than to each other.

#### ***Truth And Diversity***

The reality of pluralism faces us with the question of tolerance. The term in English dates from the 16th century, though the notion itself is much older. For as a philosophical problem tolerance concerns the reconciliation of truth with freedom, i.e., the claims of truth versus the legitimacy of diverse opinions. (Post 1970). The implications of this for a society today are as painful as they were for Socrates in ancient Athens, which was not a very heterogenous city! In the Roman Empire, the problem reached acute proportions in the persecution of Christians. With the Edict of Milan in AD 313, these ended not so much in religious tolerance, as in eventual Christian dominance.

The post-Reformation religious wars left a divided and exhausted Christendom, which now began the pragmatic separation of church and state. However, this did not always guarantee real tolerance, as the limitations in the 'Act of Toleration', 1689, in England evidenced.

Yet 'the English Enlightenment was the greatest promoter of the notion of tolerance though mostly at the expense of theology and the binding force of the knowledge of truth (to which common sense was preferred).' (ibid.: 265) In France the strongly anti-clerical Encyclopaedists 'paved the way for the republican and democratic

notions of the state,' (ibid.: 266) though its narrow rationalism provided 'a very doubtful basis for the tolerance which was always in demand.' (ibid.: 265) Thus in the modern West, the social origins of tolerance are to be found less in its monotheistic dogmatic religious beliefs than in the pragmatic resolution of intractable religious and political conflicts.

But tolerance is more than a matter of conflict resolution and emancipation. It is as multifaceted as the dimensions of the pluralism underpinning it: from intellectual worldviews to ethical values, from religious beliefs to cultural patterns, from political ideologies to economic systems, from linguistic divisions to geographic regions. In fact 'there is no generally acknowledged definition of tolerance in the concrete'. (ibid.: 262) Moreover, a merely formal definition would run into practical difficulties.

### ***The South Asian Scene***

In Sanskrit and Arabic, there is no exact equivalent for 'tolerance', (Khwaja 1992: 95, 101). But again the notion itself is not unknown or unacknowledged. For the basis for pluralism was well established in the orthodoxy of ancient Indian traditions, as we have already indicated earlier: Jaina non-violence, Buddhist compassion, Upanishadic Universalism, *Sufi-bhakti* mysticism. Indian orthopraxis, however, was less tolerant and could be quite violent.

But there were significant landmarks that have stamped our history. Thus Ashoka issued the first recorded edict for tolerance:

On each occasion one should honour another man's sect, for by doing so one increases the influence of one's own sect and benefits that of the other man . . . . Again, whosoever honours his own sect or disparages that of another man, wholly out of devotion to his own, with a view to showing it in favourable light harms his own sect even more seriously. Therefore concord is to be commended, so that men may hear one another's principles and obey them. (Thapar 1961: 255.)

In medieval times, so Humayun Kabir argues convincingly, Akbar's was 'the first conscious attempt to formulate the conception of a secular state' (Kabir 1955: 21) in the country, but this was not followed through by his grandson Aurangzeb. In this century Gandhi's satyagraha for swarajya was a valiant attempt at a non-violent reconstruction of our society, but it could not succeed in preventing the violent Partition of the country. And today, we seem to have all but abandoned Gandhi as our society gets increasingly mired in violence of all kinds and at all levels.

Thus in contemporary India, the intellectual acceptance of pluralism has not always gone along with the existential practice of tolerance. Indeed, we seem to have reached a flash point in our continuing crisis, when even the acceptance of religious-cultural pluralism is being contested, on one hand, by a violent 'cultural nationalism', which is very much the intolerant imposition of the dominant castes, threatening the existence of other subalterns and minorities, and on the other, by an aggressive religious fundamentalism which demands obedience to religious authorities, who then homogenise submissive followers.

### ***Dimensions of Tolerance***

In our understanding, a constructive and creative response to pluralism cannot mean mere endurance of, and resignation to, differences. It must include something more positive: the active acceptance of, and even the celebration of plurality. But to put such an orientation in context we must pursue this analysis further. As a response to pluralism, we can distinguish progressive levels in our understanding, all deriving from a deepening realisation of the reality, the truth, the *satya*, underlying our human situation; a reality that is radically pluralist, a truth that is essentially non-violent. These are not exclusive but rather overlapping dimensions and interpenetrating levels that form a continuous progression.

To begin with the first, tolerance as a practical necessity: bearing with a lesser evil for the sake of a greater good. But such political pragmatism does not cut deep enough to sustain itself under the stress and strain of rapid social change. A deeper understanding of tolerance is based on the realization of the essential limitations in any human grasp of truth or expression of reality: it must always be partial, it can never be complete. Such tolerance is but 'the homage the finite mind pays to the inexhaustibility of the Infinite' (Radhakrishnan 1927: 317). Such a philosophical awareness makes us accepting of what we do not understand and respectful of what we disagree with.

Beyond such acceptance and respect, however, we can still think of tolerance as a more positive and active moral imperative based on the ethics of doing good to others, of loving even our enemies. This ethical tolerance is often religiously inspired. But even in such a religious understanding of tolerance, the 'different other' as the object of one's love remains other. Such 'objectivisation' of the other can only be transcended in a further dimension of what can only be called 'a mystical experience of tolerance,' (Panikkar 1983 :23) where 'one being exists in

another and expresses the radical interdependence of all that exists,' (ibid.) where the other is the completion, the enrichment, the extension of oneself; where the other is no longer in definitional opposition to one's self, but where old selves become one new 'self', at one with the Self, *tatvamasi*; where 'I' and 'thou' merge into the 'One I-Thou'! This adds up to a mystical understanding of tolerance.

### ***Levels of Understanding***

Obviously, this is a utopian ideal for any society. But it is an ideal we can reach out to even if it remains beyond our grasp. For the dialectic between differences in a plural society must find expression in a constructive dialogue between the self and the other, if it is to be a creative celebration, otherwise, it is all too likely to implode in violent repression, that eventually dehumanises both. We shall return to a consideration of such a dialogue later. First, we must examine a more crucial aspect in our analysis.

In each of these dimensions we can, following Panikkar again, (ibid.: 25-3) distinguish two levels of understanding or rather pre-understanding: myth and ideology. Myth is 'the horizon of intelligibility or the sense of Reality.' (ibid.: 101) It is expressed in the 'mythic narrative' with its varied themes, and disclosed in the 'living voice, the telling of the myth' (ibid.) In sum, 'myth is precisely the horizon over against which any hermeneutic is possible.' (ibid.: 4) It is taken for granted, unquestioned, a part of our pre-understanding, something we accept in 'faith', 'as that dimension in Man that corresponds to myth.' (ibid.: 5)

Once it is rationally articulated, myth is demythicised and so is our faith, in a 'passage from mythos to logos', (ibid.: 21) from myth to reason as the articulated conscious word. This then develops into an 'ideology':

the more or less coherent ensemble of ideas that make up critical awareness, i.e., the doctrinal system that enables you to locate yourself rationally . . . a spacio-temporal system constructed by the logos as a function of its concrete historical moment. (ibid.)

All this has a crucial relevance for our understanding of the limits of tolerance. For the more articulate and coherent, the more comprehensive and compelling an ideology is, the less place there is for tolerance in the area it marks out for its truth. Thus a more coherent



ideology can accommodate others less, and a more comprehensive one allows less space for any others. Rather it will tend to reduce the others to its own terms and assimilate them. There can be no dialogue across the differences. Not that we must rid ourselves of all ideologies. Our human limitations require them. But we must at the same time realise their limitations. Hence the ideologies we use must be open and non-dogmatic, critical and non-authoritarian.

Whether or not an ideology will develop into an open or closed system of understanding will finally depend on the myth from which it derives. For the further the myth's horizons stretch and the more openness and space it allows, the richer will be the texture of its themes and the greater the intensity and density it will permit. Hence we can conclude with Panikkar: *'the tolerance you have is directly proportional to the myth you live and inversely proportional to the ideology you follow.'* (ibid.: 20) What we need, then, is a *metanoia* of our myths to escape and be liberated from the *paranoia* of our ideologies, whether religious, political or otherwise.

### ***Complexity and Challenge***

Both myth and ideology are found in all the dimensions of tolerance indicated earlier, though there is obviously a greater affinity for ideology in political and philosophical tolerance, as there is for 'myth' in the religious and mystical one. This makes for a greater complexity and challenge in our praxis as an action-reflection-action process, a dialectical interaction between theory and practice. It is our conviction that the constructive potential of such a dialectic can be fully realised only in a creative dialogue for both myth and ideology. For it is only in the mutual encounter of myths that they are deepened and enriched, and in the reciprocal exchange among ideologies that these become more open and refined.

Now there is always a danger of celebrating difference in seclusion and not in dialogical encounter with the other. The assertion of such isolated alterity, as in fact with some post-modernists, easily 'shades over into the celebration of indifference, non-engagement and indecision.' (Dallmayr 1989: 90) Such incommunicable uniqueness cannot but collapse into a nihilistic relativism, which is very far from the radical relativity on which a creative pluralism and a respectful tolerance must be premised.

## IV. The Hermeneutics of Dialogue

Dialogue can be in several domains and a proper hermeneutics if it is not to end in the superficial relativism that often comes in the way of a genuine and enriching encounter. The challenge of an equal dialogue will necessitate such an appropriate hermeneutic.

### *Dialectics and Dialogue*

For Panikkar 'dialogue' is a most fundamental condition of existence. It is our way of being.

Dialogue is, fundamentally, opening myself to another so that he might speak and reveal my myth.... Dialogue is a way of knowing myself and of disentangling my own point of view from other viewpoints and from me. (Panikkar 1983: 242)

Dialogue, then, goes beyond dialectics. For 'dialectics is the optimism of reason. Dialogue is the optimism of the heart.' (ibid.: 243) Thus we can speak of a 'dialectical dialogue', which would pertain to the encounter of ideologies, while a 'dialogical dialogue' would be more pertinent to the meeting of myths.

'Difference', then, as Gadamer insists 'stands at the beginning of a conversation, not its end,' (Gadamer 1989: 113) awaiting the moment of coherence, of fulfilment, of a 'fusion of horizon' that will complete the hermeneutic circle and set it off again for us -- 'we who are a conversation' (ibid. : 110) For we are constructed and deconstructed in dialogue with ourselves and others. Indeed, 'the conversation that we are is one that never ends.' (Gadamer 1989: 95) For dialogue and conversation are intrinsic to the human condition, the very language of our existence, the essential hermeneutic of all our experience.

Gadamer explains how 'to be in conversation, however, means to be beyond oneself as if to another.' For, as he insisted in 1960 all genuine dialogue must be premised on an authentic hermeneutic:

to recognise oneself (or one's own) in the other and find a home abroad -- this is the basic movement of spirit whose being consists in this return to itself from otherness. (Gadamer 1975: 15)

But we would emphasise a further implication of such dialogical hermeneutics: 'the challenge to recognise otherness or the alien in oneself (or one's own).' (Dallmayr 1989: 92)

## ***Domains in Dialogue***

Now if a dialogue must have purpose and content, its domain cannot be restricted to the dyad of the 'self' and the 'other', of 'ego' and 'alter'. It must be extended to a triad. It must be mediated by a third party, which will provide an objective point of reference that will make for 'contextualising human agency and culture in a dynamic holistic framework.' (Gupta 1996: 139) For us, the Indian Constitution and the human rights enshrined therein are certainly positioned to do precisely this, i.e., provide a reference point and context for our dialogue in which we as citizens can circumscribe acceptable and non-acceptable 'differences', set limits to tolerance and intolerance, and provide the guiding principles for dialogue within the quest for equality and freedom, for justice and fraternity.

But dialogue is surely more than a verbal exchange. It implies a reciprocity between the 'self' and the 'other' that can take place in various types of encounters and exchanges between persons and groups. Hence a complex and more nuanced understanding of dialogue requires a specification of various kinds of involvement of the 'self' with the 'other'.

Recently Christians have been urged by the Church to engage in a fourfold dialogue ('Dialogue and Proclamation', Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, Vatican City, 1991, no.42.):

1. *'the dialogue of life*, where people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations.'
2. *'the dialogue of action*', in which we 'collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people'.
3. *'the dialogue of religious experience*, where persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute'.
4. *'the dialogue of theological exchange*, where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages, and to appreciate each other's spiritual values.'

In our perspective, the dialogue of life is at the level of sharing and encounter of our myths, which then is deepened in the dialogue of religious experiences. This can be an even deeper level of not just mythic communication but mystical experience. Collaborative action

requires some level of ideological and political consensus, which can then be intensified and sharpened in a theological exchange. Thus life and experience are at the level of 'myth' and mysticism, action and theology at that of 'ideology' and politics.

In each of these areas of exchange, corresponding to the levels of tolerance delineated above, one can distinguish degrees of dialogue premised on differing understandings of the self and the other and the encounter between the two. Thus at the pragmatic level of tolerance, the other is perceived as the limitation of the self. Here dialogue becomes a practical way of overcoming differences, rather than by confrontation that could result either in the assimilation or in elimination of the other. At the intellectual level, where the other is seen as complementary to the self, dialogue seeks to overcome the limitations of the self with help of the other, rather than instrumentalise the other in the pursuit of self. At the ethical level, the self accepts moral responsibility for the other. In this dialogue the self will reach out to the other to establish relationships of equity and equality. At the spiritual level, the other is perceived beyond a limitation or a complement or an obligation, but as the fulfilment of the self. Here dialogue would call for a celebration of one another.

Hence in conclusion we must emphasise that pluralism is possible only within a context of tolerance and dialogue. However, our tradition of tolerance seems to be increasingly displaced from public life and it now needs to be revived and extended. For this, we must distinguish levels and dimensions in our understanding of tolerance, lest the ideal of tolerance we aspire to and the limits to intolerance that we set become both impractical and naive.

So too with dialogue, even as we accept dialogue as necessary to the human condition, we must understand how the demands of dialogue must be extended to the various kinds of involvement of the self and the other. However, both tolerance and dialogue can only be meaningful within the context of human rights guaranteed by our Constitution.

## **V. Common Ground to Higher Ground**

In any society, dialogue or tolerance must be premised on some stable and mutually agreed upon common ground of understanding in the socio-cultural and eco-political realms. Or else tolerance is easily exploited by the intolerant, and dialogue readily deteriorates into an unequal exchange favouring the dominant.

However, the common ground we seek is defined not just by overlapping areas or mutually acceptable, non-contradictory positions. It is not a deductively arrived at least common denominator or highest common factor. Rather it is a dynamic and creative starting point that must be extended to include other areas of human values and concerns that may well be outside these religio-cultural traditions and yet can still serve to question and critique them in turn. For instance, the eco-political common ground in regard to an economic system or a political ideology, in so far as this helps to further a multi-faceted cultural and religious dialogue. Thus if constructive tolerance brings us together on firm common ground, creative dialogue must take us from there to open higher ground.

But a precondition for this is the imperative for a common agreed-upon understanding of both substantive and procedural justice founded on some objective basis beyond the interests or concerns of the parties involved. Further, even when this is arrived at, there still may well be disagreement on the application of this justice in concrete situations, which are often defined differently by the parties involved. If there is no third party to mediate an agreement and monitor its implementation, inevitably the stronger will prevail, might becomes right. 'My justice is better than yours' syndrome!

The liberal democratic understanding and the regime of human rights derived from this is the basis of the socio-political consensus for modern democratic states. For us, this is minimally at least expressed in the Indian Constitution. This is the common ground on which all citizens must stand, the reference point from which to enlarge and lift this further to higher ground as well.

### ***Liberal Justice***

It should be apparent that no understanding of tolerance can be premised on injustice, and the practice of dialogue can be based on inequality. This must be the necessary basis of any constructive tolerance, of all creative dialogue.

John Rawls (1971) in his *Theory of Justice* has very incisively articulated an understanding of 'justice as fairness' that has become the defining point of reference in the liberal discourse. However, what Rawls seems to come up against are the limits to which liberal justice can be pushed. For it still leaves unresolved some of the more fundamental cultural and structural differences across societies with regard to basic values and vital institutions, human rights and social duties, to mention but a few by way of illustration. Indeed, it seems

that these cannot be adequately addressed within a culturally constrained liberal perspective.

A comprehensive theory of justice must be culturally contextualised and religiously sensitive. Tolerance must not replace justice, nor must dialogue negate injustice, and yet they both can draw on cultural and religious resources to bring forgiveness and reconciliation, to make justice not punitive or retributive, but restorative and healing. In the end, it seems apparent that liberal justice cannot, and perhaps does not intend to go beyond fairness to compassion and only tolerance and dialogue can get us there.

### ***Intra-Religious Dialogue***

Now if dialogue *inter*-religious must be premised on a respect for, and even celebration of pluralism between religions. However, unless there is a pluralism within a religious tradition, where difference is also respected and celebrated, tolerance sensitised, it is unlikely that all these can be carried over to an inter-religious dialogue. What we need then is an intra-religious dialogue so that we can see, each in their own tradition, what we can do for ourselves as a preparation for dialogue. If we can be non-defensive, then perhaps we will be able to initiate a non-violent and open dialogue with other religious traditions, and perhaps even with the fundamentalist within them. In other words, the *intra*- is the condition of the *inter*-religious dialogue.

Panikkar has described the intra-religious dialogue at the personal level thus:

An *intrareligious* dialogue, i.e., an inner dialogue within myself, an encounter in depth of my personal religiousness, having met another religious experience on that very intimate level. In other words, if *interreligious* dialogue is to be real dialogue, an *intrareligious* dialogue must accompany it, i.e., it must begin with my questioning myself and the relativity of my beliefs (which does not mean *relativism*), accepting the challenge of a change, a conversation and the risk of upsetting my traditional patterns. (Panikkar 1978: 40)

As St. Augustine confessed: *Questio mihi factus sum*. I am become a question to myself! I must face the question I am if I am to face the question that the other is to me.

But beyond a personal understanding of intra-religious dialogue, there is need for a community or societal one, a dialogue within a religious tradition between groups and perspectives. It is this level of dialogue we urge here.

We have already indicated how dialogue, especially in the Indian context, must be premised on a liberation theology that draws not just on the Christian but also on other religious traditions, bringing together the liberative aspects of these traditions. Specifically with regard to Dalits, women and the environment, there is a rich heritage available both in the Christian and in the Hindu traditions in the sub-continent, that is waiting for the cross-fertilisation of a creative dialogue.

### ***An Equal Dialogue***

To tap the resources of our rich heritage, it is of the utmost importance to have an *equal* dialogue. For any dialogue that starts with the assumptions of superiority on one side, or has a hidden agenda intending assimilation or conversion or propaganda, other rather than a respect and enrichment that is mutual, an openness and freedom that is creative, can never be an equal exchange, and in the end like all unequal exchanges, whether between classes, castes, genders or even between communities, regions etc. always becomes exploitative, and eventually can only be exploitative and oppressive. An unequal dialogue is always in some measure destructive, it can never be truly creative.

The dogmatic religious traditions find it very problematic to concede that those outside their religious revelation and beliefs have an equal access to the truth. They feel themselves privileged in this regard, and compromise in this matter is tantamount to being disloyal to their faith. However, precisely in such a perspective, there is even greater need of a hermeneutic approach that will make for dialogue, for it becomes imperative to distinguish between emic and etic perspectives, the insider's and the outsider's standpoint.

From an emic or insider's perspective, differing truths cannot lay claim to equal validity, unless they all are relativised, or brought into harmony at a higher level of unity. But this harmony may require an etic or outsider's perspective if the emic one is not inclusive enough. However, even such an emic perspective without compromising itself must grant the right to hold, and the duty to respect different opinions, even ones incompatible with one's own, for in civil society the other's legitimate right to freedom and claim to respect must not be compromised by imposing one's own dogmatic beliefs or ritual practice. This makes dialogue possible even between believers and atheists.

Thus from an etic perspective then, an equal dialogue is less a matter of 'equal truth' than of 'equal freedom'. This demands that no standpoint is privileged above others, much less imposed, but all empathetically critiqued and challenged. For this, a common ground must be sought and the only common currency viable, given the variety and variations prevailing among our pluri-religious traditions today, is a basic humanism. This will in turn have its own problematique but it is one in which all can engage as equals to set the conditions for a deeper religious discourse. Hence the necessity for a relevant hermeneutic.

All this will, of course, demand a more liberal and humanist approach within each tradition, for which an intra-religious dialogue becomes necessary as a prelude to an inter-religious one. Otherwise, we will have a debate not a dialogue, controversy not complementarity. Indeed, such transparency among believers and non-believers would make even an 'extra-religious' dialogue challenging and fruitful for both.

From an emic perspective, dogmatic traditions are often unwilling or unable to face the challenge of an equal dialogue. Such religious traditions need a relevant hermeneutic for an intra-religious dialogue to be more open and inclusive. Obviously, we are all conscience-bound to follow the truth wherever it leads. But the objective possibility of one's conscience leading one out of the fold as it were, is extremely problematic in an emic perspective, it is considered to be apostasy, but an etic one would find it easier to grant at least the subjective possibility of this happening in good faith. The crucial question here is how inclusive is one's perspective and how informed is one's conscience.

From an etic perspective, non-dogmatic traditions are generally not constrained by exclusive beliefs. However, inclusiveness too must go with its own cautions. On the one hand, it must not fall into relativism or degenerate into permissiveness; on the other, it must neither become a process of appropriation and absorption into a higher unity, wherein the distinctiveness of each tradition is lost, not just subsumed. The all-inclusiveness of some Universalists sometimes seems to imply just this. A valid inclusiveness would demand the integration of diversities into an enriching and higher unity so that we have a 'diversity in unity' rather than a 'unity in diversity'. White light includes the wavelengths of all the seven colours, yet the rainbow has its own special beauty.



## VI. Conclusion

Pulling together the threads of this discussion, and collecting the fragments scattered through this presentation, we need to focus now on the implications for the dialogue between religious traditions.

To begin with, it should be quite obvious that the starting point for any true and open dialogue must be pluralism, not simply as a de facto given but as the de jure structure of reality as we know it. For the law of pluralism is written into all reality. Moreover, this pluralism must not just be an acceptance but truly a celebration of difference because it is dialogue across differences that can then be truly an enriching and ennobling encounter. Uniformity does not lend itself to dialogue, but simply to monologue no matter how many people actually participate in it.

The level of tolerance that we can commit ourselves to would also indicate the intensity of our celebration of the difference in the 'other'. Unity and not uniformity then is the endpoint of a dialogue but it is often a point beyond our present horizons. It must be a unity that will allow for diversity and precisely perhaps be a 'diversity in unity' rather than a 'unity in diversity'. In other words, even in the unity the emphasis on diversity is not lost.

The co-incidence of opposites in such a unity is clearly a mystical experience of tolerance, as Panikkar has elaborated. But clearly, this is not the beginning of the dialogue. It might be important to realise that the greater diversity, the more enriching and at the same time the more arduous will be this quest for a mystical unity in which opposites coincide.

Among the four domains of dialogue enumerated surely the richest is the sharing of experience and yet the more domains a dialogue embraces the more comprehensive it and the more enduring will be.

Finally, if the justice is to be a real concern in an inter-religious dialogue, then it must begin with an intra-religious one that addresses the injustices within one's own tradition, injustices perpetrated on one's own and on the other, injustices of commission and omission. But it must at the same time work towards being an equal dialogue, not just in the religious dimension but in others as well, and even become a fraternal dialogue where justice is subsumed by charity but never substituted for it! Such a dialogue must be a dialogical dialogue before it can be a dialectical one, a meeting of myths before an ideological encounter.

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## 2. SUBALTERN ALTERNATIVES ON CASTE, CLASS AND ETHNICITY

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- I. INTRODUCING THE PROBLEMATIQUE
- II. CONTEXTUALISING THE ISSUES
- III. CASTE AND HIERARCHY
- IV. CASTE AND IDEOLOGY
- V. AMBIGUITIES AND MOBILISATION
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- IX. CASTE AND ETHNICITY
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## Abstract

The challenges to the dominant hegemony in this land have focused on the key issues of equity and justice that underlie the quest for identity and dignity. Setting these in a more integrated and holistic context we focus on three crucial issues: caste and hierarchy, caste and class, and caste and ethnicity. We conclude with some more important leads which could be further pursued: a subaltern hermeneutic, a new understanding of the fragmentation and shift in our present electoral politics, and the dilemmas of intervention by the state, social movements and market mechanisms. In sum, subaltern alternatives do represent a horizon of revolt and revolution, which can fuse with others to construct the identities and ideologies for a brave new world.

### I. Introducing the problematique

To speak of a crisis in the context of contemporary Indian society has become a tired, unhelpful cliché. We have been in a continuing and deepening multi-dimensional crisis for so long that we might easily slip into mistaking it for a normal situation. This will not, however, help us cope with a reality that is impinging on us with ever-increasing urgency. Today there is no gainsaying the failure of the social revolution envisaged by our nationalist movement, at least for the subalterns, for whom we have not yet kept our tryst with destiny.

The ‘truth’ we seek here is not just the object of a subtle or ephemeral intellectual quest, nor merely a pragmatic technique, but rather truth as a reality, a *satya*, authenticated by its humanist and liberative potential. Indeed, ‘Gandhi, like Marx, felt that the criteria of truth lies in the meeting of human needs;’ it is not defined a priori by ‘an accepted philosophy of history’ but ‘as the relative truth of a situation [that] emerged in social struggle’<sup>1</sup> (Toscano 1979: 75).

The mainstream hegemony has not as yet been able to completely pre-empt the ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson 1983)<sup>2</sup> or the ‘invented traditions’ (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983)<sup>3</sup> of minorities

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1 Toscano, David J. 1979. Gandhi’s decentralist vision: A perspective on non-violent economics. In Severyn T. Bruyn and Paula M. Rayman, eds., *Non Violent Action and Social Change*, pp. 73-89. New York: Irvington Publishers.

2 Anderson, Benedict. 1983. *Imagined communities: Reflections On The Origin And Spread Of Nationalism*. London: Verso.

3 Hobsbawm, Eric and Terence Ranger, eds. 1983. *The Invention Of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

and marginal groups for, corresponding to the 'culture of oppression', there has also been a 'culture of protest' that evolved its own methods of resistance. Not that 'the weapons of the weak' <sup>4</sup>(Scott 1990) were ever completely adequate to the violence of the strong, but they did keep alive a memory and a voice that had the potential of evolving into an alternative ideology and a new identity.

There has been a long history of contestation between these protagonists. The dominant hegemony has not gone unchallenged, though it is still not deposed. Rather, with its 'Hindu method of tribal absorption' <sup>5</sup> (Bose 1994: 168-81) and its 'Brahminical way of acculturation' <sup>6</sup>(ibid: 179) it shows an uncanny capacity to contain and marginalise any alien influence or threat to its survival within 'a Hindu rate of growth'! Eventually, however, the continuing crisis will threaten to engulf the hegemonic elites and vested interests, sharpening and bringing into the open their contradictions and conflicts with subordinate groups. Then again, the latter could very well be co-opted once more, their concerns subverted in the rush and tumble of a perverse and petty politics.

## II. Contextualising The Issues

To our mind, the most pervasive inspiration motivating the subaltern movements is the quest for equity and justice, and the most crucial themes underpinning this quest are those of identity and dignity. The first is a matter of positive self-image, the second of positive self-worth. Both these are socio-culturally constructed, but they are also politico-economically founded and intrinsically interconnected. It would be unhelpfully reductionist to exclude one or the other. Traditional anthropology might overemphasise the socio-cultural dimension, classical Marxism the political-economic one.

Our discussion on the subaltern alternatives presented here points to the need for an integrated and holistic approach, if these movements are to successfully confront the issues they attempt to address. Thus, in our concrete context, when justice for an individual is affirmed, but human dignity for the group denied by ingrained cultural prejudice, then the 'construction of equality through

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<sup>4</sup> Scott, James C. 1990. *The weapons of the weak: Everyday forms of peasant resistance*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

<sup>5</sup> Bose, Nirmal Kumar. 1994. *The structure of Hindu society* (revised edition). New Delhi: Orient Longman. Pp. 168-81

<sup>6</sup> ibid: p. 179

difference has an unmistakable Brahmanic accent, not least in its paternalistic monopolisation of the true Hindu culture' 7 (Hansen 1996: 612). When equity is promised, but the collective identity of a people homogenised by a militant and chauvinist nationalism, then the social identity of the weaker sections is easily suppressed in a dangerously fascist manner. In other words, the subaltern quest for equity and justice must not sacrifice social identity or human dignity, lest it be co-opted and subverted. This is precisely what the dominant groups attempt in order to retain their hegemony.

The issues we now discuss will, we hope, make for a deeper and broader understanding of this quest and a more comprehensive and convincing grasp of the related imperatives of subaltern dignity and identity. All these issues impinge on each other crucially and critically; they are centred here on caste and the interrelationships between caste, class and ethnicity.

### III. Caste and Hierarchy

The subaltern caste-based movements have attempted to mobilise caste to overcome caste hierarchy. However, over and over again the fault-lines in the system, between the forward and backward castes, the Kshatriya and others, the *savarna* and the *avarna*, have willy-nilly facilitated a co-option of these non-Brahmin movements and their eventual sanskritisation. Caste divisions also divide caste group interests, which will differ according to their varying locations in the hierarchical system. 'Thus just as the caste made it difficult to achieve 'unity at the bottom' in the form of large-scale peasant revolts, so it made unity from the top almost equally impossible' 8 (Omvedt 1976: 43).

While an upper-caste movement to reinforce dominance can be more consistent in its caste-based ideology, within non-dominant castes, not all have the same interests in overturning the hierarchical system. Thus, caste mobilisation at the middle levels has often improved these castes' own position in the system and changed that of others. It has not, however, undermined the system itself.

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7 Hansen, Thomas Blom. 1996. Globalisation and nationalist imaginations: Hindutva's promise of equality through difference. *Economic And Political Weekly* 31, 10 .p. 612

8 Omvedt, Gail. 1976. *Cultural Revolt In A Colonial Society: The Non-Brahman Movement In Western India, 1873-1930*. Mumbai: Scientific Socialist Education Trust. p. 43



Sanskritisation, or other versions of this process of upward mobility, does precisely this.

The fractures in the non-Brahmin movement and its inability to forge a unity across various subcastes raise the strategic issue of how effectively caste can be used against itself; ‘was it possible, in terms of caste identity, to transcend caste?’<sup>9</sup> (Omvedt 1976: 134 ). This is inextricably bound up with the more analytical question of how to comprehend caste: whether as hierarchy, or in terms of its material history of production relations, or as an aggregate of discrete groups. In other words, what is the relationship of the socio-cultural dimension to the political-economic one with regard to caste?

Caste has traditionally been conceptualised in terms of hierarchy. The classic statement on this has been Dumont’s *Homo hierarchicus* (1972) which, in spite of much discussion and critique, still remains a key reference point in the discourse on caste. Counterposing the ‘homo equalis’ of the Christian West to the ‘homo hierarchicus’ of Hindu India as two ideal types, Dumont proposed a grand design of a single purity-pollution hierarchical continuum, encompassing the whole spectrum of castes from the highest Brahmin to the lowest untouchable, wherein ‘the elements of the whole are ranked in relation to the whole’ (Dumont 1972: 104)<sup>10</sup>.

Much painstaking and thorough fieldwork has gone into establishing the inadequacy of a single, uni-dimensional continuum on which castes can be located. Rather, we are compelled to concede multiple hierarchies<sup>11</sup> (Gupta 1991b:12) in three different zones of operations: (a) the zone of the village community and its directly connected part of the countryside; (b) the zone of the recognised cultural or linguistic region; and (c) the zone of the whole civilisation<sup>12</sup> (Marriott 199 I: 54). Only in the tangle of such overlapping, multi-dimensional social spaces can the complexity and diversity of inter-caste relationships be contained and comprehended.

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<sup>9</sup> Omvedt 1976, p. 134

<sup>10</sup> Dumont, Louis. 1972. *Homo hierarchicus: The caste system and its implications*. London: Granada. p. 104

<sup>11</sup> Gupta, Dipankar, 1991b. *Hierarchy and difference: An introduction*, in Dipankar Gupta, ed., *Social stratification*, pp. 1-22. Delhi: Oxford University Press. p.12

<sup>12</sup> Marriott, McKim. 1991. Multiple reference in Indian caste system. In Dipankar Gupta, ed., *Social stratification*, pp. 49-59. Delhi: Oxford University Press. p. 54

Thus, 'purity and pollution are not universally employed to effect the diacritical marks separating different *jatis*'<sup>13</sup>(Gupta 1991c: 139). In actuality, 'any notion of hierarchy is arbitrary and is valid from the perspective of certain individual castes'<sup>14</sup> (ibid.: 130). What is critically significant is that these *jatis* do not exist in isolation. For, 'a *jati* is able to sustain itself only in the presence of other *jatis* in a clearly delimited referential context which gives meaning to symbols,' and indeed to 'hypersymbolism' as well<sup>15</sup>(ibid.: 141) Moreover, these symbols and the associated rituals and beliefs are historical accretions and therefore fairly widespread across different castes.

#### IV. Caste and Ideology

If multiple hierarchies are accepted, then it is theoretically possible to have 'as many hierarchies as there are *jatis*. But very often in practice we find one hierarchical order more in effect,' obviously because it is 'an expression of politico-economic power' which lends efficacy to caste ideology as 'a believed in and conscious structure', that translates 'pure values into empirical categories in order to provide definite guidelines on the ground' (Gupta 1991c: 138, 136, 120). Certainly, the four *varnas* impose an overarching pattern on inter-caste relationships, sustained by the ideology of the *varnashrama dharma*, which condenses the diverse ideologies of numerous subcastes into some recognisable order around widely accepted points of reference.

Subaltern contestations of caste ideology have persistently critiqued and challenged this overarching hierarchy of Brahminism, but not always successfully. Indeed, 'their failure to construct an alternative Universal to the dominant *dharma*', as Partha Chatterjee perceptively proposes, 'is thus the mark of their subalternity; the object of our project must be to develop, make explicit and unify these fragmented oppositions in order to construct a critique of Indian tradition which is at the same time a critique of bourgeois equality'<sup>16</sup> (Chatterjee 1989: 185).

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13 1991c. Continuous hierarchies and discrete castes. In Dipankar Gupta, ed.. *Social Stratification*, pp. 110-42. Delhi: Oxford University Press. p. 139

14 ibid., p. 130

15 ibid., p. 141

16 Chatterjee, Partha. 1989. Caste and subaltern consciousness, in Ranajit Guha. ed.. *Subaltern studies VI*, pp. 169-209. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. p.

Besides 'endogamy on the basis of putative biological differences' and 'the ritualization of multiple social practices' <sup>17</sup>(Gupta 1991c: 137), Gupta stresses two crucial characteristics of the caste system: hierarchy and hypersymbolism<sup>18</sup> (ibid.: 138). Some would go even further, proposing that 'the difference in jatis is not ... one of degree but of quality' <sup>19</sup>(Das 1982: 69). To view caste 'as discrete classes or groups'<sup>20</sup> (Gupta 1991c: 121), aggregated into 'a social differentiation that separates without implying inequality' <sup>21</sup>(Gupta 1991 b: 9), would, however, suggest a vertical segmentation rather than a horizontal stratification. This certainly is very far from a down-up view of caste. It comes awkwardly close to the kind of justifications made of caste as a harmonious social order, by reputed elite scholars, in their elaboration of *The Hindu View of Life* <sup>22</sup>(Radhakrishnan 1960: 104-5). 'Separate but equal' is conceptually speaking not contradictory, but all too often it has been used to legitimise various forms of 'institutional inequality'.

This may not be the intention of the purveyors of such a point of view, but their kind of understanding leans dangerously towards, and lends support to, upper-caste/class prejudice. It is true that 'difference' logically does not imply 'inequality', when the differences are in qualities that are unrelated and therefore non-comparable. Such qualities and differences can be classified; they cannot be graded. In practice, however, differences, qualitative or otherwise, are not unrelated. Certainly, this is the case with jatis: once they are valued, or rather evaluated, with regard to some common reference, the differences inevitably become graded, whether they are based on cultural and/or aesthetic preference, or political and/or economic power.

Groups like jatis, interacting and accessing similar resources in the same social system, will eventually be graded on a continuum, if these

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<sup>17</sup> 1991c. Continuous hierarchies and discrete castes. In Dipankar Gupta, ed., *Social stratification*, pp. 110-42. Delhi: Oxford University Press. p. 137

<sup>18</sup> ibid., p.138

<sup>19</sup> Das, Veena. 1982. *Structure and cognition: Aspects of Hindu caste and ritual*. Mumbai: Oxford University Press. p. 69

<sup>20</sup> 1991c. Continuous hierarchies and discrete castes. In Dipankar Gupta, ed., *Social stratification*, pp. 110-42. Delhi: Oxford University Press. p. 121

<sup>21</sup> Gupta, Dipankar, 1991b. Hierarchy and difference: An introduction, in Dipankar Gupta, ed., *Social stratification*, pp. 1-22. Delhi: Oxford University Press. p. 9

<sup>22</sup> Radhakrishnan, Sarvepalli. 1960. *The Hindu view of life*. London: George Allen and Unwin. Rae, Douglas. 1979. The egalitarian state: Notes on a system of contradictory ideas. p. 104-5

are differences of degree; if they are differences in kind, they would be ranked on an ordinal, even if discontinuous, scale. Thus, whether from within or without, by consensus or by coercion, inequality will be introduced.

If these rankings are value-premised and based on ascribed status, that is precisely what we are conceptualising as hierarchy. If, on the contrary, the gradation and consequent inequality arise from, and are enforced by, political and/or economic power, then we have another kind of institutionalized inequality or social stratification. Thus even a vertically-segmented society begins to be differentiated by horizontal strata in terms of unequal status. Therefore, conceptualising difference without inequality in our comprehension of caste would seem to betray a theoretical understanding that is innocent of the empirical reality, certainly the one experienced by the subalterns. For in the cruel world of caste, 'differences' are often constructed on apparently 'indifferent' qualities precisely to enforce inequality!

Hence, even though there may be no 'true hierarchy' in Dumont's sense, the principle of hierarchy in our society cannot be easily discounted. Certainly, it has not been effectively displaced, though it has been overlaid by class stratification, in which the political economy and relationships of production are primary. We shall return to class later, but for now, we underline how hierarchy implies an ordering of castes into super- and sub-ordinate groups on the basis of internalised values, socialised through symbols and rituals—not necessarily religious ones—rather than being externally imposed through political or economic power. It is a system in which 'rights and obligations are inextricably tied' <sup>23</sup>(Bose 1994: 187).

Of course, these values and the consequent caste status have been contested and challenged, especially in times of change when the political economy has had a more significant role to play. However, the final legitimation of a hierarchy, multiple or otherwise, comes from the value system. Thus, Dumont rightly observes: 'man does not only think, he acts. He has not only ideas, but values. To adopt a value is to introduce hierarchy' <sup>24</sup>(Dumont 1972: 54). The wider and deeper the acceptance of these values, the more stable and binding will this legitimation be. In other words, the principle of hierarchy gives

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<sup>23</sup> Bose, Nirmal Kumar. 1994. *The structure of Hindu society* (revised edition). New Delhi: Orient Longman. p. 187

<sup>24</sup> Dumont, Louis. 1972. *Homo hierarchicus: The caste system and its implications*. London: Granada. p. 54

priority to the socio-cultural dimension in a society, and this will be reflected in the extent to which hierarchy is operative there.

## V. Ambiguities and Mobilisation

This is why the articulation and use of symbols are so crucial to caste mobilisation. However, when such symbolic articulation becomes exclusive to a group, it may gain in intensity but lose in broad-based appeal. This is precisely the problem with caste-based ideologies—their ambiguity in being both specific and general in their appeal <sup>25</sup>(Gore 1993: 60). While caste is indeed an effective group mobiliser, it has inherent constraints in broadening into a movement to include other similarly disadvantaged and oppressed castes with common interests. There are real limitations in deepening the issues to be addressed, issues that are common to, and affect similarly placed groups across the system. Acceptance of hierarchy as an organising principle in a society may in fact allow contestation between groups for higher status within the system. However, it disallows a challenge to depose the system itself. This is what sanskritisation is all about. Whether it is further refined as ‘Kshatriyaisation’, or even broadened to ‘Hinduisation’, in the final analysis, such processes promote positional change in the caste hierarchy but do not pose an institutional challenge to the system itself.

However, the hierarchical principle still allows a multiplicity of hierarchies in practice. This precipitates internal contradictions in a caste system, which in turn makes contestation possible, since the various statuses of groups in these multiple hierarchies will not be congruent. Whether or not such contestation will precipitate conflict and change will depend on the resources of the group and the concrete context of their life situation. It does, however, point to the very real possibilities of endogenous change from within the system. If a single hierarchical structure were accepted by all the players in the system, then only exogenous change would be possible. Dumont’s ‘substantialisation’ of caste <sup>26</sup>(Dumont 1972: 269) and Srinivas’s sanskritisation <sup>27</sup>(Srinivas 1962: 8) both envisage such change from

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<sup>25</sup> Gore, M.S. 1993. *The social context of an ideology: Ambedkar’s political and social thought*. New Delhi: Sage Publications. p. 60

<sup>26</sup> Dumont, Louis. 1972. *Homo hierarchicus: The caste system and its implications*. London: Granada. p. 269

<sup>27</sup> Srinivas, M.N. 1962. *Caste in India and other essays*. Mumbai: Asia Publishers. p. 8

without. Since they do not allow for multiple contending hierarchies, this does not add up to change of the hierarchical structure itself.

However, it is precisely in the interstices of these multiple hierarchies, and in the contradictions they imply, that endogenous change of the system becomes possible. Multiple hierarchies allow groups to challenge the superiority claimed by other groups from a non-inferiorised and more equal position within their own system, even though these others may in turn contest this claim. It is precisely such contestation that could potentially result in structural change in the system of prescriptive statuses and exclusive identities. Whether this will finally undermine the hierarchical structure would depend on whether these multiple hierarchies neutralise each other, or whether one dominant hierarchy will eventually establish its hegemony over the rest.

Our aim is here to show how the initial advantage of mobilising a group on the basis of caste can eventually become a constraint in using such caste consciousness against the caste system itself. In spite of its multiple hierarchies and internal contradictions, the hold of the caste ideology on our society should not be underestimated. Indeed, it has permeated non-Hindu communities as well, whether Christian, Muslim or Sikh <sup>28</sup>(Singh 1977). Reform movements have often been absorbed, and reformist sects in Hinduism, like the Lingayats, have often ended up as other castes.

The essential ambiguities of caste mobilisation cannot be wished away. They must be faced. For today, as in the past, in our society, 'turn in any direction you like, caste is the monster that crosses your path. You cannot have political reform, you cannot have economic reform, unless you kill this monster' <sup>29</sup>(Ambedkar 1968: 37). And yet, caste can be oppressive but it can also provide a basis for struggle against oppression. It can at once be a traditionaliser and a moderniser. It has the potentiality of being a two-pronged catalyst: as a purveyor of collective identity and annihilator of the same hierarchical order from where collective identity is drawn <sup>30</sup>(Kothari 1994: 1590).

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<sup>28</sup> Singh, Harjinder, ed. 1977. *Caste among non-Hindus in India*. Delhi: National.

<sup>29</sup> Ambedkar, B.R. 1968. *Annihilation of caste*. Jalandhar: Bheem Patrika Publishers. p. 37

<sup>30</sup> Kothari, Rajni. 1994. Rise of the Dalits and the renewed debate on caste. *Economic and political weekly* 29, 26, p. 1590

To our mind, it is only when caste mobilisation takes into account class analysis and identifies class interests that such a movement will be a progressive rather than a reactionary force.

## VI. Caste and Class

There are two divergent conceptualisations of caste that are often confused: 'As an ethnographic category [caste] refers exclusively to a system of social organisation peculiar to Hindu India, but as a socio-logical category it may denote almost any kind of class structure of exceptional rigidity'<sup>31</sup> (Leach 1960: 1). When people talk of caste changing to class, they are using caste in the second sense. This places the two types of social stratification along a continuum, 'from mutually exclusive to cross-cutting status-sets'<sup>32</sup> (Lynch 1969: 12). However, in this essay where we refer to caste as an ethnographic category rather than a mere grab bag of attributes, we stress hierarchy as constitutive of this system (as in <sup>33</sup>Hocart [1950] and<sup>34</sup> Dumont [1972]). That is, caste is here considered as the socio-cultural aspect of our institutionalised inequality in which religious, ritual and cultural values are prominent.

Class, on the other hand, is most often used to 'refer to a system of stratification that is economic in character'<sup>35</sup> (Gupta 1991b: 14). Marxist analysis has been the classic statement on this, but the failure of Marx's precipitate prediction in 1853 of the imminent collapse of the caste system in India before the juggernaut of industrialisation should caution us to the limitations of his analysis for this country. However, class analysis rightly stresses the political-economic dimension of social stratification, where economic status and political power are crucial. To confuse caste and class really amounts to conflating these two dimensions, the socio-cultural and political-economic or, more commonly, collapsing one into the other. It is not that the two are unrelated, but any reductionism becomes very misleading.

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<sup>31</sup> Leach, E.R. 1960, *Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and North West Pakistan*, Cambridge University, Press. Cambridge. p. 1

<sup>32</sup> Lynch, Owen M. 1969. *The politics of untouchability: Social mobility and social change in a city of India*. New York: Columbia University. p. 12.

<sup>33</sup> Hocart, A.M. 1950. *Caste: A comparative study*. London: Methuen.  
and Dumont, Louis. 1972. *Homo hierarchicus: The caste system and its implications*. London: Granada.

<sup>34</sup> as in Hocart [1950] and Dumont [1972].

<sup>35</sup> Gupta 1991b: p. 14

Thus, the attempt to suppress hierarchy without a more encompassing ideology would lead to group competition and conflict. In Dumont's terms, this is the 'substantialisation of caste', i.e., its emergence as a 'collective individual' <sup>36</sup>(Dumont 1972: 269). In spite of the much-vaunted rejection of caste, even by its upper-caste promoters, the caste communalism we witness today is very much the consequence of the challenge posed to the caste hierarchy by the subalterns and the processes of social change over-taking us. The Hindutva of the Sangh Parivar is an ideology attempting to contain this, and re-establish the earlier hegemony of the upper castes, even as it scapegoats other minority communities. The cultural revolt of the subalterns was directed precisely at 'caste as a cultural system' (Omvedt 1976: 36) in an attempt to overthrow upper-caste hegemony. Indeed, the non-Brahmin movements have attempted not just to displace caste ideology, but to replace it with a more rationalist, egalitarian and democratic one. However, non-Brahmin movements have to develop a strong enough identity and ideology to resist co-option and absorption, as well as fragmentation and disintegration. Such an identity and ideology would then have to transcend caste, even though these movements were first mobilised on the basis of caste. Certainly, their cultural revolt is open to and encouraging of social change, and it has a greater potential for a more inclusive, Universalist quest than a narrower, more exclusive ethnicity or nationalism <sup>37</sup>(Omvedt 1976: 302).

## VII. Analysis and Struggle

If it is not to falter at this stage of developing a broader, mass-based appeal, as has in fact happened all too often in the past and seems to be happening again in the present, the movement must be open to a class analysis, by including the political economy dimension in its quest for socio-cultural change. Unfortunately, dogmatic Marxists and party hacks have tended to see such anti-caste agitations as diversionary and divisive (Omvedt 1994: 14), though since the 1980s at least the Marxist-Leninist groups have begun to acknowledge the importance of caste<sup>38</sup> (ibid.: 25).

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<sup>36</sup> Dumont 1972: p. 269.

<sup>37</sup> Omvedt 1976: p. 302

<sup>38</sup> ibid.: p. 25



It is therefore imperative to see the relationship of caste and class as two systems of stratification in terms of the interaction between the two distinct but interdependent dimensions from which each derives. Since both are systems of institutionalised inequality, both can be considered as exploitative. 'The basic issue is to analyze the processes of exploitation' <sup>39</sup>(Omvedt 1994: 57), and the crucial question is not just who exploits and who is exploited, but also how this comes about.

As jatis are connected to hereditary occupations, they become the units of production in the system <sup>40</sup>(Patil 1979), and caste hierarchy legitimises the relations of production that allow the expropriation of the unpaid-for surplus. In this context, then, 'the anti-caste struggle is inherently also a 'class struggle', that is a struggle against economic exploitation' <sup>41</sup>(Omvedt 1994: 31). However, caste fragments and retards this struggle, because it has 'institutionalised divisions among the exploited' (ibid.: 49). These can be overcome only by an overarching identity and ideology. The appeal to class consciousness is critical to both.

Unfortunately, the caste consciousness that might mobilise the group initially, later militates against this broader and deeper class consciousness. This is especially so when, as often happens, 'the more elite members of the disadvantaged cultural sections are motivated to rebel' <sup>42</sup>(Omvedt 1976: 302) and mobilise group consciousness. Once this happens, the same group elite easily co-opts the rest to its partisan class interests, which do not necessarily coincide with those of the other members. Moreover, common interests across similarly disadvantaged different groups are prevented from coming together in a broader unity by the divide-and-rule manipulation of the dominant castes and ruling classes. Thus, the struggle against exploitation becomes divided from without by the exploiters, and from within by the exploited themselves.

## VIII. Reciprocal Relationships

The relationships we have been exploring can now be focused more specifically. There are clearly limits to the use of power, economic

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<sup>39</sup> Omvedt, Gail 1994. *Dalits and the democratic revolution: Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit movement in colonial India*. New Delhi: Sage Publications. p. 57

<sup>40</sup> Patil, Sharad. 1979. Dialectics of caste and class conflict. *Economic And Political Weekly* 14, 7 & 8:

<sup>41</sup> Omvedt 1994: p. 31

<sup>42</sup> Omvedt 1976: p. 302

and/or political, in changing or neutralising hierarchy, just as there are constraints on how much a cultural revolt against hierarchy can achieve without the support of such power. Moreover, there is also a role for an ideology—an egalitarian, not a hierarchic one—to stabilise the results of structural change wrought by the use of such power against caste exploitation, just as an ideology can precipitate a change in consciousness that could precede structural change.

The reciprocity between caste hierarchy and class dominance is thus a reflection and consequence of the interrelationship of the socio-cultural and political-economic structures of a society. The more firmly a new change or old structure is grounded in both, the more stable and lasting it is likely to be. The stability of caste in our society is best explained by this double grounding. The void in our socio-cultural awareness can best explain why class-in-itself has not become class-for-itself here.

In sum, then, this discussion on the relationship of caste and class has underlined a twofold imperative for an integrated response to their systems of inequality and exploitation: (a) there is the pressing need for a cogent ideological challenge in socio-cultural terms to caste hierarchy; and (b) there is a corresponding urgency for an effective structural alternative in political-economic terms to class dominance.

## IX. Caste and Ethnicity

There is a further dimension in which caste phenomena can be conceptualised, besides hierarchy and dominance, and that is *ethnicity*. Here Max Weber gives us the lead. In the classic Weberian model of social stratification—of class as an economic category, status as a cultural category, and power as a political one—caste is interpreted as a special kind of status group based on the principle of inherited ‘class charisma’. The proliferation of castes is accounted for by ‘caste schism’<sup>43</sup>(Eisenstadt 1968: 183) that may be precipitated by migration, occupational differentiation, sect formation, etc. In so far as such status have a distinct groups culture, or at least a distinctive subculture, we can consider them to be ‘ethnicised’, which is most likely to happen as

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<sup>43</sup> Eisenstadt, S.N., ed. 1968. *Max Weber On Charisma And Institution Building*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. p. 183

status groups become politicised <sup>44</sup>(Jain 1996: 220). Indeed, group distinctiveness in terms of some common characteristics is definitive for both caste and ethnic groups, but there are also differences between these—differences of emphasis or of substance.

In India, tribes are readily considered ethnic groups, but not castes <sup>45</sup>(Heredia and Srivastava 1994). Yet most understandings of ethnic groups would be applicable to castes. For instance, Barth defines the term ‘ethnic group’ to designate a population which: (a) is largely biologically self-perpetuating; (b) shares fundamental cultural values, realised in overt unity in cultural forces; (c) makes up a field of communication and interaction; and (d ) has a membership which identifies itself, and is identified by others, as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order (Barth 1969: 10). He therefore readily concludes: ‘[F]rom this perspective, the Indian caste system would to be a appear case of a stratified poly-ethnic system. The boundaries of caste are defined by ethnic criteria’ <sup>46</sup>(ibid.:27).

## X. Similarities and differences

Thus, what is significant about ethnicity is a sense of collective awareness and identity; it is a group-for-itself. Caste can remain so passively socialised that the group’s self-affirmation may remain quiescent, as long as it is not mobilised socially or politically into a movement. This is more a difference of emphasis. More substantively, caste is essentially defined around hierarchical values, while ethnicity is primarily concerned with cultural rights. Both can be, and often are, extended to include other interests and concerns of the group—economic and political, or otherwise. However, neither group is ever completely identified with these to the exclusion of value options or cultural identity. Hence the inevitable overlap and disjunction between caste status and ethnic identity.

Perhaps the most critical difference between caste and ethnicity is that ethnic identities can be multiple and inclusive, especially when boundaries are permeable. ‘This produces a ‘layering’ of ethnic

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<sup>44</sup> Jain, Ravindra K. 1996. Hierarchy, hegemony and dominance: Politics of ethnicity in Uttar Pradesh. *Economic and Political Weekly* 31, 21. p. 220

<sup>45</sup> Heredia, Rudolf C. and Rahul Srivastava. 1994. *Tribal identity and minority status: The Kathkari nomads in transition*. New Delhi: Concept Publishers.

<sup>46</sup> ibid.: p. 27

identities which combines with the ascriptive character of ethnicity to reveal the negotiated, problematic nature of ethnic identity'<sup>47</sup> (Nagel 1994: 154). Caste identity, however, tends to be more exclusive and singular. Thus, one can be a Malayali Muslim, or a Jharkhandi tribal, but not a Maratha Brahmin or a Mahar Mang.

Ethnic groups are vertically segmented and often the segments overlap. Given permeable boundaries, membership can be 'attained' and multiple group identities are possible, based on various characteristics of religion, region, language, even race. Castes, on the other hand, are horizontally stratified, with broader, more inclusive categories like *vama* containing smaller, more exclusive ones like *jatis*. Caste membership is singular and ascribed and, where boundaries are less rigid, it is the sub-caste itself that is subsumed into a larger caste or *varna*. For instance, in Maharashtra, Vanjaras as a group have claimed higher status as Maratha Vanjaras, a good example of 'Kshatriyaisation'.

Both caste and ethnic communities have multiple group histories and oral traditions, folktales and folklore to sustain and perpetuate their distinctiveness, whether cultural or subcultural. Often, they also have myths of election and uniqueness, and mythomoteur of origins and foundation<sup>48</sup> (Smith 1994: 710). If there are multiple hierarchies and a proliferation of caste ideologies as argued earlier, here too we find a similar pluralism. For 'there is no practical limit to the multiplication of cultural differentiae, or the rediscovery of ethno-histories and myths of ethnic descent, which can be used to mobilize populations and inspire them into political action'<sup>49</sup> (ibid.: 725).

Thus, both ethnicity and caste are socially constructed, but they also have a foundation in the material history and circumstances of the community. It is this dialectic between a constructionist and a foundationalist understanding of the two that accounts for the substantive and contingent similarities and differences between them. Both imply negotiated and problematic identities, as well as composite and delimited cultures. Of the two, ethnicity is the less stable, more dynamic phenomenon. Indeed, 'ethnicity should be conceived as a process evolving through time'<sup>50</sup> (Devalle 1992: 18),

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<sup>47</sup> Nagel 1994: 154

<sup>48</sup> Smith, Anthony D. 1994. *The politics of culture: Ethnicity and nationalism*. In Tim Ingold, ed.. Companion encyclopedia of anthropology, pp. 706-33. London: Routledge. p. 710

<sup>49</sup> ibid.: p. 725

<sup>50</sup> Devalle. Susana R.C. 1992. *Discourses of ethnicity: Culture and protest in Jarkhand*. New Delhi: Sage Publications. p. 18

and 'ethnic identity then is the result of a dialectic process involving internal and external opinions and processes' <sup>51</sup>(Nagel 1994: 154).

## XI. Ethnicisation of Caste

Coming now to our concrete context, the Hindu nationalist revival with the Sangh Parivar has variously been categorised as religiously fundamentalist, politically fascist and socially casteist, but overall it has mostly been perceived as an ethnic movement. Its strident confrontation with other religious groups and its earlier linguistic polarisations seemed to justify this conceptualisation. However, non-Brahmin movements, even when politically mobilised, have been perceived as based on common interests, not a distinctive culture. Yet their ideologies, particularly with Phule and Ambedkar, have constructed new identities, and the traditions they 'invented' have affirmed a distinctive culture.

If caste communities had been conceptualised thus, it could have been a basis for separate electorates in the colonial period, as was the case with other distinct minorities who were granted this concession. It was perhaps for this very reason that caste was placed within the ambit of the Hindu social system by the nationalist movement. Gandhi's insistence on this is very illuminating. However, if indeed these movements have political as well as cultural dimensions, might they be conceived of primarily in ethnic terms? If so, what advantage would this have today? Would the neo-Buddhists qualify to be considered as a distinctive ethnic group like other religious minorities, as the Sikhs are now demanding? And would the other Dalits and backward castes qualify too?

We must of course resist the temptation to collapse caste into ethnicity, just as we have rejected the attempt to reduce caste to class, for even as we distinguish these two dimensions, we must be sensitive to the greater significance and impact one or the other may have in a specific situation. Thus, rather than caste changing to class, it could be argued, as in fact it has been by some scholars, that the consensual hegemony of caste has a lesser role as the primary principle of social organisation than the coercive dominance of class in our contemporary situation <sup>52</sup>(Jain 1996: 221). Can this be argued with

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<sup>51</sup> Nagel. Joane. 1994. *Constructing ethnicity: Creating and recreating ethnic identity and culture*. *Social problems* 41, 1 p. 154

<sup>52</sup> Jain, Ravindra K. 1996. Hierarchy, hegemony and dominance: Politics of ethnicity in Uttar Pradesh. *Economic and Political Weekly* 31, 21: 215-23. p. 221

regard to caste and ethnicity? Is the politicisation of caste leading to its ethnicisation, that is, to more permeable inter-caste boundaries, to less ascription and more option in group membership, to multiple and less rigid identities, to more composite and complex cultures?

## **XII. Mandalisation and Dalitisation**

Sanskritisation and its variants represented a certain flexibility and an opening to change, but within a 'hierarchy-based model of social mobility in the caste system' <sup>53</sup> (Jain 1996: 221). Today we have counter-models to this, in Mandalisation and Dalitisation, which are forging new and wider unities across jatis within varnas. These processes could well 'become the mainsprings of a counter hegemony-based model of socio-political mobility in the emergent system of ethnicised status group' (ibid.) <sup>54</sup>.

It would be counter-productive, however, to attempt ethnic mobilisation without considering class influences. For the inequalities and oppressions of class stratification in the larger society are easily reproduced in a community within it, whether caste or ethnic, especially if it is of some scale and density. Thus, in the struggle for social liberation and human fulfilment, we would see ethnic mobilisation as focusing primarily on collective identity, caste movements as mainly a quest for community dignity, and class struggle as chiefly concerned with social justice. Obviously, these are distinct, not separable, aspects of an overall struggle of disadvantaged subaltern peoples in our society but, while specific strategies will be dependent on concrete situations, an adequate response must integrate all three.

## **XIII. A Holistic Approach**

In stressing the need for a holistic and non-reductionist approach, we are well aware of the opposite error, of over-generalising and broadening the perspective to the point of blunting its cutting edge and descending into a diluted and unfocused analysis. Granted that the approach to the multiple, interdependent dimensions of a given social situation must make a beginning at some specific place, this should be decided in terms of the exigencies of the situation, and not

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<sup>53</sup> Jain 1996: p. 221

<sup>54</sup> Jain 1996: p. 221

*a priori* in terms of any prior predilections. A holistic approach to caste, class and ethnicity must not analyse one in terms of the other. This is reductionist, and to our mind has limited explanatory power. We need to begin at the point that allows our analysis to include other dimensions as well.

Too often a given discourse prejudices us *a priori* to emphasising one dimension over another. This happens in the case of both Marxists and non-Marxists in the caste-class controversy, where community and class are set off against each other. The same is the case with ethnicity and class, and we may now see a similar debate about ethnicity and caste. Our suspicion is that the socio-cultural dimension of analysis, in which caste and ethnicity are best located, has not been given the importance and space it deserves by those who make the political economy their analytical axis. Of course, to plead the urgency of holism is not as yet to have achieved it in our analysis. The contribution of this study, we hope, is a step in this direction, though it surely has not arrived at its goal as yet.

#### **XIV. Recapitulating the Discussion**

Caste-based movements have a long history in our society, though they have come into greater prominence with the multi-dimensional crisis we are now undergoing. From the earliest times, there have been alternative and heterodox understandings and responses that have challenged the dominant hegemony in this land, with more or with less success. Thus, from the ancient Buddhist ‘revolution’ and the medieval bhakti of the sant-kavis to the modern non-Brahmin and Dalit revolts, to the contemporary women’s and ecological movements, there has always been a contestation for the ideological space once claimed by Brahminic Hinduism and later by nationalists of various hues.

The key issues of equity and justice underlie a people’s quest for identity, dignity and a collective self-image of self-worth. In setting these in a more integrated and holistic context, we have focused in this essay on three crucial issues. The first concerns caste and hierarchy. If caste is both an ethnographic category as well as a political ideology, how do we conceptualise castes: as hierarchical, discrete groups, or in terms of their material history and culture? In the end, how effectively can caste be used against the system itself? If we accept the ideological dimension of caste, then we must face the ambiguities involved in its mobilisation for systemic change. The

second involves caste and class. Is caste a more effective mobiliser than class for most oppressed groups? How do we conceptualise caste/class differences so that we can address the caste-class dilemma? Once we accept the reciprocal relationship between caste and class, we must commit ourselves to a more integrated response. The third issue is with regard to caste and ethnicity. If indeed these movements have both politico-economic as well as socio-cultural dimensions, should they then be conceived of in ethnic terms? If so, of what advantage would this be today? The similarities and differences between caste and ethnic groups should alert us to the possibilities and potential of ethnicisation of caste and Mandalisation-Dalitisation, involving fundamental changes in our society.

This resumé of the argument is meant to help map the main contours of the terrain covered, and to lay bare also the loose ends still to be tied up and, more importantly, the leads which could be pursued. We do not pretend to trace every promising lead to its originating discourse, to follow it to its last practical conclusion, or to indicate every pertinent implication but, rather more modestly, our object is to make explicit a few suggestive and challenging leads which could be pursued in due course, perhaps by others as well.

## **XV. Toward A Subaltern Hermeneutic**

A critical appropriation of subaltern perspectives must avoid any uncritical romanticising of the subalterns. Making a pre-judgement in their favour must not imply blind, unquestioning faith but positioning ourselves in a more empathetic down-up perspective. That is, making a pre-option for their cause should not be an ethnocentric and chauvinistic choice, but an open and liberating hope.

In this, we are distancing ourselves from the kind of postmodernism that listens with *The ear of the other*<sup>55</sup> (Derrida 1985). Derrida's 'ear-splitting' discourse inscribes 'the difference in the ear', and allows to a concept 'no possibility of deciding from among its competing meanings, one that is true or authentic'

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<sup>55</sup> Derrida, Jacques. 1985. *The Ear Of The Other—Otobiography, Transference, Translation: Texts and discussions with Jacques Derrida* (ed. Christie V. MacDonald). New York: Sechocken Books.



<sup>56</sup>(Michelfelder and Palmer 1989: 1), even if it is expressed by the same voice. Too easily this becomes a relativistic dead end that leads to the kind of nihilism which turns a good ear— to voices one wants to hear, and a deaf one— to those one would rather not!

What the subaltern perspective needs is a hermeneutic that will not suppress any of these voices or refuse to give them a hearing, but listen to them all against the horizon of our own conceptual presumptions and value commitments, and still be open to the possibilities of a fusion beyond these. Perhaps the polyphony will eventually make a harmony, but till then we can only struggle with the cacophony without losing our sensitivity or going deaf. Such a hermeneutic is necessary to prevent what has come to be ‘an uncritical cult of the ‘popular’ or ‘subaltern’, particularly when combined with the rejection of the Enlightenment rationalism as irremediably tainted in all its forms by colonial power- knowledge’ <sup>57</sup>(Sarkar 1993: 165).

A balanced hermeneutic approach would also have to contain and exercise aggressive rationalism, such as is evident at times in Phule and Ambedkar, particularly in their criticism of traditional religious practices and beliefs. The case against this religiosity is often argued within the perspective of Western rationalism and its empiricist assumptions. This shows little regard for the limitations of such reasoning and less sensitivity to symbol and sign, or myth and metaphor, as ways of communicating beyond a closed empiricist rationale. Chatterjee’s ‘requirements for an immanent critique of caste ideology’<sup>58</sup> (Chatterjee 1989: 185) offer a promising start to such a subaltern venture: ‘

Whereas Dumont treats the series of oppositions-life in the world/ life of the renouncer, group religion/disciplines of salvation, caste/ individual-as having been unified within the whole of Hinduism by integration at the level of doctrinal Brahminism and by toleration at the level of the sects <sup>59</sup>(ibid.: 186), they remain ‘fundamentally unresolved-unified if at all, not at the level of the self-consciousness of ‘the Hindu’ but only within the historical contingencies of the social

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<sup>56</sup> Michelfelder, Diane P. and Richard E. Palmer, eds. 1989. *Dialogue and deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*. New York: State University of New York Press. p. 1

<sup>57</sup> Sarkar, Sumit. 1993. The fascism of the Sangh Parivar. *Economic And Political Weekly* 28, 5: p. 165

<sup>58</sup> Chatterjee, Partha. 1989. Caste and subaltern consciousness, in Ranajit Guha. ed.. *Subaltern studies VI*, pp. 169-209. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. p. 185

<sup>59</sup> ibid., p. 186

relations of power’ <sup>60</sup> (ibid.). Unfortunately, we have allowed ourselves to be taken in by the abstract negativity in the autonomous domain of subaltern beliefs and practices and have missed those marks, faint as they are, of an immanent process of criticism and learning, of selective appropriation, of making sense of and using on one’s own terms the elements of a more powerful cultural order.... Surely it would be wholly contrary to our project to go about as though only the dominant culture has a life history and subaltern consciousness eternally frozen in its structure of negation <sup>61</sup>(ibid.: 206-7).

The subaltern hermeneutic, then, must be able to problematise both the modernist’s grand design of rationality, as well as the postmodernist’s multiple fragmentation of polysemy, and seek a fusion beyond the horizon of both. Such a hermeneutic will have to be a further pursuit much beyond the agenda of this study.

## **XVI. Fragmentation and Shift**

The mainstream press characterised the 1996 election as a ‘fractured verdict’ and warned of the dire consequences of unstable coalition politics. The mid-term election precipitated in 1998 was more the result of a miscalculated power play by a few misguided Congress politicians, than of any really substantive issues. What is quite unambiguous at this point is the bankruptcy of the Congress model and its politics. However, beyond the failures and fractures that mark the limits of ‘dominant caste democracy’, some would begin to see the faint outlines of a ‘second republic’! What its more explicit contours will be is hard to discuss at this stage, but already we need a paradigmatic shift in our understanding if we are to be able to comprehend the significance of the changes taking place beyond the ‘fragmentation and shift’ in our present electorate.

With the collapse of the Congress, new possibilities have emerged today but the dangers of reiterating our past failures in an accelerating downward spiral are as great as the opportunities that challenge us to reverse this in a ‘virtuous circle’ by a more creative and constructive response. Thus, the Sangh Parivar has seized on the present ambiguities to moderate or perhaps mask their once aggressive Hindu

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<sup>60</sup> ibid.

<sup>61</sup> ibid., p. 206-7

nationalism. However, even this change of strategy, which does not add up to a change of heart, is no indication that their quest to establish a new hegemony to replace the old one has in any way been jettisoned. Yet the inability of their opponents to come together in a united opposition is an even greater disaster. A negative coalition, like the once United Front, can only be a transitory phenomenon.

For if the opposition to the Sangh Parivar does not hang together, they will surely hang apart! The underlying contradictions between leftists and liberals and between Bahujans and Dalits, the dissensions in the Congress and the tensions in the Janata Dal, the soul-destroying power of party fragmentation in a self-destructive process—all this adds up to a grim prognosis, where the Sangh Parivar could prevail by default and impose itself on a divided opposition. The present scenario in Uttar Pradesh is a good illustration of this. However, as exemplified in Gujarat and the precarious balance of the ruling coalition in Maharashtra, the Hindutvawadis, too, are themselves plagued with divisions. While they do have the advantage of a consistently articulated ideology and an aggressively projected identity, these have proven inadequate to submerge or subsume their inherent caste and class contradictions, to overcome ingrained ethnic and other rivalries, or to displace their own internal individual and group differences.

However, the growth of regional political parties, the acceptance of the need for a common minimum programme, the growing isolation of openly communal and fundamentalist appeals, the increasing accountability and transparency demanded by people from public representatives and servants, the support of an activist judiciary—all this and more augurs well for positive change and for the resilience of Indian democracy against authoritarian and fascist forces. Now, after the collapse of the Nehruvian consensus, the marginalisation of Gandhi and the demise of the Congress model, the urgency and inevitability of a 'politics of coalition and consent' are inescapable for the foreseeable future. On the other hand, the opposition to Hindu nationalism has still to articulate an acceptable ideology and sketch an inclusive identity.

Our study of the subaltern alternative is a beginning. We now need a further discussion on how it can make a more significant contribution to the emerging new paradigm. Our challenge today is to put together a positive and not merely a negative unity against the vested interests that had been represented by a now fragmenting Congress and that are once again coalescing in a Hinduistic, Brahminic hegemony. Regrettably, the caste divide between the

Bahujan non-Brahmin Samaj and the Dalits has not until now been overcome by the obvious interests they have in common to resist the vested interests that continue to displace and subdue them. Nor has communal harmony been able to bridge the divide between religious communities to bring the concerns of all the poor on platform. A further analysis with a new paradigm is needed to a common to help us learn from our tragic history, rather than be condemned to a farcical repetition of it.

## **XVII. Dilemmas of intervention**

As indicated at the beginning of this article, a critical study is meant to clear and prepare the ground for a committed response and hopefully some ground has now been covered in this regard. In the section on 'A holistic approach' with regard to analysis, we have seen how holistic intervention, too, must somehow impact on more than a single dimension of a particular social situation; it cannot do this in the abstract. Thus, the choice of a point of entry for an intervention strategy must not be locked into a particular dimension but must make for openings into other dimensions as well. This option can be as crucial as the strategy itself.

Though it is beyond our purpose in this essay to describe the various alternative strategies of intervention that an action response might take, it would be appropriate now to at least caution against the dilemmas arising when some of the more common intervening agencies—the state, social movements and the market—are involved.

### ***The State***

The most obvious of these agencies is the state, and the nationalism it mobilises for its ends and means. It has been among the most significant and successful agencies of modernisation and even democracy, especially in the West. In the multi-ethnic context of the Third World, however, the state and nationalism have been ambiguous forces, particularly where 'the political form of a plural society was a 'despotism' of one cultural group, usually a minority, over others' <sup>62</sup> (van de Berghe 1969: 67). This perception of the

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<sup>62</sup> van den Berghe, Pierre L. 1969. Pluralism and polity: A theoretical exploration. In Leo Kuper and M.G. Smith, eds., *Pluralism in Africa*, pp. 67-68. Berkeley: University of California Press. p. 67

pluralists, 'of the state as an instrument of domination by privileged ethnic groups' <sup>63</sup>(Brass 1991: 252), is also shared by neo-Marxists, following the older Marxist logic of the state as an instrument of the ruling classes.

However, the real dilemma of the state cuts deeper than merely the dominance of ideology or the exercise of power. For even when the state sets out to be 'ostentatiously egalitarian', it must choose, as Rae has pointed out, between different types of 'egalitarian' policies that inevitably favour some groups or categories in the population and discriminate against others, thus leading 'to a host of contradictions and confusions in which *equality is set against equality*' <sup>64</sup>(Rae 1979: 38). Even effective political will for any policy of 'affirmative action' or 'protective discrimination' creates new interests and identities which, however superficial at first, can and do lead to effective mobilisation against larger egalitarian concerns. In other words, as we have urged earlier in this article, any such policy must integrate the caste-class-ethnic considerations for equity, equality and identity.

This is but one illustration of the dilemmas the state must face between policy intentions and political practicalities, all deriving from tensions that the state must constructively resolve between delegitimising older state institutions to capture power and re-legitimising newer ones to implement change: in other words, the basic dilemma between the state as an instrument of the status quo and oppression and as one of change and liberation, which is only resolved for some when the state finally withers away.

### ***Social Movements***

To further complicate these dilemmas of selective and effective political will, the state must respond to social movements. These can be creative and constructive 'mechanisms', to use Merton's phrase, to challenge a social system and precipitate change. Their capacity for mobilisation will depend on the intensity and extent of their appeal. To be intensely gripping, a movement must articulate an ideology that is specifically targeted and concretely expressed, but this may restrict the extent of its appeal. To extend its appeal to a wider field, it must

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<sup>63</sup> Brass, Paul R. 1991. *Ethnicity and nationalism: Theory and comparison*. New Delhi: Sage Publications. p. 252

<sup>64</sup> Rae, Douglas, 'The Egalitarian State: Notes on a System of Contradictory ideas', vol. VIII, No. 4, Fall, 1979, 38

be flexible enough to admit a favourable reinterpretation by, and allow for the accommodation of, diverse groups.

There is here a built-in dilemma, between an intensive and an extensive appeal, which a social movement cannot escape. This is particularly sharp when 'issues of equity and justice also need to be informed by ethnicity' <sup>65</sup>(David and Kadirgama 1989: 42) and/or caste.

### ***The Market***

Social movements and state politics have often been seen locked in interaction, sometimes collaborative, mostly conflictual and even confrontational. Yet both operate in the broader context of a market that is a more impersonal and less voluntaristic agency, but far more real than the illusory 'free lunch' into which popularist politics and ideologies are tempted to escape. Moreover, as Furnivall suggested in 1944, the economy of the marketplace can, with some political help, be an effective integrator for a society, especially a culturally plural one <sup>66</sup>(Barth 1969: 16).

Market mechanisms can of course be politically manipulated. This is what monopoly capitalism is all about. But the economic realities of the marketplace cannot be negated by sheer political will even in command economies, as state socialisms have belatedly realised. Visioning a market with 'socialist characteristics' or with a 'safety net', or other such suggestions, are all compromises that still do not really resolve the dilemmas of the marketplace.

Thus, the market as 'facilitator of exchange' has played a critically integrative role in society from the earliest days of barter; the more complex the social order, the more intricate are its interdependencies, and the more crucial is this role. As 'the arenas where those who seek profits realise them' <sup>67</sup> (Kurien 1994:7), markets also invite manipulation and monopoly, and eventually the exploitation and oppression of the weak by the strong. This intrinsic duality of the market, for profit and for exchange, complicates the dilemma between

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<sup>65</sup> David. Kumar and Santisilan Kadirgama, eds. 1989. *Ethnicity: Identity Conflict and Crisis*. Hong Kong: Arena Press. p. 42

<sup>66</sup> Barth, Fredrik, ed. 1969. *Ethnic groups and boundaries: Social organisation of cultural difference*. London: George Allen and Unwin. p. 16

<sup>67</sup> Kurien, C.T. 1994. *Global capitalism and the Indian economy*. New Delhi: Orient Longman. Leach, E.R. 1960. *Aspects of caste in South India, Ceylon and North West Pakistan*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 7

the convenience of its impersonal economic efficiency and the demands of a humane ethical equity.

The prevailing perceptions of failed state interventions in the Second and Third World, as also the exhaustion of social movements, have had no small part in bringing into prominence once again the role of the market. However, the crises in the First World and in global capitalism that the market is imposing on us all does not address, let alone resolve, this dilemma between a market-friendly economy and a people-friendly market. And it certainly cannot be wished away any more.

There are surely other social agencies of change with their own dilemmas and dualities that could be listed here. But enough has been said to establish the need for a fine-tuned sensitivity in our strategies for intervention to the issues and concerns that the subaltern alternatives indicated here have been trying to redress.

## **XVIII. A Concluding Peroration**

The argument in this essay is perhaps too broad to be convincing on every point raised. However, our intention has not been to conclude the discussion, but rather to arouse some 'hermeneutical suspicions' with regard to dominant understandings so as to open them to a fusion of horizons with subaltern ones. Though the mainstream, hegemonic perspectives and ideologies may have the political capacity to assert dominance, they have neither the cultural credibility nor the moral legitimacy to impose it on subalterns of diverse caste, religious and ethnic groups, for any prolonged period of time. Here, we could take a cue from our South Asian experience of linguistic nationalism where any hint of imposing linguistic dominance has been counterproductive, and even violently resisted. Pluralism has proven better at regional integration. It would be tragically misplaced to try and contain the contemporary crisis with a new dominant caste/class hegemony, whether in the name of national integration, or cultural nationalism, or some other misconceived even if well-intentioned agenda.

What we need now is a more effective and real equity that will allow for diversity without inequality, whether socio-cultural or political-economic. This would imply a negation of the idea of a unilinear social evolution within a single national tradition in our civilisation. Popularist nationalism, religiously or otherwise inspired, advocates precisely such a collective destiny for a people. There are dangerously

authoritarian and even fascist connotations in such a perspective, that too easily go unsuspected and uninterrogated.

We might seem to be urging a 'utopia', a 'nowhere' society, but perhaps we may someday be able to collectively remake our own mythomoteur, our founding myth, into one more adequate to our new worldview, knowing that for liberation seekers, history can be made to follow myth 68(Nandy 1983: 63). For this, we first need to break out of the prison of our present consciousness and to transcend the categories that constrain us in order to imagine another kind of community and invent a newer set of traditions. We do not claim that subaltern alternatives have all the answers for such an enterprise, but they do represent a challenging horizon of revolt and revolution, which can fuse with others to construct the identities and the ideologies we need for this brave new world.

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68 Nandy, Ashis. 1983. *The Intimate Enemy: Loss And Recovery Of Self Under Colonialism*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. p. 63



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### 3.

## SUBALTERN INTERROGATIONS: NEED FOR A NEW SUBALTERN HERMENEUTIC

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## **Abstract**

The challenges to the dominant hegemony in this land have focused on the key issues of equity and justice that underlie the quest for identity and dignity. Setting these in a more integrated and holistic context we focus on three crucial issues: caste and hierarchy, caste and class, and caste and ethnicity. We conclude with some more important leads which could be further pursued: a subaltern hermeneutic, a new understanding of the fragmentation and shift in our present electoral politics, and the dilemmas of intervention by the state, social movements and market mechanisms. In sum, subaltern alternatives do represent a horizon of revolt and revolution, which can fuse with others to construct the identities and ideologies for a brave new world.

## **I. Introduction: The Contemporary Crisis**

Caste-based movements have a long history in our society. More recently they have come into new prominence with the multi-dimension crisis we are undergoing. For today there is no gainsaying the failure of the social revolution envisaged by our nationalist movement, at least for the subalterns, for whom we have not as yet kept our tryst with destiny. In this study, the focus is on subaltern movements in Maharashtra to draw out their humanist and liberative potential, particularly in the context of the challenge from Hindu nationalism.

There are other movements, like the environmental one, questioning the dominant model of capitalist development being imposed on us, or the women's movement opposing the oppressive patriarchal chauvinism still so prevalent. We cannot take these up within the constraints of this presentation, though we cannot quite ignore the enormous significance of capitalism and patriarchy for subaltern responses within the contemporary peasant and Dalit movements. Indeed, these have become increasingly sensitive to, and even interact with environmental and feminist concerns as well. Our focus here will be on the identity politics that once presaged a cultural revolution but seem to be running out of control into the lunatic fringe!

Today the saffron wave seems to have taken too many of us by surprise. The secular left now sees a connection between 'Saffronisation and Liberalisation' (Ahmad 1996:1329) and the predatory capitalism the latter has spawned. (Lele 1995:38). The liberal right has found fault with the political left's unwillingness or inability, to come to terms with the ground realities of caste. Some view our predicament as due to the 'pragmatic communalism' of 'pseudo secularists', who have used the communal card to appease the minorities. Others explain it as the well-planned 'programmatic communalism' of the Hindutvawadis, who manipulate religious sentiment. Modernists see this revival as a failure of rationality and a regress into tradition; postmodernists blame the homogenising nationalist state (Gellner 1983) with its 'technocratic mind sets' (Kothari 1988: 2227) for precipitating a communal reaction.

There are, then, several actors in the text of this drama and our endeavour must be to interpret each in its context, deconstructing their pre-judgement and uncovering their pre-options, even as we

become more aware of our own as we listen to them. But there is one overriding and unresolved dilemma that the contemporary crisis leaves us with. For

‘Right now India is in the throes of these opposite tendencies: of an exclusivist and monolithic definition of ‘nation’ and ‘state’ and the more inclusive model of a pluralist participant and federal political structure.’ (Kothari 1988: 2227)

## **II. The Hermeneutics of Faith and Reason**

### ***Old Suspicions and New Horizons***

In this presentation, we will take a hermeneutist rather than a deconstructionist stance. For rather than peel layers off to find an elusive core to our comprehension and then reconstruct our understanding around it, we will attempt more positively a contextual interpretation to arrive at a more meaningful understanding, without pretending to be exhaustive. Hence while listening to the various voices that speak from different perspectives, we will exercise a hermeneutical suspicion rather than indulge a destructive scepticism. For if we want to situate the meaning of a ‘text’ in a meaningful ‘context’, then we must also attempt to uncover the pre-judgements that preset their ‘horizon of understanding’, as well as the pre-options that predispose their responses.

In doing so we can of course hope for a ‘fusion of horizons’ which will yield a new ‘surplus of meaning’ and a new more comprehensive perspective. We can also expect a cross-fertilisation of options to make for better-focused choices and more committed responses. Unfortunately only a ‘collision with other’s horizons’ makes us aware of our own deep-seated pre-judgments. (Linge 1977: xxi) This happens usually in times of intense inter-cultural contact or rapid intra-cultural change.

Hence for Hans-Georg Gadamer, the present situation of the interpreter is not something negative, but ‘already constitutively involved in any process of understanding.’ (ibid.: xiv) We can never be entirely rid of our prejudices, or more literally our ‘pre-judgments’, or in communication terminology, our ‘filters’. For ‘the historicity of our existence entails that prejudices, in the literal sense of the word, constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience.’

(Gadamer 1977: 9) Hence it follows there can be no pre-suppositionless interpretation, since there is no pre-judgmentless experience!

However, if the ideal of the modernist Enlightenment, of an unbiased, autonomous subject must be abandoned, in a hermeneutic perspective this must become a positive constituent of any interpretation, and not a limiting one. For 'meaning' is always located within a 'horizon', and within different 'horizons' different potential meanings will be actualised. (Cf. Ricoeur, op.cit., p.78) For, as Ricoeur insists 'the sense of a text is not behind the text but in front of it.' (ibid. p.88)

Now even an initial stage of questioning cannot but be initiated from a particular perspective and with its own pre-assumptions. This is what we would call the hermeneutical 'suspicion'. 'It is more than a doubt. It is an insight, still dim and unconfirmed but already charged with an interrogatory force.' (Libano, op. cit., p.15)

These hermeneutic suspicions can now become the points of departure for us to initiate and continue this dialogue across various divides. But we must first be clear with regard to the horizons of understandings in which it takes place. Only then can there be a 'fusion' between them, and the dialogue will assume 'the buoyancy, of a game, in which the players are absorbed.' (Linge 1977: xix ) Then it will happen as in 'every conversation that through it something different has come to be.' (ibid.: xxii)

### ***New Sutras for Old Dichotomies***

In this more inclusive approach of a hermeneutic circle, it is 'faith' that makes the basic pre-judgements, which are then interrogated by 'reason'. (Heredia 2001) This is further subsumed into a more refined pre-judgement based on a more meaningful faith, proceeding progressively in a question-answer dialogue, wherein each interrogates the other. 'Faith' in this context is not exclusively religious faith, but rather faith in all its dimensions: personal and inter-personal, social, and inter-subjective. It is here that the boundaries between religious faith and political ideologies get blurred. 'Reason' here refers to the Enlightenment and more particularly the modernist inspiration drawn from it. This includes a whole spectrum from the reductionist empiricism that privileges experimental science to the abstract logic that struggles with the critical problem of Kant.

Today between global secularism and religious revivalism the dichotomy between faith and reason is sharpened. We need a more insightful understanding of 'reason' than the 'Age of Reason' gave us, a more incisive comprehension of 'faith' than that of the 'New Age' movements today. Hence our query: *what does being 'reasonable' mean to faith, and again what does being 'faithful' to reason require?*

Our suspicion is that in Western thought a binary opposition between faith and reason readily leads to an unbridgeable divide between fideism and rationalism, which all too easily deteriorates into a schizophrenia between religious intolerance and rationalist dogmatism! However, more generally within the horizon of Eastern thought, there is a more inclusive understanding as expressed in our first sutra: *faith and reason are complementary, not contradictory ways of seeking the truth.*

More conventionally faith is understood as giving one's ascent to a truth on the testimony of another. Its credibility rests on the trustworthiness of the testifier, and not on the content of the belief itself. Hence our second sutra: *what we believe depends on whom we trust.*

Now a reasoned ascent to truth is not dependent on extrinsic testimony, but on a rational methodology that leads not to 'belief' but to 'knowledge'. However, this very method rests on basic premises, like the reality and intelligibility of the world we live in, which cannot be logically proven, but must be existentially experienced. Further hermeneutics and deconstruction have today demonstrated the limits of the old Enlightenment rationalism and have offered alternative investigative approaches. Hence in accepting the validity of this methodology we must also acknowledge its limitations. And so our third sutra: *a rational methodology transgressing its inherent limitations can never yield 'rightly reasoned' knowledge.*

Moreover, the sociology of knowledge has convincingly demonstrated how our underlying presumptions and pre-judgements are not subject to reason so much as socially derived from the 'unconscious ideologies' and fundamental options of the vested interests and status quo establishment of those involved. Consequently our fourth sutra: *where we position ourselves influences how we reason.*

Further, in 'faith' we must distinguish the 'content of belief', which is contingent and the 'act of faith', which is necessary to live our interdependent lives. Moreover, if we grant that we are not the ground of our own being, then this 'faith' must transcend and reach beyond



the horizons of the human. In an empirical-rationalist frame of reference, there is no room for such faith, for 'what ultimately concerns man', as Paul Tillich described religion. Hence our fifth sutra: *whether or not we believe depends on our self-understanding*.

In this sense 'faith' becomes a 'constitutive element of human existence' (Panikkar 1983: ??), and the content of faith must fulfil this human dimension, i.e., make the believer more human, or else it cannot be 'good faith'. And so our sixth sutra: *if to believe is human, then what we believe must make us more human not less!*

This is precisely the test of 'good faith', whereas with 'blind faith', the act of faith becomes compulsive rather than free, and 'cathects' on a content that promises security and perhaps even grandiosity, rather than one that expresses trust and dependency. Hence sutra seven: *faith that is 'blind' is never truly humanising; faith that is not humanising, is to that extent 'bad faith'*.

Now the language of faith communicates at the various levels of meaning, from the literal and the direct, to the symbolic and the metaphoric. Hence rather than an *experimental* methodology with its objective emphasis, this demands a more self-reflexive and *experiential* methodology, which while being subjective is neither arbitrary nor irrational, but focuses on 'meaning' and 'meaningfulness', rather than merely measuring quantities and determining cause and effect. Thus our eighth sutra: *only a self-reflexive, experiential methodology is meaningful to the discourse of faith; a rationalist-empirical one is alien to it*.

It should now be apparent that the basis for an enriching inter-religious dialogue cannot be so much the *content of faith*, which may vary across different cultural and religious traditions. Rather because the *act of faith is constitutively human it will necessarily have a common religious basis across varying cultures and traditions*. This is our ninth sutra.

Today religious revivalism justifies the unreasonable and even the irrational in the name of faith, while a rationalist secularism dismisses all religious beliefs as irrational and unscientific. This merely turns the dilemma between faith and reason into an irresolvable dichotomy, not an enriching dialectic. And so our tenth and last sutra: *an inclusive humanism must embrace both 'meaningful faith', as well as 'sensitised reason'*. For it is only thus that we will be able to bring a healing wholeness to the 'broken totality' of our modern world, in Iris Murdoch's unforgettable phrase.

In foreground, the discussion to follow we then conclude, that *the dialectic between faith and reason must be pursued in the context of a hermeneutic circle as a dialogue or it will degenerate in a debate across an unbridgeable divide.*

The worse danger of course is to fall into the ‘fundamentalist trap’ on either side of the divide! That is, when confused and angered by the convulsive changes of the times, one seeks security in the dogmatic affirmation of absolutes and uncritical submission to an authority, whether this ‘faith’ be religious or ideological, or even rationalist under the pretence of ‘science’. The temptation to such a trap affects us all in varying degrees, though it is easy to point out the speck of compromise in the eyes of those struggling in their search for relevance, and to miss the beam of self-righteous complacency in one’s own.

### **III. Phule’s Search for Truth**

#### ***Hindu Nationalism and the non-Brahmin Movement***

The historical roots of Hindu nationalism can be traced to the Indian ‘renaissance’ in the 19th century nineteenth, with its elements of religious revival and reform. Mainstream nationalist thought has had many strands interwoven into its texture, especially in the Congress ideology and culture that dominated it, though different trends have tended to dominate at different times.

The term ‘Hindu’ itself is a construction subsuming a multiplicity of diverse religious beliefs and practices. However, Hindu nationalist thought attempts to impose on this multiplicity a predominantly Brahminic hegemony, as it becomes more a political ideology rather than a religious theology. It remained a sub-terranean current among the many streams that flowed into the nationalist movement, even though it was largely ignored by liberals and leftists.

The developments under colonial rule made new space for a communalism and casteism. This precipitated a new ethno-politics with its imposed differences and hegemonising identities. These need to be problematised and critiqued. Thus the Hindutva project today is best seen as an attempt to displace real-life concerns of ordinary people by the vested interests of upper caste-class groups. Yet within the complex dialectic tensions between dominance and subservience, subaltern groups of peoples have made space for resistance and revolt.

For, from the earliest times, there have been alternate and heterodox understandings and responses that have challenged the dominant hegemony in this land, at times with more, at others with less success. Thus from the ancient Buddha's 'revolution' and the medieval bhakti of the *sant-kavis*, to the modern non-Brahmin and Dalit revolts, to the contemporary women's and the ecological movements, there has always been a contestation for the ideological space once claimed by the Brahminic Hinduism and later by the nationalists of various hues. However, we need a historiography from a bottom-up perspective to hear and record these subaltern voices.

In the colonial period it was the forward castes, who first took advantage of the new opportunities in education and employment to form a new modernising indigenous elite. It was only later that a new leadership emerged from among the backward castes to challenge this *shethji-bhatji* dominance. It was from here that the new leadership for the non-Brahmin movement came. For 'precisely this process of individual enlightenment served to integrate them into a new collective—that of the oppressed.' (O'Hanlon 1985:131)

### ***Rereading History, Reconstructing Culture***

Jotirao Phule (1827-1890) could well be regarded as the founder of the non-Brahmin movement in Maharashtra. He was among the first generation of Indian thinkers who responded to the challenge of the West. 'With ruthless self-criticism they sought to lay the ground for a total social transformation, to weld science and rationality to Indian culture to recreate India.' (Omvedt 1976:99) Phule was at the cutting edge of this response. With his articulate ideology and inclusive identities, with his anticipation of feminist and ecological concerns, Phule's subaltern alternative represents a genuine 'cultural revolt', an unrelenting attack on caste, superstition and inequality.

Phule's understanding of Indian society does not derive from an organic functionalist perspective. He is acutely aware of the long record of oppressive injustice and the irreconcilable conflict of interests from which these derive. He accepted the Aryan race theory propounded at the time by European orientalisks and popular with the Brahmin elite like Tilak. The theory gave the upper castes a common origin with the Europeans, distanced them from the masses and became a pseudo-scientific explanation for caste. However, Phule turned it around into a history of foreign conquest and exploitation over a prosperous and egalitarian indigenous people.

Phule interprets the avatars of Vishnu not in terms of a soteriology of a benevolent deity but as successive stages in a war of aliens against the original 'rakshasas, that is protectors of the land.' (Omvedt 1995:17) Parashuram is the worst perpetrator of this Brahmin tyranny. In 1873 he wrote:

'Perhaps in the whole range of history it is scarcely possible to meet another such character as that of Purshram, so selfish, infamous, cruel and inhuman. The deeds of Nero, Alaric or Machiavelli sink into insignificance before the ferocity of Purshram.' (Phule 1991a: xxxi)

On the other hand, Baliraj, who is treacherously tricked into defeat by Vaman, the Brahmin, is the most significant indigenous hero. Balirajya is still a living aspiration among the masses in Maharashtra : '*ida pida javo, Balicha rajya yevo!*' (Let troubles and sorrows cease, and Bali's kingdom come.) In Phule's view, Muslim rule failed to liberate the oppressed and now he calls on the British to seize the momentous opportunity to redress this history, and re-establish Balirajya's *satyayuga*, the age of truth, by putting to shame the Brahmin *bhudevs*, gods-on-earth.

Thus Phule reads history through his master lens of rationality and equality. These are the core values of his ideological stance, which is a humanism from which he attempts to redefine a pan-Indian tradition, not in terms of 'a Sanskritic and therefore elite basis', but on the fact that 'non-Sanskrit traditions have as much claim to an all-India spread.' (Omvedt 1976:116) He himself used the term 'Maratha' to refer to the whole non-Brahmin community in an attempt to appropriate 'traditional loyalties and aspirations in a new radical disguise'. (O'Hanlon 1985: 139)

Phule's own concern was certainly more with the unity of the non-Brahmin community than with any claims to Kshatriya status, for a part or even the whole of this community. For he was acutely sensitive to the ambiguities such claims involved and the Sanskritisation it implied. Actually, Phule never even uses the term 'Hindu'. The new identity he constructs is not articulated in terms of varna status but projected in the imagery and symbols of the toiling cultivator in his *Shethkaryacha Asud* (The Cultivator's Whipcord), and the peasant woman, *the Kulambin*.

Thus identifying a moral religious core for his ideology, he seeks a more Universal faith with his Sarvajanic Satya Dharma (Public

Religion of Truth), which was basically ‘inspired by a theistic humanism,’ (Gore 1993: 322) or what in Bellah’s terms would be categorised as ‘civil religions’. (Bellah 1970:168) It would replace *jat bhau* (casteism) in society, with *jagbhandu* (Universal brotherhood), *behdniti* (an ethic of discrimination) with *manuski* (humanism). (Gavaskar: 1995:10) There well might be some Christian influence here but Phule is even more influenced by the rationalist Enlightenment of the West, as expressed for instance by Tom Paine, whose writings he was familiar with. Thus he distances himself from Semitic patriarchy and a fideistic authority of scripture and/or tradition. Rather he is closer to the heterodox shamanic faith with its rationalism, and bhakti cults, with their ‘*ekantika dharma*’.

However, Phule’s religion was not an other-worldly mysticism, but very much a this-worldly praxis for a humanist and egalitarian society. Besides reaching out to the *ati-shudras*, the ‘untouchables’ of his time, Phule is, in fact, one of the first reformers to insist on greater equality across the gender divide, and an end to the patriarchal and authoritarian family that oppressed women of all castes, high and low. In his personal life, unlike other reformers, he was uncompromising on issues affecting women. Phule indeed seems to have anticipated the relationship between liberation from familial patriarchy and the suppression of caste hierarchy.

### ***A Mahatma’s Legacy***

Mahatma Phule articulated a non-Brahmin ideology and sketched a non-Aryan identity that began as a cultural revolt and had the potential of a revolution. For it was

‘in establishing an ideological basis for a revolution in social and religious values, that Phule and his fellow radicals displayed their greatest talents. In a brilliant effort of creativity and imagination, they projected a new collective identity for all Maharashtra’s lower castes.’ (O’Hanlon 1985:8)

But like so many other revolutions in this country it still remains a postponed one. The alternative readings and constructions he makes may not always measure up to the best critical scholarship today. But they are a precious legacy of inspiration and challenge to fulfilling the

promise of the cultural revolution he initiated and is still waiting to be carried through.

In the final analysis, Phule's best contribution has been his cultural critique and the revolt it precipitated. Eventually, the movement was co-opted by the Congress expanding into rural areas in the 1930s, and was absorbed into the nationalist struggle. Hence we see that while Phule's 'shudras' are absorbed into the nationalist mainstream, the 'ati-shudras' carry forward his heritage with Ambedkar. Here we discover some differences but much greater continuity between the two, especially in their use of equality and rationality as the master lens for their social critique.

## **IV. Ambedkar's Radicalism**

### ***Subaltern Alternatives***

The affinity between Phule and Ambedkar (1891–1956) is as marked as the differences between him and Gandhi. He was convinced that caste was an inevitable consequence of Brahminic Hinduism, and untouchability its most degrading expression. Hence the eradication of untouchability demanded the abolition of caste, something he now felt was not possible even for the reformist Hinduism of Gandhi or the Brahmin-Bania party of the Congress or even the communists whom he saw as just 'a bunch of Brahman boys.' For him India was still a nation-in-the-making, and the Constitution he fathered the basis for the new society coming into being.

For his Dalits, the most intransigent obstacle was Brahminical Hinduism itself. Ultimately Ambedkar's alienation was expressed in his 'final decision' to reject Hinduism itself in 1935. His conversion to Buddhism was the conclusion of a long discernment thought out critically, planned carefully, and timed deliberately. With Ambedkar, his neo-Buddhists were opting to re-established themselves with an ancient religious identity and a new human dignity. Politically it was meant to be a social rebirth, a movement for the recreation of India. For in the final analysis, Buddhism for Ambedkar was more in consonance with the democratic ideal of liberty, equality, fraternity, than Hinduism or Marxism.

### ***Integration or Autonomy***

There were at the turn of the century two diverging paths open to the Dalit movement: an integration into a reformed mainstream Hinduism, with Sanskritisation; and a rejection of the Brahminic tradition with an assertion of autonomy. The first represented by Bansode and Gavai drew on the bhakti traditions; the second led by Ambedkar was rooted in the Satya Shodhak movement. The two orientations were not easily reconcilable for they were driven by opposing forces:

‘While the basic social oppression and economic exploitation of the Dalits pushed them to a radical autonomy, at the same time there were powerful pressures for absorption: the sheer social and political power of caste Hindus and their organisations, the readiness of reformers to make concessions, the Hinduistic tendencies that came to dominate even movements opposing class exploitation.’(Omvedt 1994:134)

However, the road to Dalit autonomy required them to organise independently and define their non-Hindu, non-Aryan option, to articulate their stance on British rule and their position in the nationalist movement, to choose the social group and political allies to work with for their cause. This was no mean task and the ideology and leadership for it was provided by Ambedkar.

The ideological journey of Ambedkar to situate his people in their long struggle against caste oppression is reflected in the distance he travelled from the graduate school paper he wrote at Columbia University in 1917 and the manuscript he left unfinished when he died in 1956. At his point of departure, the young academic asserts: ‘I venture to say that there is no country that can rival the Indian peninsula with respect to the unity of its culture.’ (Cited by Zelliott 1996: 81) At the end of his life the veteran leader comes to the opposite conclusion:

‘It must be recognised that there never has been a common Indian culture, that historically there have been three Indias, Brahmanic India, Buddhist India, and Hindu India, each with its own culture ... It must be recognised that the history of India before the Muslim invasions is the history of a mortal conflict between Brahmanism and Buddhism.’ (Moon 1987: Vol.3, 275)

The decisive break with mainstream Hindu society came with Ambedkar’s lengthy testimony to the Simon Commission in 1928, which in turn set the stage for his confrontation with Gandhi and the Poona Pact. His ‘final decision’ to reject Hinduism was expressed in his famous pronouncement at Yeola on 13th October 1935: ‘It was not my fault that

I was born an untouchable. But I am determined that I will not die a Hindu.’ (Keer 1981:263 trans. Gore 1993: 126) It marked the point of no return in ‘Ambedkar’s final disillusionment with Hinduism, even with the best and most ‘reformed’ of Congress leadership,’ (Omvedt 1994:161) and in his radical commitment to Dalit autonomy from Hinduism.

### ***Social Identity and Human Dignity***

The economic emancipation that Ambedkar struggled to achieve for the oppressed all through his life still remains an unfinished revolution. However, his religious conversion to Buddhism to which he led a large number of his followers, was seen by them not unwarrantedly ‘as a social rebirth, a gaining of a new identity, a way in which the Dalits were leading, not simply joining a movement for the recreation of India.’ (Omvedt 1994:248)

For the Dalits this ‘conversion as a gateway to self-respect’ (Gore 1993: 99) was the culmination of a long and agonised struggle for identity and dignity, for liberation from caste oppression, so institutionalised in Hindu society, and legitimated by religion. Searching for the one ‘principle in Hinduism which all Hindus, no matter what their other differences are, feel bound to render willing obedience’ to, he concludes, ‘that principle is the principle of caste.’ (Moon 1987: vol. 3, 336) For Ambedkar, Hinduism negated the essential dignity of the person by subordination to the caste group ascribed at birth. Only its total repudiation for a new religious identity could give these Dalits back their usurped human dignity.

### ***New Beginning***

Ambedkar’s conversion to Buddhism was the conclusion of a long discernment thought out critically, planned carefully, and timed deliberately. For he was acutely aware, that however personal his religious convictions might be his conversion could not be merely a private affair. It was also a public protest that would necessarily and crucially affect lakhs of his people as well. His final decision to convert was declared only at Colombo in May 1950, and his actual *diksha* took place in October 1956 at Nagpur.

Other alternatives, like Sikhism, Christianity and Islam, were considered, and many overtures were made by the leaders of these faiths. But all these three had internalised, to a greater or lesser extent,



the institutionalised inequality of the caste system, and none of these religions presented the chance of a new beginning for the converts, an opportunity to be part of a new religious community without the baggage of past prejudice. Whereas Ambedkar and his neo-Buddhists were opting to re-established themselves with an ancient religious identity and a new human dignity.

*The Buddha and His Dhamma* begun in Oct. 1951 and completed in 1955, was published posthumously in 1957. Here Ambedkar reinterprets Buddhism more in terms of a political and liberation theology rather than as a religious spirituality, and he explains *dhamma* in terms of a rational social morality, not a blind ritualistic ethic. In his final comparison between *The Buddha and Karl Marx*, completed in 1956, (Moon 1987: vol. 3) he clarifies his differences with Marxism but also brings out the socialist content of Buddhism: dukkha as exploitation and the abolition of private property in the sangha. In sum, Buddhism for Ambedkar was more ‘in consonance with Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, in short Democracy’, (Moon 1979: Vol.1, 77) than Hinduism or Marxism.

However, Ambedkar may not have quite succeeded in displacing the inferiorised identity imposed on Dalits by caste Hinduism with a new Buddhist one. For the ambiguities and dilemmas of a religious response to the problems of the Dalits cannot be gainsaid. Ambedkar’s was a Buddhism ‘cleansed of the Brahmanic interpolations of the doctrine of karma and rebirth.’ (Gore 1993: 259) However, his rationalist demythologising, without a reinterpretation of popular religiosity and beliefs, as Phule had earlier attempted, left the door open to new superstition among his neo-Buddhists. But beyond Phule what he did attempt, and did in some measure achieve, was ‘a conscious non-Hindu identity, a collective material and radicalizing force in India,’ (Omvedt 1994:249) as the basis for Dalit dignity. This is precisely Ambedkar’s most challenging contribution to our contemporary crisis, and not just for the Dalits, but for the whole Bahujan samaj as well.

### ***Ambedkar’s Revolution***

At the beginning of and throughout his public life, Ambedkar challenged the institutional structures of his society and precipitated a real rebellion among his people: a rejection of an oppressive tradition, and an affirmation of an alternative identity. But at the end of his life’s odyssey, the revolution he initiated remains incomplete: the exploitative

structures still prevail, the dignity of his people is as yet denied. Certainly there were external pressures working against Dalit liberation, in the caste-class, liberal-democratic society of post-independent India. And yet, part of the betrayal came from the inner dynamics of the movement itself.

Once again we see a subaltern movement of great promise splinter and dissipate its forward thrust. Not all the Dalits followed Ambedkar into Buddhism. At the time this would have put them beyond the pale of protective discrimination then given to the Scheduled Castes. The neo-Buddhists, or 'nav-Buddhas', were mostly from his own Mahar caste, which also dominated the Republican Party. Here again, it was caste rather than class that was the basis for mass mobilisation.

In 1972 the radical Dalit Panthers, challenged the older leaders with a new manifesto inspired by Naxalite imagery and more in tune with Marxist ideology than the Buddhist dhamma:

'We want a complete and total revolutionary change. We do not want a little place in Brahman Alley. We want to rule the whole land. We are not looking at persons but a system. Change of heart, liberal education, etc., will not end our state of exploitation, when we gather a revolutionary mass, rouse the people, out of the struggle of this giant mass will come the tidal wave of revolution.' (cited by Joshi 1984:146)

In today's opportunist and amoral factional politics, the need for unity among the subalterns, or at least a commitment to a common minimum programme for a united front is even more urgent. In this context, Ambedkarism is coming into prominence even beyond Maharashtra, among Dalits in the south and the Bahujan Samaj Party in the north. Yet with the saffronisation of his home state and the factionalism in the Republican Party there, Ambedkarism is still to come into its own in Maharashtra. The 'wave of revolution' remains beyond the horizon, waiting for the earth to quake with a Dalit revolt before it rolls over the land and engulfs 'Brahman Alley' in its wake.

But Ambedkar's relevance is not just local, for the Dalits, or national, for this country, it is global as well. For though the cultural and historical context of Ambedkar is very specific, as with Tagore and Gandhi, for him too

'over time the Indian freedom movement ceased to be an expression of only nationalist consolidation; it came to

acquire a new stature as a symbol of the Universal struggle for political justice and cultural dignity.’ (Nandy 1994:2-3)

## **V. Hegemony and History**

### ***Resistance and Co-optation***

The subaltern mobilisation of the backward and scheduled castes and tribes has brought down the Nehruvian consensus as expressed by the Congress hegemony. But with this has also come a revived Hindu nationalism in its more blatant and violent expressions. The upper castes and upper classes have seized upon this collapse to re-establish their hegemony reinterpreting and reabsorbing the cultural revolt of the backward castes and Dalits into an updated Brahminic revivalist Hinduism of the Sangh Parivar, as once the Congress did with the non-Brahmin movement in Maharashtra. A viable and effective subaltern alternative can successfully counter this together with other resistance movements, only when these new identities and ideologies displace the dominant hegemony of caste-class relations and reorder the social relations of production into the bargain.

But we would be naive not to be alert to other subversive possibilities as well. Thus in Maharashtra the Shiv Sena which has been till now very much a backward movement, though not a Dalit movement has already taken over the Hindutva ideology with an aggressiveness that, in spite of their precarious alliance with the original standard-bearers of the saffron flag, embarrasses, if not shames them. Though once identified with the displaced sons of the soil, it is now increasingly oriented to the middle class and dominated by the upper castes. The Sena is now attempting to break into the Dalits’ stronghold and co-opt them to their cause.

### ***Adaptation and Displacement***

While there is continuity in the hegemonic project of traditional Brahminic Hinduism and the contemporary Hindutva of the Sangh Parivar there has also been adaptive change. For

‘situated in the broad sweep of history, today’s Hindutva project brings out most vividly the three essential characteristics of all its past manipulations. In its intentions,

it is hegemonic, homogenizing and pedagogic, all at the same time and in complexly interrelated ways.’ (Lele 1995: xvii)

Thus the Sangh Parivar seeks to establish its hegemony through a multi-pronged, multi-dimensional ‘network of political institutions that will shape public policy as and for a proud Hindu nation.’ (ibid.) Adjusting to new social compulsions the Hindutva forces are attempting ‘a national consensus based on a homogenized Hindu identity that must be flexible and must accommodate diversity.’ (ibid. xviii) This requires the co-option and subordination of other groups and local traditions into this pan-Indian hegemony.

Finally, this hegemony and homogenisation is legitimised and sustained by a ‘pedagogic violence’ that selectively valorises and condemns historical memories, cultural symbols and religious traditions. It is the old process of appropriation and exclusion, of assimilation and hierarchy. It facilitates the ‘generational transmission,’ (Bourdieu 1973) of a taken-for-granted worldview, and blunts the critical competence of those who might challenge it, preventing ‘the gradual acquisition of experiences that can eventually translate into political action.’ (Devalle 1992: 237) This does not enable people to constructively confront their real-life experiences, rather it encourages an escape from it into reconstructed myths and reinvented histories.

What this adds up to is a displacement of the real-life concerns of ordinary people, issues of caste, class, gender, ethnicity, etc., by illusory and alienating ones that manipulate them into serving vested interests. This may seem discouraging, but we must not underestimate ‘the potential of today’s anti-Hindutva majoritarianism’ (Lele 1995: xxi) of the *Bahujan* initiatives, nor the Sangh Parivar’s ambiguity towards the non-Brahmin movements, especially the Dalits.

### ***Hindutva Historiography***

The construction of a national community and the appeal to a glorious past were very much a part of the historical context of the nationalist movement. But the mainstream hegemony could not preempt the ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson 1983) or the ‘invented traditions’ (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) of minorities and marginal groups. For if the ‘Hindu mode of absorption’ has been part of the ‘culture of oppression’ there has also been a corresponding ‘culture of protest’ that evolved its own methods of resistance. Not that ‘The weapons of the Weak’ (Scott 1990) were ever completely adequate to the

violence of the strong, but they did keep alive a memory and a voice, that had the potential of evolving an alternative ideology and a new identity.

No dominant hegemony can be absolutely monolithic, for it cannot completely suppress every group conflict or contain all antagonistic interest. Hence the contradictions and cracks in social systems will inevitably reflect the 'complex ways in which relationships of meaning are produced and fought over.' (Giroux 1984: 332) For in the complex dialectical tension between dominance and subordination the incorporation of such groups and interests will often be limited and selective, allowing space for differing perceptions and an alternative consciousness.

Here subaltern groups can 'build up zones of resistance as a strategy for survival and political action.' (Devalle 1992: 21) The voices of resistance and the modes of protest may seem at times 'non-political or with meanings that appear only as marginal to explicit political discourses,' (ibid. 236) but these do have the potential for a 'cultural revolt' that acquires economic and political content. (Omvedt 1976: 2)

### ***Historical Text and Contemporary Context***

But the Hindutvawadis can be expected to contest any such revolt that undermines their upper-caste hegemony. The present controversy over the history textbooks and syllabus for our schools illustrates precisely this. For our vision even when focused on the future is always related to the past, either as reaction and rejection, or as confirmation and continuity. For the way we remember and recall the past cannot but influence how we perceive and act in the present, and what we expect and strive for in the future. This is why the textbook controversy is important because it will affect our children, who are our future.

All history, right or left, is constructed, and indeed must be reconstructed anew in the light of the changing exigencies of present needs and future hopes of a people. But a rationalist positivism does not cut deep enough into the underlying prejudgments and fundamental options grounding this reconstruction. Neither side is explicitly facing the basic questions regarding a national consensus on the kind of society we want our children to inherit or the pedagogic role of history in their young lives. The Sangh Parivar is far more determined to paint our understanding of history with a broad saffron brush, than the Marxists were once concerned to colour it red, even while the positivists still are trying to ground history in 'facts'.

In post-Independent India, the effort to influence the educational processes has been more with regard to the ideological orientation as expressed in textbooks and syllabus, than in regard to changing the structure or improving the system itself. Avril Powel perceptively remarks: ‘whenever there has been a textbook crisis of any proportion, it has followed a change of government at the centre or state level’ (as in 1977 and 1991).’ (Powel 1996: 222) The ideological hegemony of a dominant elite, whether traditional or modern, whether class or caste, does not easily allow subaltern groups in society to form their own culture, and build their own critique. For homogeneity facilitates hegemony.

Thus in the Nehruvian era whereas socialism was privileged, we now find a cultural nationalism, or rather a nationalist majoritarianism that is becoming an ‘ideological obsession’. (Kumar 1998) This began in 1977 when the Sangh Parivar was a constituent of the Janata government but not dominant enough to push its own separate agenda. Now when it is the leader of the coalition in power they are unashamedly pursuing a blatant attempt to reconstruct the past for their own perverse partisan purposes. However, the positivist, rationalist critique of the political left and the liberals is inadequate in this contest.

Thus the *National Curriculum for School Education* put out by the Central Government’s NCERT (National Centre for Education Research and Training) in 2000, is supposedly an attempt at indigenisation, but it succeeds only in ‘ideologising’ education, and trivialising knowledge. (Kumar 2001) The autonomous NHRC (National Human Rights Commission) has issued notice to it on a petition arguing that the NCERT compromises the child’s right to education, most recently declared as a fundamental right.

Already some saffron-ruled states have implemented an alarming educational agenda. ‘Hate language and hate politics cannot be part of the history project in a democracy’, but this is precisely ‘How Textbooks Teach Prejudice’ in the state of Gujarat, ruled by the Hindu Nationalist BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party). (Setalvad 1999: 9) Further, the introduction and subsidisation of departments of astrology by the UGC (University Grants Commission) only trivialises another cherished Nehruvian ideal of promoting a scientific temper in our society.

The earlier textbook history was premised on a broad Nehruvian consensus and was written by internationally recognised scholars. The new one is by some anonymous courtesans of Sangh Parivar with

little credibility beyond that narrow coterie. If there is now need for a change it must be in the light of a new consensus about our national vision and pedagogic mission and certainly not imposed by a partisan politics highjacked by an even more partisan party and that too without a popular mandate! Moreover, it is the Constitution that must in no uncertain terms set the parameters of any consensus, especially with regard to its basic structure which is not negotiable in our present circumstances, unless one wants to found a new republic: not 'Indian which is Bharat', but 'Bharat' which is no longer 'India'!

However, even a Constitutionally compatible vision of our nationhood must be translated into a practical pedagogy. How we respond to such a challenge in a complex multi-ethnic, pluri-religious, will require sensitivity and creativity. For Giroux

'the answer to this lies, in part, in revealing the myths, lies and injustices at the heart of the dominant school culture and building a critical mode of teaching that engages rather than suppresses history and critical practice. Such an activity calls for a mode of dialogue and critique that unmasks the dominant school culture's attempt to escape from history and that interrogates the assumptions and practices that inform the lived experiences of day-to-day schooling.' (Giroux 1988: 7)

This necessarily implies a critical pedagogy, but this in turn does not make for homogeneity or easy social control. For in as much as cognitive competence leads to a critical awareness, it will inevitably unmask the hidden dominance implicit in society as it seeks to extend the limits of understanding and freedom. This is the pedagogy we need as the foundation for an education for pluralism. We are still a long way from reaching such a goal. It will need a whole new breakthrough in our education system, where 'the social construction of meaning within schooling is often structured through a dominating social grammar that limits the possibility for critical teaching and learning in schools.' (Freire and Macedo 1987: 14)

## **VI. Toward a Subaltern Hermeneutic**

Only an adequate hermeneutics can address basic issues underlying this controversy by setting our historical 'texts' in their 'contexts', and indicating the horizons of understanding within which a dialogue can lead to a 'fusion of horizons' and not a 'clash of

civilizations'. If this is to be a subaltern hermeneutic, then, it will position itself with a pre-judgement in their favour and a pre-option for their cause. Now our pre-judgement in their favour must not be a blind unquestioning faith, but a positioning of ourselves in a more empathetic down-up perspective; and our pre-option for their cause must not be an ethno-centric and chauvinistic choice but a critical and reasonable option, premised on an open and liberating hope.

It will help us, then, to listen to contrary or awkward voices without losing our sensitivity or going deaf. In this we are distancing ourselves from the kind of post-modernism that listens with *The Ear of the Other*. (Derrida 1985) For Derrida's 'ear-splitting' discourse inscribes 'the difference in the ear', and allows to a concept 'no possibility of deciding from among its competing meanings, one that is true or authentic,' (Michelfelder and Palmer 1989:1) even if it is expressed by the same voice. Too easily this becomes a relativistic dead-end that leads to the kind of nihilism, which turns a good ear to voices one wants to hear and a deaf one to those one would rather not!

Thus what the subaltern perspective needs is a hermeneutic that will not suppress any of these voices or refuse to give them a hearing, but rather listen to them all against the horizon of our own conceptual presumptions and value commitments, and still be open to the possibilities of a fusion beyond these. Perhaps the polyphony will eventually make a harmony, but till then we can only struggle with the cacophony without losing our sensitivity or going deaf. Such a hermeneutic is necessary to prevent what has come to be

'an uncritical cult of the 'popular' or 'subaltern', particularly when combined with the rejection of the Enlightenment rationalism as irremediably tainted in all its form by colonial power-knowledge.' (Sarkar 1993:165)

In this subaltern hermeneutic the key issues must not be displaced: concern, empathy and compassion for the marginalized, equality, equity and justice for the oppressed. These necessarily underlie the quest for identity and dignity of a people, for their collective self-image and self-worth. This is the dialogue that must continue with subalterns today to evolve a new hermeneutic so sorely needed.

Our encounter with Phule and Ambedkar is intended to help this venture. For their prejudgments and pre-options represent a 'faith' that is reasonable and humanist, in the beliefs and values, the



commitments and convictions that this brings to their innovative rational critique, which in turn expresses a creative fidelity to this 'faith'.

But then again a balanced hermeneutic approach would also have to contain and exorcise the aggressive rationalism evident at times in Phule and Ambedkar, particularly in their criticism of traditional religious practices and beliefs. Often the case against this popular religiosity is argued within the perspective of Western rationalism and its empiricist assumptions. This shows little regard for the limitations of such reasoning and less sensitivity for symbol and sign, or myth and metaphor as ways of communicating beyond a closed empiricist rationale, in a world of physical contingency and moral imperative, of personal freedom and political will.

Towards this, the subaltern hermeneutic must be able to problematise both the grand narratives of modernist rationality, as well as the fragmented polysemy of post-modernism's multiplicity, and then seek a fusion of horizons beyond the clash of perspectives of both. This presentation has attempted to establish the urgent need for such a subaltern hermeneutic. Its further elaboration will have to be pursued much beyond the agenda of this study.

## **VI. Conclusion: A Future Response**

For with those who want to change not just to interpret the world, like Phule and Ambedkar, the truth they seek is not just the object of an intellectual quest, nor merely a pragmatic technique, but rather truth as a reality, a satya, authenticated by its humanist and liberative potential. It is of course a reality that must be understood and interpreted before it can be changed and transformed. For the way we conceptualise a situation already sets the parameters for our response, which will inevitably reflect the limitations and leads, the confusion or the clarity in our thinking. Hence the more incisive our understanding, the more decisive can be our response.

Action follows vision! And if our action is to be liberative for the subalterns, then our vision too must focus on their situation. Now reflection is always at least implicit in human action, or else it is not 'human action' but just 'the acts of humans'; and reflection must somehow be actualised and become real in action, or else it is mere abstract speculation and the less real for it. This calls for a radical praxis that can only keep its authenticity within a hermeneutic circle, and it

only preserves its radicality when it is premised on a subaltern hermeneutic!

### ***Fragmentation and Shift***

From this distance, a critical appreciation of Phule's and Ambedkar's Dalit revolution surely indicate still a long way to go. There is no predetermined gestation period for revolutionary deliveries. However, the more recent the subaltern assertion in electoral politics, particularly after its Mandalisation has revived the older embers of rising expectations and revolutionary hopes. This certainly warrants deeper and more extensive study beyond this one.

The mainstream press has characterised the 1996 election as a 'fractured verdict' and warned of the dire consequences of unstable coalition politics. What is quite unambiguous at this point is the bankruptcy of the Congress model and its politics.

However, beyond the failures and fractures that mark the limits of 'dominant caste democracy', some would begin to see the faint outlines of a 'second republic'! What the more explicit contours of this will be is hard to discuss at this stage, but already now we need a paradigm shift in our understanding, if we are to be able to comprehend the significance of the changes taking place beyond the 'fragmentation' of the last election.

For with the collapse of the Congress new possibilities have emerged today. But the dangers of reiterating our past failures in an accelerating downward spiral are as great as the opportunities that challenge us to reverse this in a 'virtuous circle' by a more creative and constructive response.

Thus the Sangh Parivar has seized on the present ambiguities to aggressively promote a Hindu nationalism that will establish a new hegemony to replace the old one. Yet the inability of the opponents of the Hindutvawadis to come together in a united opposition is an even greater disaster. A negative coalition like the present United Front can only be a transitory phenomenon. If the opposition to the Sangh Parivar does not hang together, they will surely hang apart! The underlying contradictions between leftists and the liberals, the conflicts between the Bahujans and the Dalits, the dissensions in the Congress and the tensions in the Janata Dal, the soul-destroying power of party fragmentation in a self-destructive process, .... all this adds up to a grim prognosis, where the Sangh Parivar could prevail by default and impose

itself on a divided opposition. The present Uttar Pradesh scenario is a good illustration of this.

But as exemplified in Gujarat and the precarious balance of the ruling coalition in Maharashtra, the Hindutvawadis too are plagued with divisions themselves. Their advantage is that they do have a consistently articulated ideology and an aggressively projected identity. But these have proven inadequate to submerge or subsume their inherent caste-class contradictions, or overcome and displace their own internal rivalries.

However, the growth of regional political parties, the acceptance of the need for a common minimum programme, the growing isolation of openly communal and fundamentalist appeals, the increasing accountability and transparency demanded by people of public representatives and servants, the support of an activist judiciary,...all this and more augers well for positive change and the resilience of Indian democracy against authoritarian and fascist forces.

Now after the collapse of the Nehruvian consensus, the marginalisation of Gandhi and the demise of the Congress model, the urgency and inevitability of a 'politics of coalition and consent' is inescapable for the foreseeable future. However, the opposition to Hindu nationalism has still to articulate an acceptable ideology and sketch an inclusive identity.

Our study of the subaltern alternative is a beginning. We now need a more contemporary account of how it can make a more significant contribution to the new paradigm emerging. For our challenge today is to put together a positive unity, not a negative one, against the vested interests that had been represented by a now fragmenting Congress and are once again re-coalescing in a Hinduistic, Brahminic hegemony.

Regrettably until now, the caste divide between the Bahujan non-Brahmin Samaj and the Dalits has not been overcome by the obvious interests they have in common to resist the vested ones that continue to displace and subdue them. Nor has communal harmony been able to bridge the divide between religious communities to bring the concerns of all the poor in them on to a common platform. We now need a further analysis that will help us to learn from our tragic history rather than be condemned to a farcical repetition of it once again.

### ***Dilemmas of Intervention***

In our understanding of 'truth' as praxis, as indicated in our *Approach* at the beginning of this monograph, a critical study is meant to clear and prepare the soil for a committed response. Hopefully, some ground has been covered in this regard. Now, as explained earlier in *An Holistic Approach* with regard to analysis, to be holistic an intervention too must somehow impact more than a single dimension of a particular social situation; and it cannot do this in the abstract. Thus the choice of such a point of entry for an interventionist strategy must not be locked into a particular dimension. This would be to paint itself into a corner. Rather it must make for openings into other dimensions as well. This option can be as crucial as the strategy itself.

However, in concluding now, it is beyond our purpose to describe various alternative strategies of intervention and points of entry that an action response might take. This would be a complex and involved task that would warrant another study. But we feel it would be appropriate now to at least caution against the dilemmas arising when some of the more common intervening agencies are involved.

### ***The State***

The most obvious of these agencies is in the state and the nationalism it mobilises for its ends and means. It has been among the most significant and successful agencies of modernisation and even democracy, especially in the West. But in the multi-ethnic context of the Third World several ambiguities regarding the state and nationalism have obtained, particularly where 'the political form of a plural society was a 'despotism' of one cultural group, usually a minority, over others.' (van de Berghe 1969:67) This perception of the pluralists, 'of the state as an instrument of domination by privileged ethnic groups,' (Brass 1991:252) is also shared by neo-Marxist, following on the older Marxist logic of the state as an instrument of the ruling classes.

But the real dilemma of the state cuts deeper than merely the dominance of ideology or the exercise of power. For even when the state sets out to be 'ostentatiously egalitarian', it must choose, as Rae has pointed out, between different types of 'egalitarian' policies that inevitably favour some groups or categories in the population and discriminate against others, thus leading 'to a host of contradictions and confusions in which *equality is set against equality*' (Rae 1979:38) For even effective political will for any policy of 'affirmative action' or

‘protective discrimination’ creates new interests and identities which, however superficial at first, can do lead to effective mobilisation against larger equalitarian concerns. In other words, as we have urged earlier in the study, any such policy must integrate the class-caste considerations for equity and equality.

This is but one illustration of the dilemmas the state must face between policy intentions and political practicalities. And all these derive from the tensions that must be constructively resolved between delegitimising older state institutions to capture power and then re-legitimising newer ones to implement change. Or in other words the basic dilemma between the state as an instrument of the status quo and oppression and as one of change and liberation, which for some is only resolved when the state finally withers away.

### ***Social Movements***

To further complicate these dilemmas of selective and effective political will, the state must respond to social movements. These can be creative and constructive ‘mechanism’, to use Merton’s phrase, to challenge a social system and precipitate change. Their capacity for mobilisation will depend on the intensity and extent of their appeal. To be intensely gripping, a movement must articulate an ideology that is specifically targeted and concretely expressed. But this may restrict the extent of its appeal. To extend its appeal to a wider field, it must be flexible enough to admit a favourable reinterpretation by, and allow for the accommodation of, diverse groups.

There is here a built-in dilemma, between an intensive and an extensive appeal, which a social movement cannot escape. This is particularly sharp when ‘issues of equity and justice also need to be informed by ethnicity’ (David and Kadirgama, 1989:42) and/or caste.

### ***The Market***

Social movements and the state politics have often been seen locked in interaction, sometimes collaborative, at most times conflictual and even confrontational. But both operate in the broader context of a market that is a more impersonal and less voluntaristic agency, but far more real than the illusory ‘free lunch’, into which populist politics and ideologies are tempted to escape. Moreover, the economy of the marketplace can be an effective integrator for a society, especially a culturally plural one, with some political help. (Barth 1944:16)

Market mechanism can of course be politically manipulated. This is what monopoly capitalism is all about. But the economic realities of the marketplace cannot be negated by the sheer political will even in command economies. This is what state socialisms have belatedly realised. Visioning a market with 'socialist characteristics' or with a 'safety net', or other such suggestions, are all compromises that still do not really resolve the dilemmas of the marketplace.

Thus a market as a 'facilitator of exchange' from the earliest days of barter played a critically integrative role in society, and the more complex the social order, the more intricate are its interdependencies, the more crucial is this role. But markets, merely as 'the arenas where those who seek profits realise them', (Kurien 1994:7) invite manipulation and monopoly, and eventually makes for exploitation and oppression of the weak by the strong. This intrinsic duality of the market, for profit and for exchange, complicates the dilemma between the convenience of its impersonal economic efficiency and the demands of a humane ethical equity.

The prevailing perceptions of failed state interventions in the Second and Third World, as also the exhaustion of social movements with the ideologies and identities that were constructed, has had no small part in bringing into prominence once again the role of the market. But the crises in the First world and the global capitalism it is imposing on us all does not address, let alone resolve this dilemma between a market-friendly economy and people-friendly market. And it certainly cannot be wished away any more.

There are surely other social agencies of change with their own dilemmas and dualities that could be listed here. But enough has been said to establish the need for a fine-tuned sensitivity in our strategies for intervention on the issues and concerns that the subaltern alternatives described here have been trying to redress.

### ***A Concluding Peroration***

The sweep of the argument in this study is perhaps too broad to be convincing on every point raised. However, our intention has not been to conclude the discussion, but rather to arouse the 'hermeneutical suspicions' in dominant understandings so as to open them to a fusion of horizons with subaltern ones. Hopefully, our presentation of subaltern perspectives here has garnered evidence enough to establish, that though Hindu nationalism may have the political capacity to assert dominance, it has neither the cultural credibility nor the moral

legitimacy to impose it on the subalterns of diverse caste, religious and ethnic groups, for any prolonged period of time.

If we would take a cue from our South Asian experience of linguistic nationalism, here any hint of imposing linguistic dominance has been counter-productive and even violently resisted. Pluralism has proven better at regional integration. It would be tragically misplaced to try and contain. *The Contemporary Crisis* we have stretched in our introduction, with a new dominant caste hegemony.

What we need rather is a more effective and real equity, that will allow for diversity without inequality, whether socio-cultural or political-economic. This would imply a negation of the idea of a unilinear social evolution within a single national tradition in our civilisation. Popularist nationalism, religiously or otherwise inspired, advocates precisely, such a collective destiny for a people. There are dangerous authoritarian and even fascistic connotations in such a perspective, that too easily go unsuspected and uninterrogated.

What we are urging might seem to be a 'utopia', a 'nowhere' society. But we could someday be able collectively to remake our own mythomoteur, our founding myth, into one more adequate to our new worldview. And we know for liberation seekers history can be made to follow myth. (Nandy 1983:63)

But for this we need first to break out of the prison of our present consciousness and transcend the categories that constrain us there so we can imagine another kind of community and invent a newer set of traditions. We are not claiming that subaltern alternatives have all the answers for such an enterprise, but they do represent a challenging horizon of revolt and revolution, which can fuse with others to construct the identities and the ideologies we need for this brave new world.

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## 4.

# GLOBALISATION, CULTURE AND RELIGION: CONTRADICTIONS AND DILEMMAS

From *Church In The Service Of Asia's Peoples*, edited by Jacob Kavunkal, SVD, Errol D'Lima SJ, Matthew Jayanth SJ, Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune, 2003, Pp. 197 – 220.

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## ***Abstract***

Contemporary globalisation is the rapid and radical interconnectivity that impacts transnational and domestic structures of society at various levels, creating new challenges, demanding new responses, a 'second modernity'.

This article has focused on two dimensions of this process: the cultural and the religious. With regard to the first: it begins with the set of questions urging an investigation of how globalisation redesigns culture, restructuring meanings and values, myths and rituals. The effect of this on local identities, the difficulty of the intergenerational reproduction of culture, of integrating diversity in some kind of overarching unity, and freeing the imagination to approach such challenges in new and creative ways, are some of the points that were elaborated. Ultimately globalisation and localisation are complementary processes, and their interaction can be seen in the Universalising of the particular and vice versa, the particularising of the Universal.

## **I. Comprehending the Process**

### ***1. Previewing the Argument***

Globalisation is an idea whose time has come, at least to judge by the way the word is bandied about. But as yet there is no cogent theory for this multidimensional process, which would comprehend intelligibly the contradictions and challenges that it presents to us. In fact there is some ambiguity in spite of

a burgeoning academic debate as to whether globalisation, as an analytical construct, delivers any added value in the search of a coherent understanding of the historical forces, which at the dawn of a new millennium, are shaping the socio-political realities of everyday social life, from the cultural to the criminal, the financial to the spiritual. (Held et al 1999:2)

In this paper we have focused on two dimensions of this process: the cultural and the religious. With regard to the first: we begin with the set of questions urging an investigation of how globalisation redesigns culture, restructuring meanings and values,



myths and rituals. The effect of this on local identities, the difficulty of the intergenerational reproduction of culture, of integrating diversity in some kind of overarching unity, and freeing the imagination to approach such challenges in new and creative ways, are some of the points that will be elaborated. Ultimately we find that globalisation and localisation are complementary processes, and their interaction can be seen in the Universalising of the particular and vice versa, the particularising of the Universal.

The starting point of the discussion on the religious dimension is the paradox of globalisation as a further stage of the modernisation process that presages both the 'secular cities' and the 'global village'. Moreover, globalising homogeneity is counter-punctual to a religious identity that privileges the particular and the local. The residual problems that globalisation creates are then taken up by the new religious movements at local levels, but this in turn cannot but be affected by globalising processes. Hence the liberal religious option may be too 'Universalist' and therefore somewhat diluted. Yet it is more compatible in the long run with globalisation than a fundamentalist religious revivalism, for this cannot eventually escape the penetration of globalising forces. However, in a global 'civil religion' the specifics and particularities of a religious identity and solidarity are lost. It is precisely because the new religious movements are mobilised around these aspects of identity and solidarity that they are able to address the alienation and isolation, which people experience as the downside of globalisation.

## **2. Clarifying the Concepts**

If in general the globalisation process refers to the 'widening, deepening and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness in all aspects of contemporary social life' (ibid.:2) we may well be on our way to a 'world society as a multiplicity without unity,' (Beck 2000:4) rather than an integrated global system. Contemporary changes driven by new technologies and movements have left us with a more interconnected yet highly uncertain world.

There are several approaches to defining globalisation but even before we start to describe it, we need to clarify some of the ambiguous terminology involved. Thus in trying to answer the question: *What is Globalisation?* Ulrich Beck distinguishes 'globalisation' as a process from 'globalism' as an ideology, and 'globality' as the social reality we are actually living with. (ibid: 9)

Similar distinctions have been made with modernity and secularity, and indeed globalisation is not unconnected with these two social phenomena.

Generally, globalism is an ideology that privileges the world market of neoliberal capitalism. But globalisation as a multi-dimensional process also generates counter-understandings as with various resistance movements. Thus the globalisation process does give rise to several kinds of ideologies, some more dominant than others, but all referring to the reality on the ground. The purpose of such distinctions is not just for the sake of conceptual clarity but more so 'to break up the *territorial orthodoxy of the political and the social* posed in absolute institutional categories.' (ibid: 9)

Now in attempting to place the globalisation process in a historical context, some would rather loosely trace its origins back 500 years, when 'through conquest, trade, and migration, the globe began to shrink.' (Mittleman 2000:18). However, world-system theorists would place the origins with the development of capitalism in 16<sup>th</sup> century Western Europe, while for others the fundamental changes in the world order in the 1970s mark the origins of contemporary globalisation. Fine-tuning this further, a fourfold periodisation of the 'Historical Forms of Globalisation' (Held et al. 1999:414 - ) has been worked out: the pre-modern up to 1500, the early modern about 1500 – 1850, modern circa 1850 – 1945, and the contemporary period since.

Here we are concerned with the contemporary period. Precisely because there are complex and controversial issues involved—more than just being a matter of conceptual clarity—we need to situate our discourse more precisely before a meaningful discussion is possible.

### **3. An Elaborate Syndrome**

Perhaps because of the ideological dominance of neoliberal capitalism today, the economic dimension is seen to be the cutting edge of globalisation. But this is to truncate the process and miss some of its most critical contradictions and crucial challenges.<sup>1</sup> More

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<sup>1</sup> Giddens insists: 'globalisation is not only, or even primarily, an economic phenomenon; and it should not be equated with the emergence of a 'world system'. Globalization is really about the transformation of space and time. I define it as action at distance, and relate its intensifying over recent years to the emergence of means of instantaneous global communication and mass transportation.' (Giddens 1994:4)

critical is the present increase in extent and impact of global inter-connectedness; its new intensity and instantaneity inevitably bring about a compression of space and time. This gives rise to 'manufactured uncertainties' or risk as 'a result of human intervention into social life and into nature,' (Giddens 1994:4) which in turn has unintended and unpredictable consequences that cannot be dealt with by the old remedies.

More in continuity with, than in contradiction to Giddens, Appadurai's approach takes media and migration 'as its two major, and connected diacritics and explores their joint effect on the *work of the imagination* as a constitutive feature of modern subjectivity.' (Appadurai 1997:3) This relationship between electronic media and migrating masses makes the core link between globalisation and modernity.

In a similar vein, Giddens argues that 'the Enlightenment prescription of more knowledge, more control,' (Giddens 1994:4) is no longer viable. For modernist rationality corresponds to an earlier 'simple modernisation'. It is rather misplaced with the 'reflexive modernisation' such as is precipitated by the impact of contemporary globalisation. For this is not a simple continuation but a qualitatively different and inherently ambiguous process.

By 'reflexivity' Giddens refers 'to the use of information about the condition of activity as a means of regularly reordering and redefining what that activity is.' (ibid: 86) At the individual level, this creates a 'reflective citizenry'. Moreover, 'the growth of social reflexivity is a major factor introducing a dislocation between knowledge and control — a prime source of manufactured uncertainty.' (ibid: 7) Such situations precipitated by human action, have largely new and unpredictable consequences that cannot be dealt with by old remedies.

### ***A Spectrum of Responses***

There is now a whole spectrum of interpretation and responses to these phenomena from the 'hyperglobalisers', who exaggerate the consequences for better or worse, to the 'sceptics', who doubt both, the intensity of change and the usefulness of the concept itself. Somewhere between the two ends of the spectrum, between

hyperglobalisers and sceptics are the 'transformationists' for whom 'globalisation is a central driving force behind the rapid social, political and economic changes that are reshaping modern societies and world orders.' (ibid: 7) This is where we locate ourselves in this paper.

In the new borderless economy, national governments have little regulatory power and their peoples are left to cope with the global market. New categories of winners and losers evolve, as new technologies create new elites and old skills become obsolete. This further reinforces the global division of labours. Here 'global civil society' has still to catch up with the 'global market' and as yet the structures for this are quite inadequate for any kind of effective 'global solidarity'.

No society escapes its 'shake-out' as it recasts traditional patterns, creates new hierarchies, and most crucially 're-engineers the power, functions and authority of national governments.' (ibid: 8) This results in 'an 'unbundling' of the relationship between sovereignty, territoriality and state power.' (ibid: 8) But rather than acquiesce in the 'end of the state', it needs to be 'reconstituted and restructured in response to the growing complicity of process of governance in a more interconnected world.' (ibid: 9). This now will pose new challenges that demand new responses.

It should be apparent from this discussion that these responses are mostly ideologically premised. For, where the hyperglobalisers celebrate the cornucopia of the global market, and the sceptics dismiss this as a myth, the transformationists perceive a more open-ended and contingent process with all the concomitant contradictions and challenges. Given that this discussion on globalisation overlaps with and carries forward the discourse of the old modernity as a second or reflexive modernity we need now to focus on the key dimensions and levels of this complex process.

### ***Levels and Dimensions***

At the core of any adequate comprehension of the globalisation process is the phenomenal increase in the scope and speed of cross-border flows that results in an unprecedented connectedness and dependence that makes our world a *single space*. But this is far from making it a *simpler place*. For these very flows and interactions take place across diverse dimensions and varying levels with greater or lesser complexity and speed. However, it would be a mistake to

conceive of these 'flows' as linear vectors whose impact can be anticipated and contained. Rather they are vehicles of change that bring unintended consequences and unavoidable challenges.

Appadurai distinguishes 'five dimensions of global cultural flows that can be termed (a) ethnoscapas, (b) mediascapas, (c) technoscapas, (d) financerscape, (e) ideoscapas.' (Appadurai 1997:33) These 'scapes' are perspectives constructed out of the shifting flow of people information, technology, finance, ideas. They are building blocks of 'imagined worlds, that is, the multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups around the world.' (ibid: 33) He calls them 'scapes' to indicate they are constructed perspectives of a ground reality that affect our response to it, very much in the manner a landscape artist affects the way we relate to our natural surroundings.

It is precisely in these 'cultural flows', in spite of their obvious capacity for homogenisation that we can find the potential for micro-narratives that can fuel oppositional and counter-cultural movements, and subvert the mega-narratives of the dominant order. Thus homogenisation and heterogenisation can be seen in the same relationship as globalisation and localisation. The first precipitates the second, which in turn uses the first for its own counter-hegemonic purposes, in a kind of 'cannibalising' of one by the other! (ibid: 43).

## ***6. Resistance from Below***

It is precisely in the contestation and even the contradictions between the 'macro' and the 'micro', the 'homo' and the 'hetero', the similar and the different, the global and the local, that we come to see the obverse side of globalisation as the intrinsic, yet dysfunctional counterpart of the idealised version too often uncritically projected by a neoliberal globalism.

In this connection, Giddens identifies four 'global bads' or dysfunctions that must be responded to: (Giddens 1994:100)

'Capitalism' that produces economic polarisation. This needs to evolve to a 'post-scarcity economy.

'Industrialism' that degrades the environment. Here we need to incorporate a 'humanisation of nature' within a post-traditional order, rather than to try and defend nature in the traditional way.

'Surveillance' on the control of information that denies democratic rights. A 'dialogic democracy', not merely a representative one must

counter such political control, in other words to 'democratise democracy'.

4. 'Means of violence' or the control of military power that threatens large scale war. Structures for negotiated power must be put in place so that differences are not mediated by violence

What these responses amount to is really a bottom-up pro-action to a top-down imposition. Indeed, here lies the real challenge to humanising the processes of globalisation, driven as they are by an impersonal market and bureaucratic power. <sup>2</sup>

## **7. Defining the Process**

Hence given the ambiguities and contradictions involved, it is apparent that 'globalisation is not a single unified phenomenon, but a single syndrome of processes and activities,' and while some may consider this to be a 'pathology', 'globalisation has become normalised as a dominant set of ideals and a policy framework', albeit still 'contested as a false Universal.' (Mittleman 2000:4) <sup>3</sup>

For the promises of globalisation—of greater abundance and less poverty, of information access and release from old hierarchies—comes with its price: reduced political control and market penetration, cultural erosion and social polarisation. Hence economic dynamism and marginalisation, upward and downward political mobility, cultural implosion and explosion, etc., is all part of this zigzag process that races ahead at times, and even reverses itself at others.

Thus multiple levels of interaction are involved from the global to the local. For 'a globalization framework *interrelates multiple levels of analysis*—economics, politics, society, and culture.

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<sup>2</sup> Mittleman explains this: 'as experienced from below, the dominant form of globalization means a historical transformation: in the economy, of livelihoods and modes of existence; in politics, a loss in the degree of control exercised locally -- for some, however little to begin with --such that the locus of power gradually shifts in varying proportions above and below the territorial state; and in culture, a devaluation of a collectivity's achievements or perceptions of them. This structure, in turn, may engender either accommodation or resistance.' (Mittleman 2000:6)]

<sup>3</sup> Mittleman elaborates: 'globalization is a multilevel set of processes with built-in strictures on its power and potential for it produces resistance against itself. In other words, globalization creates discontents not merely as latent and undeclared resistance, but sometimes crystallized as open counter movements.' (ibid.:7)]

This frame thus elucidates *a coalescence of diverse transnational and domestic structures*, allowing the economy, polity, society, and culture of one locale to penetrate another,' (ibid: 7) and vice versa at the same time.

We can now conclude this introductory discussion with a tentative description rather than a definition of globalisation as a process (or set of processes) that embodies a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions — assessed in terms of their extensity, intensity, velocity and impact — generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction, and the exercise of power. (Held *et al.*1999:16)

Localisation, nationalisation, regionalisation, would thus be the consolidation or specification of these 'social relations and transactions' at particular levels and locales which are therefore not unrelated to each other, but often actually precipitate reactions in a cascading effect from one to the other. Our effort then must be not to obfuscate the linkages by overworking the concepts, but to specify the interactions between these levels and in different spheres: economic, political, cultural, environmental, religious, ethical.

## **II. The Cultural Dimension**

The economic and political dimensions of the globalisation process are often treated as foundational for any insightful understanding of social structure and dynamics. This readily leads to underplay or neglect the socio-cultural dimensions of society, whereas these are often experienced and perceived by people as the cutting edge of global change. However, whether or not one or the other dimensions is to be regarded as the more critically causal in particular situations, will depend more on that specific context and not any a priori generalisations. Here the focus on the socio-cultural does not in any way pretend to displace the political-economic dimensions but rather to complement them.

### **1. Interrogating the Context**

The classical anthropological definition of culture as 'a design for living', a shared social inheritance, has been spelt out in terms of shared meanings and values, common patterns of ritual and behaviour. In so far as culture is not biologically determined as

instinct is, it is likened to 'human software' in relation to the already given 'hardware' on which it is founded. But this analogy has its limitations, for the relationship between nature and nurture is far more intricate and problematic than any simple technological metaphor can comprehend. Even the Marxist model of super- and sub-structure is not without its inadequacies. What is crucial for our understanding here is the relative autonomy and interdependence, in the reciprocity between the political economy and the socio-cultural system of a society, beyond any simplistic theory or perspective.

With regard to globalisation we have discussed how Giddens stresses the compression of space and time in his characterization, while Appadurai emphasises the impact of media and migration in his. In both these perspectives, it is clearly the underlying technology that is the crucial, causal variable for the cultural consequences of the contemporary globalisation. Here following Appadurai, we must ask: what is the new cultural context precipitated by media and migration? How are these related both at the global and the local levels? What are the new images and narratives of the global 'mediascapes'? The contemporary identities and worldviews (Weltanschauung) of the new migrants pass on with their 'social inheritance'? And again with Giddens, we need to investigate the implications of the global compression of space and time: how does this 'redesign' our living? Or, re-structure our shared symbols and rituals, meanings and values?

## **2. *Situating Identities***

In the old modernity, cultural identity was very much constructed in a territorial context and found its expression in the territorial nation-state. But mass migrations have increasingly begun to delink identity from territory, while transnational structures and multi-lateral corporations are making state boundaries porous and unviable. For 'place polygamy' (Beck 2000:72), the multi-location of people made possible with rapid mass transcontinental travel, is redefining personal belonging in terms of place. Technology-created-virtual-reality seems to know no time barriers as it makes contemporary both ancient historical worlds and futuristic fictional ones. For today the old social techniques of reproducing 'locality' and neighbourhood no longer seems to apply. The earlier 'complex and deliberate practices of performance, representation and action'



(Appadurai 1997:180) that produced such 'localities' are not as relevant in socialising and localising space and time.

Now if 'imagined communities' can invent traditions, aided by print-media among other things (Anderson 1983) then it should not surprise us that today's 'mass-mediated solidarities have the additional complexity that, in them, diverse local experiences of taste, pleasure and politics crisscross with one another, thus creating the possibility of convergence in trans-local social action that would otherwise be hard to imagine.' (Appadurai 1997:8) In contemporary globalisation this makes for a new 'power of imaging possible lives' (Beck 2000:52) fed by 'the global circulation of images and models, which (actively and passively) keeps the cultural economy going.' (ibid: 54)

### ***3. Reproducing Culture***

But if new global identities are inscribed in macro narratives, these in turn are 'punctuated, interrogated and domesticated by the micronarratives of film, television, music and other expressive forms which allow modernity to be rewritten more as a vernacular globalisation'. (Appadurai 1997:10) In this context then ethnic identity becomes 'the conscious and imaginative construction of difference as its core ... differences that constitute the diacritics of identity' (ibid: 14)

All these 'diasporic public spheres, diverse among themselves' make for a new identity politics, or 'culturalism' (ibid: 22). The apprehension that globalisation will precipitate a culturally homogeneous world, a global McDonaldisation, seems misplaced. On the contrary, if anything it provokes localisation in diverse vernacular cultures.

The reconstruction of identities necessarily implies a situation of cultural fluidity of no small proportions today. And third world countries that are being leap-frogged into the process are surely the most acutely affected. In such a situation cultural reproduction or the transmission of a social heritage across generations becomes enormously problematic. For one thing, there is no transgenerational stability, the point of departure from where the parental generation may start and the point of arrival to which the young aspire, are both in flux.

This easily leads to generational conflict in which intimate and familial relations are traumatised, and resistance to the already

discredited socialising processes and agencies is further compounded. Alienation and violence are the inevitable consequences and are only too evident in our societies today: in the family, between genders, in ethnic cleansing and religious strife, in genocides and war. Here in fact is the dark underside of cultural globalisation: the disruption wrought by changes that it brings, and which no society is completely immune to. The 'fractal landscape' resulting from such cultural confusion needs new analytical models and a new 'chaos theory of culture'! (ibid: 46)

#### **4. Integrating Diversity**

From the discussion so far, it is no surprise that cultural globalisation would precipitate social-cultural conflict of various kinds. For diversity without some overarching integrative unity cannot but be endemically conflictual, the more so as we have seen, where the situation is already one of economic inequality, and political instability, and when mass migration complicates issues and electronic media obfuscate them further.

This is especially so in third world countries where there is already a cultural fragmentation, which further confuses and compounds their struggle to cope with the unprecedented changes their burgeoning populations are undergoing. Here diverse groups competing for scarce resources, for their limited place in the sun, are particularly vulnerable to such violent conflict.

However, to conceptualise such group conflict in terms of insiders versus outsiders misses the peculiarities of contemporary globalisation. Appadurai suggests a new understanding that will 'resist the inner-outer dialectic imposed on us by the primordialist way of thinking and think instead in terms of the dialectics of implosion and explosion over time as the key to the peculiar dynamics of modern ethnicity.'(ibid: 157)<sup>4</sup> There is, in other words, a folding-in and a breaking-out: for instance, a claim to fundamental rights and

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<sup>4</sup> This he clarifies further: 'episodes of ethnic violence may thus be regarded as implosive in two senses: in the structural sense, they represent the folding into local politics of pressures and ripples from increasingly wider political arenas, and in the historical sense, the local political imagination is increasingly subject to the flow of large events (cascades) over time, events that influence the interpretation of mundane occurrences and gradually create a repertoire of adversarial ethnic sentiments'. (Appadurai 1997: 156)]

Universal principles legitimised in the global context, and an affirmation of distinctive differences and particular identities politicised in the local one. The resulting dialectic cannot but make for an explosive mix.

Tambiah explains these in terms of two opposite processes: bottom-up and top-down. In the first instance, he uses the terms of ‘focalization’ and ‘transvaluation’, linked processes ‘in which micro events at the local level, through chain-like linkages accelerate and cumulatively build up into [an]avalanche, whose episodes progressively lose their local textual, circumstantial, and substantive associations’. (Tambiah, 1996:257) In the second instance, for a top-down process, he introduces the concepts of ‘nationalization’ and ‘parochialisation’, where a more general issue of conflict is projected into a local context and heightened.

Thus several incidents of atrocities against minorities are focused and transvalued and then explode on to a more Universal stage; or a defused national resistance against affirmative action and reservation gets parochialised by an anti-Mandal agitation in local riots. Obviously, these are not predetermined dynamics. They can be reversed by deliberate interventions. Thus concrete instances of communal harmony can be transvalued and projected on to a larger social stage, just as a national human rights awareness can motivate a movement to contextualise itself by taking up significant local issues.

But, whatever be the political-economic causes of ethnic differences, when these societies and groups come together on a common stage or in a common situation, they all tend to polarise around the cultural fault-lines built up on constructed histories and perceived injustices, imagined communities and invented traditions. The globalisation–localisation dialectic has the potential to heighten these into violent conflict or defuse them into an enriching complementarity. But in a globalising world, there is no escape into isolation from such situations, and ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ can become confused and ambiguous categories. Rather it is the implosion-explosion dialectic in which top-down and bottom-up processes work themselves out that would seem to provide a more adequate understanding.

## ***5. Freeing the Imagination***

It has been argued that ‘colonial rule both introduced and arrested the flow of new values and also that it both changed and froze

their traditional counterparts.’ (Nederveen and Parekh 1992:2) Apprehending that globalisation may introduce or open up a new era of economic and cultural neo-colonialism, there is a temptation to respond to it with an ‘orientalism, in reverse’, i.e., ‘denounce the Occident, embrace the Orient’, or to react to it with our own version of occidentalism’, i.e., ‘study the West like the West studied the East’. (ibid: 12) However, these are but are reactionary responses that open us to all kinds of ethnic chauvinism, cultural nationalism, religious fundamentalism and worse.

What we need rather is a global socio-cultural pluralism that will allow space not just for diversity, but beyond it for a postcolonial sensitivity that will decolonise our mind and free our imagination. We need to be able to cope with multiple identities and to accept a radically new hybridisation. But for this, we will have to construct a new cultural dynamics out of globalising and localising processes, which are mapping the new cultural landscape today. For already now it is becoming apparent that even in the west modernity is not singular or uniform but decidedly multiple and complex. (Hefner 1998:87)

Indeed, there are no simple binary choices, between the global and the local anymore, since ‘globalization is a hybrid of historical continuities and discontinuities, integrating yet disintegrating structures.’ (Mittleman 2000:231)<sup>5</sup> What we need then is ‘a cultural Lebanonization of the mind’, which ‘occurs with multiple frames of references for action, corresponding to each subculture’. (Goonatilake 1997:232) For in today’s world ‘multiple selves and multiple identities are necessary to function in any viable society.’ (ibid: 233)

For a ‘discourse that remains within the framework of binary opposition (westernisation/orientalism, white/black, etc.) without room for interstices, lacks the resources for imagining the mixed and betwixt as a creative jostling space, of home-making in multiple worlds.’ (Nederveen and Parekh 1997:15) Hence the half-caste and the half-breed, the mestizo and the mulatto were rejected, tragic victims, not the beginning of a new synthesis. Rather the new ‘hybridization as

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5 For Mittleman ‘globalization is not totally new. It is an epochal transformation, not an overnight rupture, that took a turn in the 1970s: a long process and part of the history of capital accumulation, which consists of markedly different periods. As indicated, from a historical perspective, globalization may be understood as the contemporary phase of capitalism, which exhibits strong continuities to prior eras, as well as identifiable discontinuities with them.’ (Mittleman 2000:231)

a thematic and perspective differs from previous imageries of inter-cultural mixing.’ (ibid.) It implies complex multiple identities that reflect the global human condition beyond a culture of submissive victimhood, or of aggressive ‘people’s power’; one that does not gravitate to the dominant reference group or reject the subaltern marginalized one, but rather projects a new creativity in ‘the power of imaging possible lives.’ (Beck 2000:52)

### ***6. Universalising and Particularising***

Contemporary globalisation involves a cultural paradox: on the one hand, ‘central to the very idea of globalization is that subunits of the global system can constitute themselves only with reference to this encompassing whole ... But conversely, the global whole becomes a social reality only as it crystallizes out of the attempts of subunits to deal with their relativising contact.’ (Beyer 1994:27) Thus each society produces its own image of a world order and ‘the global Universal or, more precisely, the global concern about the Universal only results from the interaction among these images.’ (Beyer 1994:28)

Such a global-local interaction becomes a fertile site for encouraging diverse particularisms as also diverse images of globality. This is the paradox of ‘the particularization of Universalism (the rendering of the world as a single place) and the Universalization of particularism (the globalised expectation that these societies ... should have distinct identities).’ (Robertson, Ronald, 1989:9)

The underlying tension implied in such a dialectic is most pertinent to the socio-cultural movements in a globalising context, and especially for the insightful analytical perspective it provides on the new religious movements.

## **III. The Religious Dimension**

Some of the most critical dilemmas precipitated by globalisation have been with regard to religion, and some of the most volatile responses to it have come from religious movements. If globalisation is a further stage of modernisation, then the secularisation consequent on this must further it as well, and the religious response must be seen in this context too.

## **1. Secularising the Global Village**

In fact, 'the worldwideness of the religious upsurge demands that we consider the global circumstances in totality.' (Robertson and Chirico, 2000:93) For paradoxically, the religious movements spawned in the global village have in fact become globalised with the very global processes that were expected to marginalise them. Indeed, if we accept with Paul Tillich that religion is what 'ultimately concerns man', then we can expect changes in the way we cope with such concerns, not their pre-emptory exclusion, and least of all their premature demise.

For if globalisation celebrates the secular city (Cox 1966), the global village still remains a 'disenchanted' place for those whose God will not die, Nietzsche's prophecies notwithstanding. In fact, the resurgence of religion has been as vigorous and diverse as the process of globalisation and secularisation that provokes this. Hence the response of religious traditions to globalisation can only be understood in the context of secularisation.

Secularisation in our understanding here is perceived as the rationalisation of religion. This is a continuous process in society but not without its discontinuities. Thus the stoics and sceptics of the West are replaced by the Christian faithful there; the Buddhist and Advaitins in India are followed by the sant-kavis and their bakthas. However, with the modern Enlightenment in Europe, *The Sacred Canopy*, (Berger 1967) which once nurtured and legitimised the medieval 'Age of Faith', has been torn asunder and the new 'Age of Reason' has left us with a rationalised cosmos.

Max Weber anticipated that such a process of rationalisation would eventually lead to 'the iron cage', an alienation that leaves us alone and homeless in a disenchanted world. The religious response was precisely to address such an alienation and provide a haven in this heartless world. Though sometimes such withdrawals into private group space have been cures worse than the disease!

For without underestimating or undermining the liberative power of reason, it is important to recognise its constraints and limitations in effectively addressing and resolving human problems, for reason can very well become an aggressive and alienating instrument. Such rationalism is but another kind of naiveté. The extreme rationalist then becomes the rationalist simpleton, unaware of the sensitivity of a Pascal who knew that 'the heart has reasons which reason knows not of'.

There are, then, three elements in this process of secularisation. It begins with the de-mythologisation of religion, and this results in the de-institutionalisation of its social expressions and consequently their privatisation. Secularisation thus affects three levels: the cultural worldview, social institutions, and individual lives. Globalisation also impacts all these three, and more forcefully than ever today. For in undermining and reconstituting the cultural values of a tradition, the institutionalised practices of a society, and the civic life of individuals, globalisation adds a pervasive breadth and an incisive depth to the secularisation process. But then inevitably localisation, as the obverse side of this situation precipitates a response that could be positive or negative, or at times a reaction that can be equal and opposite.

### ***2. Situating Symbiosis***

Thus global homogeneity tends to erode particular cultural traditions, whereas religion functions very much in the realm of such localised particulars and personal solidarities and hence becomes a critical factor in re-affirming threatened, and re-constituting lost identities. However, 'the global revival consists in large part of movements which are sometimes indifferent and frequently hostile to the fortunes of each other,' (Robertson and Chirico, 2000:94) though this does not preclude the possibilities of shared interests and collaboration.

Moreover, as a plurality of personal values and choices implodes into a society from the global scene, it encourages a privatisation of religious life, where uniformity is not viable any more. Yet global structures and technologies can also be used not just to resist alien impositions, but also to actively promote a local collective solidarity and project this onto the global stage. Thus particular identities are Universalised, as they explode on the world scene, even as Universal expectations are particularised, as these implode into local situations.

Many of the new religious movements are driven by such a dynamic. Thus particular religious discriminations are projected on to a larger Universal stage where remedial action is sought, just as the Universal affirmation of religious freedom is injected into a particular concrete context to raise local expectations and seek lasting redress. Fundamentalist movements can operate similarly but for the very opposite goals.

Again the economic inequalities caused by the free market, the political insecurities consequent on the diminished nation-state, the rank individualism due to the undermining of social solidarity, all this and more belies the global promise of liberty, equality, fraternity. The inherent contradiction between promise and performance, the inevitable tension between inclusion and exclusion in global systems creates residual problems that provide fertile ground for utopian movements, especially religious ones, that promise all this and heaven too!

Now residual problems are the ones that various sub-systems of a society leave unresolved. They represent the shortfall between actual performance and expected function. The more endemic such problems are to a system, the more inevitably will these movements mobilise resources from outside the concerned subsystem itself. This is precisely the impelling compulsion that drives the new religious movements today. Globalisation once again compounds and accentuates the potential for all this. Thus there is a 'symbiosis of religion, social movements, and 'residual' problems in global society.' (Beyer 1994:108)

### ***3. Globalising Movements***

The anomalies in the globalisation process are reflected in the ambiguities of religious movements that respond to it. Thus when a religious movement intervenes to address specific systemic problems in a society, it must necessarily follow the logic of that very system itself. For economic problems are not solved by religious faith, nor are political conflicts resolved by theological hope, neither is the medical health improved by liturgical rituals. Indeed, the very involvement of a religious movement in global society begins to change it, precisely because the compartmentalisation and isolation of diverse areas of social life no longer obtains. With globalisation, then, the danger for a religious movement is to fall between two stools: it might end up advocating bad social policy, or suffer from poor religious inspiration.

In analysing these movements we can distinguish two dimensions. Firstly, with regard to their integration into society: from the extreme negative of isolation or at least separatism at one end, to a positive intervention or even revolution at the other. Secondly, on their orientation in society: from regressive conservatism, or even fundamentalism, to a progressive liberalism or radicalism. The four categories on each of the two dimensions



give us a 4 by 4 table. But obviously these will be more ideal-types useful for analysis; they are not always actually observed instances in the field, where complexity and complications are inevitable. Here we mention some common cases and combinations.

To begin with interventionism in the first dimension: here the liberal option in a pluriform world can only be effective by focusing on a more inclusive community that is now being increasingly globalised. This inevitably tends to dilute its appeal by making it too broad-based. The reactionary intervention seeks not to adapt to, but to bend global processes to its particular purposes. But then it must use, and so be open to being changed by the very dynamics of the processes it opposes.

Moreover, whether radical or fundamentalist even a revolutionary interventionist option, while motivating specific social and cultural groups finds that it cannot be narrowly exclusive in a globalising world without the risk of being marginalised by the very process it seeks to impact.

The separatist option, especially in its more extreme expression of isolationism, attempts to avoid the polluting secular ethic of society, but cannot for long. It may succeed temporarily by limiting itself to a particular social or geographic space. But with globalisation once again, such sites are inexorably penetrated by relentless global processes. Moreover, even to defend the limited space such movements may set out for themselves, they have to interact with outside forces and so be inevitably influenced by these in turn

‘In other words, the otherness of the other is increasingly problematic as a consequence of globalization; fundamentalism, to put it most simply, is inevitably contaminated by the culture it opposes.’(Lechner, 2000:341)<sup>6</sup>

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6 Mittleman explains the dynamic of this process thus: ‘Just as in any pluralistic culture, the other is always already within us, we are also already in the other, even when she or he puts forth a grand display of antipluralist authenticity. In the modern world system, no fundamentalist can simply reappropriate the sacred and live by its divine lights. The very reappropriation is a modern, global phenomenon, part of the shared experience ‘creolization’ To see it as such is to include the other as full participant in a common discourse, a common society, rather than to relegate him or her to the iron cage of otherness.’ (Mittleman 2000:231)

#### **4. Localising Relevance**

Now precisely because religion focuses on cultural particularities, it becomes an invaluable resource for mobilising specific people variously situated to bridge the gap between individual alienation and group solidarity. This gives religion a critical potential to address the residual problems in a society: problems of group solidarity and personal identity, of social belonging and stable location, of perceived injustice and relative deprivation, of economic inequality and political insecurity ... all of which, as we have seen are compounded and accentuated in a globalising world. For ultimately,

fundamentalism has its origins in real discontents experienced by real people; the mobilization factors that account for its relative strength in particular places have not disappeared everywhere; the tensions inherent in the globalization process cannot be resolved in any permanent fashion; in modern global culture, fundamentalism has found a place as part of a movement repertoire, to be activated when conditions are right. (Lechner, 2000:341)

In the spectrum of religious responses, it would seem to many that the moderate liberal option though less visible may in fact have a greater long-term influence on global culture. Not only is it more compatible with globalisation processes which broaden the sense of inclusion and interdependency, this culture itself is more susceptible to a reformist rather than a radical or a revivalist appeal.

But to imagine the final outcome as one global civil religion, would precisely negate the appeal and inspiration of particular religious beliefs and practices, which are at their best when affirming local cultures and particular peoples. The very homogenisation of a globalising world would seem to precipitate a pluralism of religious responses. This is precisely the paradox that keeps the religious enterprise alive, and hopefully the radical, liberating and empowering possibilities in a religious tradition still relevant as well.

For our alienation in a world that has lost its enchantment can hardly be effectively addressed at the global level. For globalisation is part of the problem of such disenchantment not part of the solution. Rushdie's 'metropolitan experience' which brings the 'mutability of character' is not addressed by more cosmopolitanism! Nor can one be forcibly reintegrated today like Camus's 'Outsider' of yesteryear. What we need is a 're-enchantment' of our world with a

creative religious response that is both locally relevant and relevantly global.

For this we must think locally more incisively precisely to act globally more effectively. For globalisation and localisation as the new religious movements have demonstrated are complementary processes, not contradictory ones—whether in our secular cities, where the Universal is particularised in distinct identities, or in our ‘global village’ where the particular is Universalised as a single place.

## **IV. Contradictions and Dilemmas**

### ***1. Winners and Losers***

Here our attempt has been to clarify some of these ambiguities especially with regard to the cultural and religious dimensions of globalisation. To preview the argument of this paper briefly: the process of globalisation is a multi-dimensional, complex process that is more easily described as a syndrome demanding multiple levels of analysis. The defining aspect of contemporary globalisation is the rapid and radical interconnectivity that compresses space and time across several social dimensions. This impacts transnational and domestic structures of society at various levels, creating new challenges, demanding new responses.

So far the chief beneficiaries of the globalisation process as fostered and advocated by a neoliberal ideology of globalism has left us with a global reality that has advantaged transnational capital and privileged a cosmopolitan elite, even as it has dispossessed indigenous labour and oppressed local populations. This has resulted in deep tensions and contradictions that cannot any more be gainsaid: the disempowerment of the nation-state and the inadequacy of civil society at the global level, the lack of accountability structures in the global market place and the marginalisation of the weaker players there, the diffusion of new identities and concerns that erode the old solidarities and traditions, the precipitation of a global environmental crisis without any corresponding global response, the relativising of ethical and human values with the affirmation of cultural and groups rights, ... these are but some of the issues and questions we must now struggle to come to terms and resolve.

## ***2. Dichotomies and Dialectics***

A contradiction implies an exclusive polarity in which one negates the other. Hence in resolving a contradiction one is forced to choose between these polarities. There are, of course, 'false contradictions' where this exclusive polarity is only apparent. This may actually turn out on a critical analysis to be not a real contradiction. Rather it could be a real dilemma, which implies an inclusive polarity where one involves the other and so both must be held in a dialectical tension and creatively and constructively addressed. False dilemmas are those, which on examination turn out to be disguised but real contradictions, hence imply a forced choice.

Thus in the cultural dimension, the paradox of globalisation and localisation represents a real dilemma, and eliminating one of the polarities would leave one all the more vulnerable to the other. Thus when globalising processes refuse to recognise localised interests and concerns it could well find itself running aground as the WTO has in at many of its meetings, e.g., at Seattle and Genoa. At Doha, there was a more realistic compromise. So a localisation that uncreatively resists globalisation, will only find itself marginalized and isolated, as in fact is happened to North Korea and other such countries.

There are of course real contradictions, as with the economic dimension, which we have not considered here but only indicate briefly. Here neo-liberalism and democratic socialism represent a real contradiction between market forces and human concerns, or between economic efficiency and effectiveness, and social equity and equality. This has ethical implications that are beyond the scope of this paper, but the contradiction does indicate how even compromise here only postpones the real underlying moral problem, which left unresolved only submerges, if not subverts the tension into uncreative responses.

In the religious dimension, the paradox of globalisation promotes both secular rationalism and also religious revivalism. The polarity between the secular and religious is not regarded by us as a real contradiction but rather a real dilemma. The tension between the two polarities represents a dialectic between reason and faith that can indeed have very creative human outcomes. All of these would be contained in a pluralism that is precisely one of the defining characteristics of contemporary globalisation. Extremist religions may represent only one strand in such a pluralist enterprise, that in

no way dismiss others across the spectrum from the more moderate to the more liberal. Our own analysis shows that the extremes in the spectrum of responses are likely to end up in real contradictions that will demand a forced choice at some time, sooner rather than later.

We are far more sensitive today to the inherent limits of modernisation as a process that is not indefinitely sustainable any more. Weber saw the underlying rationalisation of such processes in the modern world as eventually ending with the 'iron cage' a syndrome that with later modernisation theorists leads to a 'largely accepted view of the modern world as a space of shrinking religiosity (and greater scientism), less play (and increasingly regimented leisure), and inhibited spontaneity at every level.' (Appadurai 1997: 6) With globalisation, the second, reflexive modernity would seem to contest this. But there are new and equally inherent contradictions in this process as well and we are still to examine its internal limits and sustainability.

Such contradictions and dilemmas have been rendered ever more compelling today by global terrorism. Once terrorism was the political tool of ideological extremists. Now it is increasingly the preserve of religious fundamentalists and fanatics. There is no secure fortress possible any more. This is clearly one of the inescapable lessons of globalisation. How we address these issues of inequality and justice, of power and participation, of identity and transcendence in an increasingly interdependent and shrinking world today, will define our future tomorrow.

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## 5. ART AND ITS PROPHETIC ROLE – COUNTER-CULTURE ILLUSTRATED IN FONSECA

Creative Dialogue Fostered through Art (A response to the Symposium), *Euntes Docete*, Vol. 8, 2003 – 2004, pp. 57 – 64 / 2050 words

I. ART AS CREATIVE

II. CHARISMA AS PROPHETIC

III. CULTURE AS A DESIGN FOR LIVING

IV. RELIGION AS INCARNATE

V. ART AS INTER-RELIGIOUS AND INTER-CULTURAL  
DIALOGUE

### ***Abstract***

This is an attempt to locate art as the prophetic in culture and religion with reference to Angelo da Fonseca.

### **I. Art as Creative**

Art is creative, it reveals and challenges in all its 'languages', its symbolic expressions, whether it is a verbal, sound, plastic medium, or whatever. Now art as creative must then be innovative, and further dynamic, transformative. Hence in a static and tradition-bound society, art will necessarily be counter-cultural, otherwise it will not be art. Now all societies have such aspects, some more than others, and so to the extent that they do, art will be contrapuntal in that culture. But in a society, or at least in those aspects where a society is developing and progressing, there art will be celebratory and affirmative. However, art responds to negative change as well, but

differently. Here it unmask and indicts. Thus, a true art reveals the world and challenges are to respond.

Indeed, great art is found at the cutting age of such cultural transformations and great artists often turn up in times of rapid change. Hence if you want to recognise a genuine transformation or revolution in a society look at the art it is producing! If modernisation and globalisation and the upheavals these bring are genuinely positive changes for a society, its art will reflect this. This is precisely its prophetic role. Art then is more indicative of a society and its culture than the social sciences are. And I am a social scientist and I am saying this.

Coming to da Fonseca, he lived in a colonial society and belonged to a colonial church and it is no surprise that for a free spirit his art was counter-cultural in that context. In a post-colonial society and in a post-colonial church his art would be celebratory and affirmative, as we see today, and if he is still not accepted by some, then we must ask those people in which age, in which time are they living!

## **II. Charisma as Prophetic**

The prophetic always inspires. It denounces and destroys, but always in order to build and proclaim. But precisely because the prophetic by its very nature is charismatic, it must be routinised or else it is dissipated and lost. It cannot be preserved across time for generations or across space for other peoples.

In the social arena, we have movements inspired by charismatic leaders, both good and bad. Gandhiji was surely charismatic, but so was Hitler in many ways an evil genius. And yet they have to institutionalise their inspiration in a movement otherwise it will have no lasting effect. After some time a political movement might be institutionalised in a party, or a religious one in a church. It can then become bureaucratised and resist change. To the extent that it finds expression the charismatic element in such a process remains dynamic.

Now religious experience is essentially charismatic, prophetic, of the spirit, and hence it is creative. Later it gets institutionalised, routinised. For this, there has to be a church, a sangh, a mutt, an ulema. But all such institutions are inevitably inadequate without the prophetic element as well. Hence the importance of art as



prophetic and charismatic and therefore as necessary to en flesh, to inculturate a religious message.

A religious tradition needs both priest and prophet, but here too the prophetic will be the dynamic element. An institution is meant to be at the service of the prophetic. The 'spirit' is more important than the 'letter' in any living tradition, religious, politics, artistic, or whatever. Thus in a religious tradition the spirit is the prophetic divine element, the institution is the human priestly one. And true prophets do not trivialise their traditions, rather they are rooted and grounded in them, even as they transcend and transform them. Or else they are more like to be 'false prophets'.

Coming again to da Fonseca. He was a prophet of religious art in his time. His life and work testify to this. What I would urge is that we do not make him the 'priest' in our own day. Let us not institutionalise him once again, and this is what seminars tend to do. I think it was Voltaire who said, when history wants to take revenge on a great man it sends him disciples. So we must not repeat what Angelo did. We must do something new. We must create our own art, not imitate his. This is his inspirational legacy that must grow with us.

### **III. Culture as a design for living**

Culture transmits and transforms the social heritage of a society. It is a system of meanings and motivations and therefore all the communications to the human beings must be in their cultural medium. Otherwise, it could turn out to be not just non-communication, but miscommunication and misunderstanding. Therefore all cross-cultural communication must be inculturated, it must be rooted, interpreted and indigenised. It cannot be transported, translated, or transplanted. If you do that there will be an evitable alienation. A true inculturation transcends cultural divides. It Universalises and it unites.

Cross-cultural communication is particularly problematic, especially with art and religion, less so science and technology. Because science communicates in concepts, with precise symbols which can be expressed in accurate formulas, it is more easily translated and transplanted. Science is Universal and more readily Universalised. However, wherever communication has to be open-ended, symbolic, expressed metaphorically, where it is multi-vocal, multi-valent, as in fact life itself is, then we need art. Otherwise we do not really connect. More especially then, is art important for religious

communication both within a culture and much more so across cultures.

This is the real trouble with the colonial world. It is a transported, transplanted world. And for whatever good colonialism might have done, finally, there is very much more that was left undone. If you look at Asia today and compare the countries that were not colonised with those that were not, this becomes startlingly clear on more than one axis of comparison.

Now to come to da Fonseca, he locates himself in his time, he is routed in his time. We can see his early art in Goa. But then he transcends this. He communicates across cultures, not just across cultures within this sub-continent of multi-culturalism, but even across continents. For as has been rightly pointed out he has also integrated many elements and aspects of art from beyond the shores of this land. So he communicates to others across our cultural boundaries. But once again we must not stereotype him, otherwise we will end up missing his message.

#### **IV. Religion as Incarnate**

I believe all the religions are incarnate. They must be enfleshed, otherwise they cannot be about both the human and the divine. They may be about one or the other, or one from the perspective of the other, not an integrated perspective on both. For an authentic religion is meant to both humanise and save.

Religion therefore tries to communicate across the great divide, not just across the culture but across worlds: across the divine and human, the transcendent and the worldly, the *parmarthik* and the *parlaukik*, the *samsarik* and the *parmarthik*. These are not necessarily separate but they are distinct, and they have their specific messages and ways of communications. And across such divides, all the media are inadequate, some more than others. It is often very difficult, but not always impossible to bridge these divides.

Basically, then, there are two elements here the divine and the human and this is bridged finally when, on the one hand, the divine initiative reaches to the human with an incarnation or avatars, with divine revelations and mystic grace; and on the other, when humans respond to and celebrate the divine with prayers and renunciations, in love and service. Thus does a true incarnation unite the human and the divine; it humanises the divine just as it divinises the human.

Such communication is necessarily creative. It must bring innovation, it makes all things new! Here, then, the importance of art in religion, not science and technology is apparent. Science is not designed to communicate religion, and certainly not vice versa. As Galileo said: the Bible is meant to tell us how to go to heaven, not how the heavens go!

And this is what Angelo da Fonseca does in his art. He art communicates across this great divide. He incarnates and enfleshes the divine, even as he divinises and spiritualises the human. His line and colour, the themes and compositions are all attempts to communicate across this divide, to express his message in creative symbols.

## **V. Art as Inter-Religious and Inter-Cultural Dialogue**

To begin with, here are a few pertinent sutras:

to be person is to be inter-personal;  
to be religious is to be inter-religious;  
to be cultured is to be inter-cultural.

The psychologists have convinced us of the first, and the sociologists are trying to teach us the second. And theologians are coming to realise the third. But more than the theologians it is art that can engage us constructively and creatively in the third.

And this I would like to illustrate this with a small story. My friend Aloysius Pieris, a truly seminal Asian liberation theologian, has a centre for inter-religious dialogue and peace dialogue in Sri Lanka just outside Colombo, which he began at the height of the Sri Lankan civil war, bringing together people he knew from both sides. And the only way you could get them to talk was through art. Besides peace, he did this for religion as well.

He asked a Buddhist artist to paint a representation of Jesus in his own perception, the way he imagined him. What does Jesus mean to you and paint it? When I saw the painting I found it very striking. Here was Jesus coming out of a house, from a domestic scene into a public place as it were, accompanied not by his disciples or his mother but by young women. Perhaps Mary and Martha and others, I don't know who the artist had in mind. Now how many of us have seen such a picture of Jesus coming out of the house followed by young women. We know that women served him. But we paint him with his disciples or with his mother, with his followers or his enemies, but with young

women, even those who served him! When asked the artist simply said that he had not thought about but that was the way Jesus came across to him.

When I thought about it, it seemed to fall in place. Jesus is a religious founder who has a very open and close relationship with women and yet not even his enemies dare accuse him of sin! He is gender-sensitive and gender just, egalitarian and non-paternalistic with women. He does not idealise them, he does not demonise them. He treats them with a very natural ease.

And this was the insight that we seem to have missed. If it had been internalised more effectively, would we have been able to legitimise patriarchy in our Church? The Holy Spirit has been depicted by artists as feminine. And in the early Church Mary has been painted in priestly garments, because she had to have had all seven sacraments to be the perfect Christian.

It is precisely artists like da Fonseca that can help us all to see through and beyond our own truncated theology and to respond in a new and creative dialogue.

## 6.

# SINKING OLD HORIZONS, IMAGINING NEW ONES: DEBUNKING EXCEPTIONALISM

From Economic and Political Weekly, August 19, 2006.

Book Review of *'Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny'* by Amartya Sen; Penguin Books India, New Delhi, 2006; pp xx + 215.

INTRODUCTION

CENTRAL THESIS

OPENNESS AND RECEPTIVITY

### **Abstract**

A book review of *'Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny'* by Amartya Sen

### **Introduction**

The global scenario today is increasingly polarised by an identity politics that is partitioning the world into collectivities of belligerence. This has brought genocides and ethnic cleansing, religious fundamentalism and racist revivals. In the 'clash of civilisations' you are either 'one of us or one of them'. In the 'war on terror' you are either 'for us or against us'. A religious tradition is either fundamentalist or secular. If you are not from here, you must belong elsewhere. All this creates unwarranted exclusions and a delusory exceptionalism, the more dangerous as it progresses from local to global levels, from small communities to large nations. This can only presage a more violent world, perhaps more violent than the ideologically divisive century we have just lived through.

For Amartya Sen, such identity constructions amount to an alarming reversal of the Enlightenment agenda that once seemed to promise a more rational and humane world. This volume puts

together and expands a series of lectures that he gave at Boston University on 'The Future of Identity' between November 2001 and April 2002. In these essays on identity and violence, he emphatically urges us to recognise our plural affiliations and common rationality in which he sees the real prospects for peace in our world. There is a certain overlap in the discussions across the chapters, but this is more a reiteration that serves to further nuance a point made earlier, than just a repetition that merely restates it.

His core argument places identity at the heart of such apparently irrational violence, whether aggressive or defensive. Privileging predetermined, singular and unique identities may be a convenient way of mobilising people for hostile purposes. But this inevitably precipitates social exclusions and antagonisms in a 'them-versus-us' polarity. It assumes a homogeneity within the protagonist groups that in reality does not obtain. Thus, when identities are defined negatively in terms of exclusive and competing groups, they can create an Illusion of Destiny that is so often used to mobilise racial antagonism and communal hatred. Such manifest destinies then add up to denigrating some and misunderstanding nearly everyone else, and worse still, it all too readily leads to internecine conflicts.

## Central Thesis

However, as Sen emphasises, individual identities are always plural and human societies never homogeneous. Identities, especially when inclusive and open-ended, can be an invaluable resource of social capital, an emblem of unity that binds together community members and fellow citizens. Moreover, individuals inevitably and necessarily have multiple and competing identities derived from the various roles they play and the diverse groups to which they are affiliated in their societies. Such plural identities necessarily result in overlapping affiliations and complementary interests that can resist mobilisation around a single exclusive categorisation. But both, for individuals and communities, these still do not completely negate the possibility of choice or the logic of responsibility that must determine loyalties and choose priorities in the given constraints of a social context.

Sen sets out his basic argument in the first two chapters: 'The Illusion of Violence' and 'Making Sense of Identity'. In the subsequent chapters, he lucidly elaborates the discussion as he challenges and

contradicts much of the accepted wisdom on some well-established subjects such as the clash of civilisations, Muslim history, postcolonialism, cultural choice, neoliberal globalisation, multi-culturalism and freedom.

The book's central thesis is not entirely new. Many social scientists, like Ashutosh Varshney more recently with reference to the Indian subcontinent, have shown how multiple memberships across a diversity of groups integrate civil society by creating multiple group affiliations that make for networks across and channels of communications between social groups. Thus, social tensions between these groups get defused rather than compounded, eventually boiling over in violence. Sen's own elegant elaboration of this insight is enlightening and persuasive.

At the start, he distances himself from the contemporary communitarian understanding of ascribed, collective identities, as well as from Samuel Huntington's theory of an inevitable, violent 'clash of civilisations'. He rightly rubbishes the 'Civilisational Confinement' (chapter 3) implied by Huntington as the more subversive and dangerous of the two, for it privileges the uniqueness of the West as though it has little if anything to learn from other civilisations. Such civilisational or religious partitioning he finds thoroughly flawed inadequate, and dangerous. It negates our shared humanity and undermines our many non-antagonistic identities. It is an apt example of how 'cultivated theory can bolster uncomplicated bigotry' (p 44).

This is at the root of the West's demonisation of Islam, which once reintroduced Greek learning to the West, and yet for centuries was perceived as a threatening and uncomfortable presence on the European continent. The Hindutvawadis are doing no less with Muslims on this subcontinent. Sen attempts to set the record right in his broad sweep through Muslim history (chapter 4) as he highlights the many positive aspects of the Muslim world that are neglected or negated by the stereotyping so common in the West today. Collapsing the plurality of identities among Muslims, the cultural variations in the Islamic world and the plurality of Muslim religious sects into a monolithic Islamic tradition, to which all Muslims supposedly submit, may suit the 'clash of civilisations' theorists abroad and the saffron brigade at home, but it is hardly supported by a fair-minded reading of Muslim history. Unfortunately, the contemporary war on terror is becoming a 'self-fulfilling prophecy', as once moderate Muslim societies become radicalised by violent extremists, as is happening with the 'creeping Shariahisation of Indonesia' (p 72). However, Sen

argues against recruiting religion to fight terror, for he feels even good religion only reinforces religious identities, which can then be subverted by fundamentalists.

He is sensitively aware of the devastating experience of humiliation and vulnerability that a colonised people are subjected to. The inferiorisation of one's identity, that a colonised people undergoes, whether on the basis of race or culture, economic exploitation or political marginalisation, leads to a debilitating destruction of self-confidence. However, he does not react by counter-posing 'West and Anti-West' (chapter 5). This implicitly defines oneself in terms of being different from the other, India is spiritual, the west is materialist. Nor would he want us to be its mirror image, obsessed with catching up with it. Rather he urges a more authentic decolonisation of the mind that would free us to recognise and accept a world of plural identities and multiple affiliations.

Globalisation is now presaging such an imploding world. However, as with the anti-west reaction, anti-globalisers are protesting an unequal exchange that can only lead to a new imperialism. For without a level playing field, which the free market by itself cannot guarantee, globalisation will only deepen the prevalent exclusions and marginalisations, and as a sense of injustice takes root in people, religious and ethnic differences and identities can easily be mobilised for self-protection and even in retaliatory violence, as identity becomes a dividing ideology (chapter 7).

Yet Sen would not have us held captive to any one culture. In our multicultural world, the cultural diversity of groups and communities must be preserved, and also the individual's options expanded. He privileges individual freedom to choose one's way of living. A plurality of cultures in a society expands the scope of individual options, but enforcing a group culture on individuals restricts these. Holding persons captive to the culture of their communities amounts to a 'plural monoculturalism' that may be preserved in a federation of ethnic communities. But privileging collective rights over individual ones does not broaden the horizon of a people's perspective and choice (chapter 6).

Hence, multiculturalism must not mean self-contained, impervious communities that negate individual freedom to prioritise and activate different identities and affiliations in different contexts. An authentic pluralism cannot be premised on permanently ascribed identities. Rather it demands porous boundaries for communities within an overarching civil society. This allows for overlapping groups



and makes for more coherent social cohesion (chapter 8). Ultimately, as an Enlightenment liberal, Sen is committed to the ‘freedom to think’. He has great confidence in the power of reasoned choice to affirm our multiple identities and escape the ‘solitarist illusion’ and its cultivation of violence (chapter 9).

Sen is a Nobel laureate in economics, now a public intellectual engaging in a secular liberal discourse. He brings much sense and real sensitivity to some of the most agitated issues of our time, perhaps none more critical than the unjustified exclusions and illusory exceptionalism in our contemporary world. No review can do complete justice to the discussion he initiates here but it can be a beginning to a more continuing dialogue.

From the list of the multiple identities he uses to describe himself, it is evident that Sen speaks from a very privileged position. He is at the same time an Asian, an Indian citizen, a Bengali with Bangladeshi ancestors, an American or British resident, an economist, a dabbler in philosophy, an author, a Sanskritist, a strong believer in secularism and democracy, a man, a feminist, a heterosexual, a defender of gay and lesbian rights, with a non-religious lifestyle, from a Hindu background, a non-brahmin, a non-believer in an afterlife (and also, in case the question is asked, a non-believer in a ‘before-life’ as well) (p. 19).

Clearly his life experiences enable him to be at home with the complexity and change of our times. He is most persuasive and convincing with those who have shared similar experiences. However, for much of this world he is more the exception than the rule, and he shows none of the bewilderment that those struggling with their confusions in their rapidly changing, even deteriorating, situations have to cope with. This is an area that must be probed in more depth.

In such a confusing and alienating world, individuals do often seek collective security, sometimes perceived as a matter of survival. Multiple identities are then prioritised and conflated into group ones, into which other identities are then subsumed. These collective identities are more effectively mobilised for collective action. Hence, we must ask: why do ethnic and religious bonds so readily serve to redraw group boundaries and consolidate community divisions? Here we enter into the turbid world of identity politics, where the rationalism of the Enlightenment does not take us very far. Yet this is where contesting exclusive identities and reconstructing them more inclusively is most needed. But first we must ask how identities are formed.

## Openness and Receptivity

Identities answer to the question of who I am, and hence where I belong. Group or collective identities are an extension of this, who we are and where we belong. The first is formed in the intimate encounter with significant others, the second is socialised in a more public space. There is of course a relationship between the two but the first is never a straightforward projection of the latter. Identity provides a horizon of meaning in which individuals and groups understand themselves. Such a horizon necessarily involves inclusion and exclusion.

The more identities are defined and experienced positively, in terms of who one is, the more they tend to be inclusive and multiple, oppositely, the more this happens negatively, in terms of who one is not, the more they tend to be exclusive and singular. The boundaries defined for both groups and individuals can thus be more or less permeable, they may overlap and cut across other borders or they may get sharper and harder as they are contested and politicised, from without or within the group.

For both individuals and groups, Sen argues in favour of inclusive multiple identities, that make for openness and receptivity. This demands accommodating flexible identities and overlapping porous group boundaries. However, his listing of multiple identities could well remain external identifications, that label or flag persons and groups. Stereotypes are an example. Such external identifications must become internalised identities, collective self-definitions, to produce effective group affiliations.

In actuality, multiple identities are the more inevitable in a more complex world, but they do get prioritised and activated differently in different contexts. More resilient identities will take a greater priority in more contexts than peripheral ones. These priorities are culturally mediated, they are not rationally decided. Sen concedes that 'cultures count', he rejects *homo economicus* as something of a 'rational fool'. But does not seem to give due importance to culturally, particularly religiously defined identities. For even if these are constructed, some identities still remain more resilient than others, and religious and ethnic ones are notorious for their intransigence.

Sen may well be right about religious identity not being a helpful way of categorising persons or societies, for these inevitably involve much more than just religion. But we must still ask: is ignoring religion, as secular rationalists do, more helpful in grasping the realities on this contested terrain when identity turns to violence? Sen rightly insists that ‘singularising identities’ amounts to an ‘identity disregard’. But truncating or neglecting critical dimensions of identity is no less. It leaves a vacuum that plays into the hands of the religious fundamentalists. ‘Religion in danger’ becomes their battle cry and it all too easily turns the anxiety of believers to anger that readily gets articulated in rage. Failing to realise the critical significance of such core identities, can be as disastrous as overly privileging them.

Economic and political differences can be contained in a politics of interests that have a rational logic on which basis violent conflicts can be addressed. Identity politics becomes a politics of passion in a war of symbols that begins to have a life of its own, and one which does not submit to the persuasions of reason. Here we seem to be beyond the limits of Enlightenment rationalism. Fanatics and extremists of all kinds feed on such a manipulation of identity politics. For, as we have seen, there is a delicate distinction between identity as a uniting emblem and its use as a dividing ideology. Hence, the importance of ‘the politics of recognition’ so that ‘nonrecognition’ does not lead to ‘misrecognition’ that distorts. This cannot make for an insightful understanding or an effective response. Sen cannot be entirely unaware of this, though we seem to miss this in these essays.

In 1944, as an 11-year-old, Amartya witnessed the murder of Kader Mia by Hindu rioters in Dacca (Dhaka). His father explained to the boy that Kader Mia was a desperately poor, unemployed labourer in search of work to support his family. He had braved the danger of the streets in those troubled times against the pleading of his wife because there was nothing at home to eat. The young Amartya could not help wondering why all that mattered to those who killed Kader Mia was that he was Muslim and they were Hindu.

Amartya could never forget Kader Mia bleeding as he lay dying in his lap. The experience left him with a question that grounds his concern with identity and violence, for others in similar circumstances are still being murdered today. This book is a compelling endeavour to do for us what he could not do then for Kader Mia or his murderers, to ‘imagine another Universe, not beyond our reach, in which he and I can jointly affirm our many common identities (even as the warring singularists howl at the gate)’ (p. 186).

In this persuasively argued presentation, Amartya Sen's persistent, yet gentle interrogation of our unexamined wisdom and uncritical convictions may well be deservedly discomfiting. But from his deep concern with exclusive identities and the culture of violence fostered by such exceptionalism, he urges us to stretch our imagination and expand our horizons, and construct a gentler, kinder, more rational and more compassionate world for all of us inclusively. This may seem utopian, until we are faced with the alternatives. We cannot escape Amartya Sen's challenge, but first, in Dereck Walcott's inimitable words, we must never allow our mind to be 'halved by a horizon', even as the old 'horizon sinks in the memory' and new ones open in our imagination.

# 7.

## TOWARDS A DIALOGUE OF CULTURES

[Longer version published in *Economic and Political Weekly* and based on a presentation made at the Workshop on Minorities in Asia: *Integration or Segregation*, Asian Muslims Action Network, AMAN, on November 16, 2006, in Jakarta.] *Longer version in Dialogic Discourses*  
- *Selected Works of Rudolf C Heredia*

I. THE CLASH OF CIVILISATION

II. THE REALITY OF PLURALISM

III. THE LIMITS OF TOLERANCE

IV. DIMENSIONS OF DIALOGUE

V. ART AS CREATIVE

VI. CHARISMA AS PROPHETIC CRITIQUE

VII . CULTURE AS A DESIGN FOR LIVING

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IX. ART AS INTER-RELIGIOUS AND INTER-CULTURAL DIALOGUE

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### ***Abstract***

Dialogue is a most fundamental condition of existence, the very language of our being, the essential hermeneutic of all our experience. We need to to reverse cycles of communal clashes and spiralling violence, to heal old wounds, to create a new future; with tolerance and dialogue, creativity and critique.

## I. The Clash of Civilisations

The inevitability of a clash of civilisations, suggested by Samuel Huntington, (Huntington, 1993) seems to have been prophetic now. Particularly after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attack on the World Trade Centre, and the US-led war against terrorism, a 'holy crusade' against an 'Islamic jihad' has occupied the international stage, and preoccupied our political imaginations! In our country too the old 'two-nation theory' and the violence of the Partition of 1947, seems to be replaying itself in a one-sided genocides inspired by a cultural nationalism, which borders on a nativism in its acceptance of indigenous religious traditions as the basis of a majoritarian polity, and the rejection of others as alien. Such chauvinistic ethnocentricity has precipitated violent clashes between Hindus and Muslims, and now with Christians too. But the boundaries of this politics of hate is never quite settled or fixed. In 1984 we were shocked by the massacre of the Sikhs in Delhi, once considered to be the 'sword arm of Hinduism'! The continuing atrocities against neo-Buddhists and Dalits seems to have ceased to shock us any more. The politics of exclusion has now precipitated a politics of hate exclusion that is tearing apart the social fabric, compelling us to ask if 'the clash of civilisations' has become endemic to our country, and indeed to the world at large?

But we must ask further ask whether nationally or internationally has this always been the past fate of humankind, and is it then likely to be our future destiny as well? Huntington's thesis is a replay of the temptation to essentialise culture in an over-simplification that premises human culture on inherent characteristics, and makes religion a matter of innate status, both of which are seen as givens, that can at most be adapted but not subject to any real change. And yet our historical experience testifies to the obvious fact that cultural and religious traditions evolve even to the point of changing into very new cultures and traditions, and human identities based on them must also follow suit, or else we will inevitably be different degrees of dissonance, and disorientation.

Historically there is no denying that there have been innumerable violent clashes between peoples in the past premised on cultural and religious differences. But there have also been exemplary harmony and creative synergies between different peoples as well. The crusade, the jihad, ethnocentric nationalism and religious intolerance have not been the only or even the dominant heritage of humankind in the past,

and it must not be allowed to become, by decision or default, our dark destiny in the future, even though these seem to so preoccupy us with dark and dangerous possibilities today.

For when we realise that cultures are constructed, and when we accept that religious affiliation must be a matter of conscience, then the human element of decision and choice can be brought back to centre stage in our social and political life to reverse these cycles of communal clashes and spiralling violence, to heal old wounds, to create a new future.

Here is an attempt to demonstrate where we can start and how we can go about it: with tolerance and dialogue, creativity and critique.

## **II. The Reality of Pluralism**

We cannot avoid the grim reality of the divisions that mark our societies and our neighbourhoods. For if common human concerns bring us together differing social interests separate from each other. We cannot of course wish away such differences, nor can we impose a uniformity over them, or enforce a consensus on them. Earlier in a less pluriform world, such differences were settled by confrontation and controversy: each party tried to establish its own position while demolishing that of the other.

However, this age of controversy and the religious wars it precipitated settled nothing for long. For the human conscience, cannot be forced, or imposed upon indefinitely. Yet there remains the temptation to fall back on such inhuman and 'final solutions'! But repression and force only make for unstable and potentially violent situations. In our world today, pluralism is an inescapable given, whether ideological, religious, or otherwise. We have, accepted a whole doctrine of human freedom and dignity, though we have still a long way to go in making these a reality in the lives of our people.

We are still coming to terms with the implications of religious freedom and cultural rights for different groups within a single society. We are beginning to realise that uniformity is not the only or the most creative response to difference. It often forces differences underground and when divisions disappear at one level they reappear at another, often in even more divisive and volatile expressions. Nor is mere co-existence a viable answer in an ever-shrinking world.

Hence we are coming to value diversity as something potentially enriching and even uniting at a higher level of union. This is certainly true of the rich religious traditions of this land, when they are not

manipulated for narrow political gain or subversive communal interests. It is such an enriching 'communion' which must inspire us as neighbours to reach out to each other in a common concern and in a shared faith, one that brings us together with our differences into a unity in diversity, one that does not negate our peculiarities, but accepts and respects, yes, even celebrates them.

The reality of pluralism today is not to be isolated as an unnecessary evil to be repressed, before it engulfs us further; or tolerated as a necessary one to be distanced, since it cannot be dismissed. Rather it is a challenge, which will not go away. It must be constructively and creatively met or it will exhaust, if not destroy us. Nowhere is this truer than of religious differences and cultural diversity.

### III. The Limits of Tolerance

Tolerance must imply an active and positive response to coping with differences. Thus we can distinguish various levels of tolerance from reluctant forbearance to joyful acceptance. Here we are not considering the negative constraints on tolerance, i.e., the boundaries beyond which tolerance would be unethical. Rather we focus more positively on the limits to which tolerance can be constructively extended.

Following Raimundo Panikkar, in *Myth, Faith, and Hermeneutics* (1983: pp.20-36), we can distinguish four levels of tolerance. The first is tolerance as a practical necessity, i.e., bearing with a lesser evil for the sake of a greater good. This passive acceptance of necessary evils is but political pragmatism.

The second level is based on the realisation that the human grasp of any truth, even religious or revealed truth, is always finite and never complete. Such a philosophical realisation makes us cautious in absolutising our own 'truths', and even more so in rejecting those we disagree with. From such philosophically founded tolerance comes respect.

At the third level, ethical or religious tolerance derives from the moral imperative to love others, especially those different from us, even our enemies. This is far more demanding than just acceptance and respect. Yet the different 'other' here is still the 'object' of one's love. Such love can celebrate our differences, but it cannot overcome or transcend them completely in a higher unity.

Overcoming this objectification of the other is 'a mystical experience of tolerance.' Here tolerance 'is the way one being exists in another and expresses the radical interdependence of all that exists'. Only this kind



of mystical tolerance overcomes and transcends the contradictions and conflicts between religious traditions, bringing them into a higher communion.

At each of these levels, we can distinguish two dimensions of understanding, or rather pre-understanding. Thus our comprehension can be in terms of a more or less explicit meaning that is conceptually grasped, i.e., 'ideology'; or in the context of our implicit pre-judgments and presumptions, in terms of a meaningfulness that can be only symbolically represented, i.e. 'myth'.

Myth as defined by Panikkar, sets 'the horizon of intelligibility' for us, 'over against which any hermeneutic is possible.' It is taken for granted, unquestioned, a part of our pre-understanding, something we accept in 'faith'.

Once it is rationally articulated, myth is demythicised and so is our faith, in a 'passage from *mythos* to *logos*', from myth to reason, as the articulated conscious word. This then develops into an 'ideology', which Panikkar describes as: 'the more or less coherent ensemble of ideas that make up critical awareness, i.e., the doctrinal system that enables you to locate yourself rationally.'

The more coherent and cogent the articulation of an ideology, the more likely it is to reduce other understandings to its own terms, or reject them, if they cannot be fitted into its own horizons. We do of course, need ideologies for we need to articulate and rationalise our understanding of our varied life experiences. But ideologies must be able to accept alternative understandings, and open themselves out into broader and deeper perspectives. This will depend on the myth, the pre-understanding, from which it derives. For the more extensive and intensive the myth's meaningfulness, the richer and denser its symbolism, the more open and accommodating the ideology that can be built on it.

Hence we can conclude with Panikkar: 'the tolerance you have is directly proportional to the myth you live and inversely proportional to the ideology you follow.' (ibid. p.20, emphasis in original text) What we need, then, is a *metanoia* of our myths to liberate us from the *paranoia* of our ideologies, whether religious, political or otherwise. Both are found at all the levels indicated earlier, though there is obviously a greater affinity for ideology in political and philosophical tolerance, as there is for 'myth' in the religious and mystical one.

In the context of our religious traditions, 'faith' is essentially at the pre-rational, not irrational, level of 'myth', while 'theology' is necessarily at the level of 'ideology'. Only in the mutual encounter of myths are they

deepened and enriched, and in the reciprocal exchange among ideologies do these become more open and refined. Indeed, such a dialogue is the most constructive expression of tolerance.

#### **IV. Dimensions of Dialogue**

Dialogue is a most fundamental condition of existence, the very language of our being, the essential hermeneutic of all our experience. For we are constructed and deconstructed in conversation with ourselves and others.

We can distinguish various dimensions of this involvement with one another, following the fourfold dialogue urged by the Catholic Church recently: ('Dialogue and Proclamation', Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, Vatican City, 1991, no.42.)

1. 'the dialogue of life, where people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit, ....'
2. 'the dialogue of action', in which we 'collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people'.
3. 'the dialogue of religious experience, where persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, ....'
4. 'the dialogue of theological exchange, where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages, ....'

The dialogue of life is at the level of sharing and encounter of our 'myths', which then is deepened in the dialogue of religious experiences. This can be an even deeper level of not just mythic communication but mystical experience as well. Collaborative action requires some level of ideological and political consensus which can then be intensified and sharpened in a theological exchange. Thus life and experience are at the level of 'myth' and mysticism, action and theology at that of 'ideology' and politics.

An adequate response in a pluralist world is not mere co-existence or mutual seclusion but a constructive dialogue between neighbours engaging both the 'myths' we seem to live by, and the ideologies we chose to act from. But first some clarifications.

In our religious understanding, we must distinguish between 'knowing', which implies certainty and security, and 'believing' which demands trust and faith. It is the vulnerability that comes from faith that must be the basis of our tolerance and dialogue, not the certainty and security of 'knowing'.

Now faith is always premised on our experience and here we must distinguish again between having an experience, which founds faith, and articulating one, which requires concepts. Not everyone who has a deep religious experience can articulate it. Indeed the great mystics prefer silence! This is not a negation of the experience but rather a testimony to its depth. And again not everyone who speaks of an experience has necessarily been deeply moved by one. There is much articulation by proxy, that is little more than experientially unauthenticated conceptualising.

We are pointing to a difference that is analogous to that of the artist and the art critic. Artists have the aesthetic experience, and struggle to express and communicate it the best they can. Art critics may never have had one and frequently stand outside the experience, even though they write and talk about it. And yet unfortunately, all too often it is through the critic that we seem to have access to the artist's experience, rather than the artists themselves.

So too with religious experience! Yet too often we stop at the traditions and institutions that are meant to mediate and provide access to an experience of the reality that religious symbols represent. With Thomas à Kempis, would that we feel compunction rather than be content with defining it!

For a genuine dialogue, we must understand that martyrs are not fanatics! For a martyr, as the Greek word implies, is a witness to something of such great value that even life must be sacrificed. As witnesses they must be tolerant and open to dialogue. Fanatics affirm only their own convictions, however misguided or extremist. They are essentially closed and cannot but be intolerant and contestational.

In an unbelieving world, the only way of being religious is in solidarity with other believers not in confrontation with them. Today to be a 'person' I must be inter-personal, to be religious I must be 'inter-religious'. Thus to be human and religious, besides tolerance, even more necessary is dialogue. Only thus can we genuinely be our authentic selves, true believers and truly human.

For this we must dare beyond the constraints of dialectical reason, which no doubt has its uses--and limitations. For Panikkar 'dialectics is the optimism of reason. Dialogue is the optimism of the heart.' Pascal wisely counselled: the heart has reasons that reason knows not of. Indeed, a genuine dialogue pertains less to the dialectical mind than to the compassionate heart. Once again we will need a *metanoia* of our hearts, to free us from our *paranoia* of each other.

## **V. Art as Creative**

Art is creative; it reveals and challenges in all its 'languages', its symbolic expressions, in whatever form these may take: a verbal, auditory, visual, plastic medium ... As creative art must then be innovative, dynamic, and transformative. Hence in a static and tradition-bound society, art will necessarily be counter-cultural, otherwise it will not be art. Now all societies have such aspects, some more than others, and so, to the extent that they do, art will be a counter-punctual in that culture. But in a social scenario of transition and change, or at least in those aspects where this obtains in a society, there art will be celebratory and affirmative. However, art responds differently to negative change. Here it unmask and indicts. Thus true art reveals and challenges our world.

Indeed, great art is found at the cutting age of such cultural transformations and great artists often materialise in such times of rapid change. Hence if you want to recognise a genuine transformation or revolution in a society look at the art it is producing! If modernisation and globalisation and the upheavals these bring are genuinely positive changes for a society, its art will reflect this. Art then is more indicative of a society and its culture than the social sciences are. And I am a social scientist and I am saying this.

## **VI. Charisma as Prophetic Critique**

The prophetic always inspires. It denounces and destroys, but always in order to build and proclaim. But precisely because the prophetic by its very nature is charismatic, it must be routinised or else it is dissipated and lost. It cannot be preserved across time for other generations or across space for other peoples.

In the social arena, we have movements inspired by charismatic leaders, both good and bad. Gandhiji was surely charismatic, but so was Hitler, in many ways an evil genius. And yet their charisma had to be institutionalised in a movement, otherwise it would have a very limited spread effect. Thus a political movement inspired by a charismatic leader is institutionalised in a party, or a religious one in a church. It can then become bureaucratised and resistant to change. To the extent that the charismatic finds continuing expression in such a process, it remains the dynamic element. but for this it must be constantly renewed.

Now religious experience is essentially charismatic, prophetic, of the spirit, and hence it is creative, innovative, dynamic. To be preserved it must get institutionalised and routinised. For this there has to be a church, a sangh, a mutt, an ulemma. But all such institutions are inevitably inadequate without the prophetic element as well. This is precisely where the prophetic role of art becomes critical; it keeps alive the charismatic in religion! For it is needed to en flesh, to inculturate the religious message.

A religious tradition too needs both priest and prophet, but here as well the prophetic will be the dynamic element. The institution is meant to be at the service of the prophetic. The 'spirit' is more important than the 'letter' in any living tradition, whether religious, political, artistic or whatever. Thus in a religious tradition the spirit it the prophetic, divine element, the institution is the human, priestly one. But true prophets do not trivialise their traditions, rather they are routed and grounded in them, even as they transcend and transform them. Or else they would be 'false prophets'.

## **VII . Culture as a design for living**

Culture transmits and transforms the social heritage of a society. It is a system of meanings and motivations and therefore all communication with human beings must be in their cultural medium. Otherwise, it could turn out to be not just non-communication, but miscommunication and misunderstanding. Hence all cross-cultural communication must be inculturated, it must interpreted, indigenised and routed. It cannot be translated, transported, or transplanted. That would be an evitable alienation. A true inculturation transcends cultural divides. It Universalises and it unites.

Cross-cultural communication is particularly problematic, especially with art and religion, less so science and technology. Because science communicates in concepts, with precise symbols, which can be expressed in accurate formulae, it is more easily translated and transplanted. Science is Universal and more readily Universalised. Technological gadgets themselves are little affected by changing cultural climes, though they may have unintended effects. However, wherever communication has to be open-ended, symbolic, metaphoric, where it is multi-vocal, multi-valent, as in fact life itself is, then we need art. Otherwise we do not really connect. More

especially then, art is important for religious communication both within a culture and much more so across cultures.

This is the real trouble with the colonial world. It is a transported, transplanted alien world. And for whatever good colonialism might have done, finally there is very much more that was left undone. If you look at Asia today and compare the countries that were colonised with those that were not, this becomes startling clear on more than one axis of comparison.

## VIII. Religion as Incarnate

I believe all the religions must be incarnated. They must be enfleshed, otherwise they cannot be about both the human and the divine. They may be about one or the other, or about one from the perspective of the other, but only an integrated perspective on the human and the divine can humanise and save. This is precisely what an authentic religion is meant to do.

Religious communication must bridge the great divide, not just across cultures but across worlds: across the divine and the human, the transcendent and the worldly, the *parmarthik* and the *parlaukik*, the *samsarik* and the *parmarthik*. These are not necessarily separate but they are distinct, and they have their specific messages that require their own syntax of communication. Across such divides, all media, even artistic ones, are inadequate, some more than others. Yet difficult though this might be, impossible though this might seem, we do struggle to bridge these divides.

Basically, then, there are two elements here, the divine and the human and this is finally bridged when, on the one hand, the divine initiative reaches to the human with an incarnation or in avatars, with divine revelations and mystic grace; and on the other, when humans respond to and celebrate the divine with prayers and renunciations, in love and surrender. Thus does a true incarnation unite the human and the divine; it humanises the divine just as it divinises the human.

Such communication is necessarily creative. It will bring innovation, for it makes all things new! Here then, the importance of art for religion, rather than science and technology is apparent. Science is not designed to communicate religion, and certainly not vice versa. Technology often hijacks the religious message in unintended and unanticipated ways. As Galileo said: the Bible is meant to tell us how to go to heaven, not how the heavens go!

## IX. Art As Inter-Religious and Inter-Cultural Dialogue

To begin with, here are a few pertinent sutras:

to be person is to be inter-personal;  
to be cultured is to be inter-cultural.  
to be religious is to be inter-religious;

The psychologists have convinced us of the first, while the sociologists are trying to teach us the second, and theologians are coming to realise the third. But more than the theology it is art that can engage us constructively and creatively in this third.

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## 8.

# DEVELOPMENT FOR MODERNITY: WHOSE DEVELOPMENT, WHAT MODERNITY?

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SETTING THE CONTEXT

A FAILED MODEL

THE POVERTY OF DEVELOPMENT

THE NEW BARBARISM

THE MYTH OF DEVELOPMENT

TECHNOLOGICAL DIVIDES

SCIENCE AND SUPERSTITION

WEAPONS OF THE WEAK

GRASS-ROOT MOVEMENTS

AN EXPLOSIVE MIX

FROM ONE TO MANY MODERNITIES

FROM SIMPLE TO REFLEXIVE MODERNITIES

LIVING IN A REVOLUTION

MYTH AND IDEOLOGY

INCOMPATIBILITIES AND ALTERNATIVES

GATHERING THE FRAGMENTS

## **Abstract**

The development policies have not effectively reached the vast masses of our people, leaving the vulnerable more defenceless and desperate. A million mutinies at the grassroots, hopefully presaging a more sustainable paradigm for an inclusive development.

## **Setting the Context**

The stark contrast between micro-finance of self-help groups and the macro-financial bailouts for massive mismanagement is a damning indictment of prevailing paradigms for development and modernity. Muhammad Yunus, *Banker to the Poor* (2007) records the stories of millions of poor women in self-help groups have crossed the poverty line because of a breakthrough innovation in banking gave them access to credit to earn and save. The mainstream bankers more cleverly invented financial instruments that speculated and lost billions of other people's money, and were rewarded for it, even as they precipitated a global financial meltdown and economic recession. After trillions of dollars in bailouts to avert even more disastrous consequences, the same people are being paid huge bonuses over and above the ones they have already received, to fix the crisis they created in the first place.

Such privatised profits and socialised losses are a compelling testimony to the contradictions at the very heart of the system. How does this micro-finance of self-help groups interrogate our understanding of development and modernity? Who is a better credit risk: the pinstriped bankers of Wall Street or the ragtag women of the Grameen Bank? Can the micro is a metaphor for the macro? The micro cannot always be scaled up to the macro-level but it can point to compelling alternatives to our understanding of development and modernity, both within and beyond the system that can be.

To move beyond the middle-class consumerism that is becoming the reference point for desirable change in developing and modernising countries, we need to interrogate the development model we pursue and to critique the modernity that enthrals us.

The development policies, so insensitively implemented, have not effectively reached the vast masses of our people. On the contrary, the poverty of our development has led to a new barbarism, where the contradictions and conflicts are further exacerbated by the inevitable

technological divides in our high-tech, digital age, leaving the vulnerable even more defenceless and desperate than before. However, there are a million mutinies and more at the grassroots, causing a *manthan* (churning), questioning developmental models and skewed policies, hopefully presaging a more sustainable paradigm for an inclusive development.

With the myth of development, we must critique our understanding of modernity. From one to many modernities, from simple to reflexive ones, we are living in a revolution, a new axial age that calls for more relevant and meaningful 'myths' and more coherent and critical ideologies. We need a modernity that is liberating not alienating, one that will question the myth of development and inspire new ideologies for change. For this, we must draw on our subcontinental heritage to synthesise from our past and our present a new symbiosis for a liberating modernity for our future.

## A Failed Model

With the liberalisation of our economy since the 1990s and the increased globalisation of our economy, South Asian development is ever more riddled with contradictions, which we still refuse to take as seriously as we should. The social order is even further skewed in favour of the rich and against the poor. Our upper class and caste elites are increasingly more cosmopolitan and globally cued in. We have survived the financial meltdown and the global recession in its wake far better than most countries, developed and developing. Undoubtedly, the economy is still growing: an average of about 6 per cent in the two years before the setback of the present global recession but now recovering and likely to reach 8.0 per cent this year, according to official figures and even 9 per cent according to a recent interview of the World Bank president. Soon we expect to be targeting a double-digit growth rate. But so too has the relative divide between the rich and the poor, the powerful and marginalised widened and deepened. This is now threatening to become an unbridgeable chasm as extremisms of various persuasions, Marxists, Maoists, separatist, casteist, religious, communalist, ... take ever deeper roots in our society. This surely represents the delicate underbelly of our much-vaunted development.

The haste to develop India into a strong prosperous modern nation, commanding a place of respect in the international community, picked up considerable momentum at the beginning of

this decade. There is now an insensitive celebration of consumerism and smugness by the affluent and secure, in utter disregard of the 'other India', abandoned in the dark, desperate and deprived. This is a cynical attempt to co-opt the middle strata of society into an agenda of the elites, leaving behind the masses of the poor to their fate. The contradictions in our society have now been further heightened in an even more divisive and disastrous scenario of religious divisions and political violence, class inequalities, and caste antagonisms.

A distorted identity politics of religion and caste, used to mobilise people to causes that betrayed their real interests, is being given a thumbs down by the voters. It has not delivered on the development they had hoped for. Our democratic electorate is finding its voice and can no longer be taken for granted. If this new mandate is not resolutely and effectively translated into action, it could once again lead to Vilfredo Pareto's 'circulation of elites' (1966: 108) rather than any real positional change for the masses.

## **The Poverty of Development**

The overly optimistic projection of middle-class prosperity for the country as a whole has still excluded the vast majority of our people from this charmed circle of development. The great mass of our people have not benefited by the economic growth of the earlier decade, certainly not to the extent they were led to expect. But were they actually worse off? If relative poverty has increased in terms of the rich-poor divide, has there been a decrease in absolute poverty levels over the last couple of decades?

The debate on changing poverty levels since the 1990s remains inconclusive in spite of the mountain of data and the critical analyses by experts on both sides of the economic-political spectrum. The discrepant claims regarding the economic reforms initiated at the time are more politically than statistically grounded. How the new economic policy of the 1990s affected levels of poverty in India has been fiercely debated and as yet the conclusions remain controversial. The optimists extrapolate a middle-class success to a rapid elimination of poverty in the country. Sceptics argue that the data shows the reforms benefited the rich, but failed the poor, especially among the rural population. Others in between point to the positive growth rate and the lack of conclusive evidence to support a widening gap in consumption levels between the rich and poor.

A comprehensive review of *The Great Indian Poverty Debate*, by experts representing different points of view, begins with this caution by the editors on the politics involved in an evaluation of the economic reforms of the 1990s:

‘Given the political divisions that surrounded the reforms, the discrepancy quickly ceased to be a purely statistical issue. Those with a stake in the success of the reforms emphasized the national accounts statistics, as well as the lack of evidence that the distribution of consumption had widened among the poor. According to this view, surveys are inherently unreliable and error-prone, and some commentators (although without producing any evidence) went so far as to paint pictures of enumerators filling out the questionnaires in tea-shops, avoiding the time-consuming and repetitive task of actually interviewing respondents. On the other side, reform sceptics argued that the survey data showed exactly what *they* had expected, that the reforms, while benefiting the better-off groups in society, had failed to reach the poor, particularly the rural poor, and that the distribution of consumption had indeed widened. They also pointed to the differences in definition between the national accounts and survey measures of consumption, arguing that the latter was more relevant for assessing poverty. They also identified many areas where the National Accounts estimates of consumption are weak and prone to error’ (Deaton and Kozel 2005: 2).

The statistical inadequacies were not the result of direct interference by politicians or policymakers, but in a broader sense political compulsions had influenced changes in the survey design. This led to ambiguities and compromised the poverty monitoring system. Hence the debate continues despite the mass of empirical work by eminent researchers who have engaged with each other. More than ideological perspectives are in conflict here, for it is the operational definition of poverty that is involved, i.e., how it is statistically measured on the ground and how far the results are comparable over a period of time.

Thus, if poverty is defined in terms of a minimum consumption of 2400 calories per capita per day in rural areas, then, based on this criterion, 75 per cent of the rural population in India today is poor, compared with 56 per cent in 1973-74 (Patnaik 2004). Inequality and poverty have therefore been exacerbated by liberalisation and globalisation. A most recent attempt at ‘Redefining Poverty’, set up ‘A New Poverty Line for a New India’ (Guruswamy et al. 2006) by using

nutritional norms, basic health needs, access to shelter and sanitation, and miscellaneous household expenditure, which adds up to some Rs. 840 per month per person. Using the NSS Report for Household Expenditure for 2001, this would place 68.8 of the total population below the poverty line, 84.6 per cent rural and 42.4 per cent urban. Others using different estimates of consumption arrive at opposite conclusions of a sharp decline to less than 15 per cent below this poverty line in 1990-2000 and a reduction of inequalities in the late 1990s (Bhalla 2003).

The official figures of the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) are somewhere in between:

‘The estimates based on 30-day recall, which were the only ones even nominally comparable with the previous poverty estimates from 1993/94, showed a reduction in poverty rates from 1993/94 to 1999/2000. Among rural households estimated poverty fell from 37 to 27 per cent, and among urban ones from 33 to 24 per cent, so that all-India poverty fell a full ten points over the 6-year period, from 36 to 26 per cent’ (Deaton and Kozel 2005: 10).

These figures were accepted by the Government of India but they met with widespread skepticism. Against these official estimates, it must be said that the figures in the comparison made across the time span are not statistically comparable, because the survey designs were different. Moreover, there will be no poverty measures comparable with 1993-94 estimates until the 2005-2006 survey results are available.

In 2009, the Expert Group to Review the Methodology for Estimation of Poverty under the chairpersonship of Suresh Tendulkar, constituted by the Planning Commission in 2005, has revised the estimate of poverty in India for 2004-05 to 37.2%, from the earlier official estimate of 27.5%, and for rural India to 41.8% from 28.3%. But it left the all-India urban poverty estimate unchanged at 25.7%. But the basis for this is still not clear. (*Economic & Political Weekly* 19 Dec 2009). However, moving ‘Towards New Poverty Lines for India’ on the basis of the National Family Health Survey of 2005-6, ‘the 2004-05 official all-India rural poverty count of 28.3% does appear to be too low, but the all-India urban poverty count of 25.7% is again defensible’ (Himanshu 2010: 41).

But the controversy is far from settled. Some insist that ‘Inclusive Growth in Neoliberal India’ is a ‘Façade’, for though ‘the rural employment programme has been a partial success in certain regions, but the move to extend social audit to plug the loopholes has been

scuttled' (Chandra 2010: 55). Others ask if India is 'Shining for the Poor Too?' and find that in spite of 'new inequality-increasing forces' in contrast to the preform-period, the post-reform process has brought significant gains to the poor (Datt & Ravallion 2010: 55).

Hence at most such statistical comparisons are suggestive rather than definitive. However, even conceding a measure of credibility to the official estimates, with the present gains in our growing economy it is hardly acceptable for a democracy to have a quarter of its people below the poverty line, which in India means more than 225 million. Moreover, when poverty is here measured not in terms of the minimal standards of health, education and security, but mere survival requirements such as calorific intake, or consumption levels that reflect bare subsistence living, then more realistically, this is a measure of destitution.

If, indeed, the percentages of those below the poverty line have decreased, the absolute number of the poor has actually increased with our population growth. Because of the size of its population, India still has the largest number of adult illiterates in the world. According to the national Census of 2001, only 65.38 per cent of our people were literate, 75.85 of males and 54.16 of females. With regard to the absolute poor,

'India accounts for about 20 per cent of the global count of those living on less than \$1 a person per day, so that what happens in India is not only a reflection of the worldwide trend, but is one of its major determinants.' (ibid.: 1)

Moreover, the relative distance between those below and those above the poverty line has further increased and become more visible, while the lowest percentiles, the poorest of the poor, have plunged further into poverty with no safety net to rescue them when threatened by destitution. The difference between the conspicuous consumption of the super-rich and the dire deprivation of the desperately poor is now grotesque. This disparity gets reflected in unequal exchange relations and asymmetric power equations that tend to become self-perpetuating and dangerously tension-ridden. More than a half-century after Independence, this is surely a most severe indictment of our society. What does this mean for our development endeavour? Have we lost the plot?

We are now compelled to admit, that while liberalisation has facilitated economic growth and has benefited the privileged who could take advantage of this, it has not correspondingly opened up social opportunities for the disadvantaged to benefit from. Jean Drèze

and Amartya Sen have convincingly argued this in 1995 and further reaffirmed it in 2002. Rather the developmental model pursued has brought with it new patterns of patronage based on money and muscle power. This has displaced the old obligations of loyalty and protection, which have not been effectively replaced by norms of justice and fair play in civil society. Corruption has become endemic at all levels and spheres of our society. Law enforcement seems to be powerless against the wealthy and the well-connected, who literally get away with murder and are paroled from jail on dubious grounds. The squalor of our slums against the glittering urban high-rise, the suicide of our debt-strapped small farmers, while venture capitalism still survives, if not prospers, malnutrition in the midst of conspicuous consumption, ... such contradictions are the long, dark shadow side of 'India shining'.

In the final analysis, beyond statistics and politics, what must be questioned is the very model of development that we have so uncritically adopted from the West. 'However,' as Oswaldo de Rivero rightly insists:

'since the myth of development has nearly religious connotations of hope and salvation from poverty, it remains untouched by the experience of the last forty years, which demonstrates so unequivocally the utter lack of development of the majority of countries. The mythical nature of development leads the politicians of poor societies to continue insisting on 'closing the gap' that separates them from the capitalist industrialized societies – closing it by attempting to reproduce consumer patterns that cannot be financed or sustained environmentally' (de Rivero 2001: 113).

Yet, even when this mythic development arrives, its paradoxical contradictions remain, as has happened in affluent countries, which have an unacceptable proportion of their people in a self-perpetuating 'underclass' (Wilson 1987). As Ashis Nandy explains:

'It is becoming obvious that all large multi-ethnic societies, after attaining the beatific status of development, lose interest in removing poverty, especially when poverty is associated with ethnic and cultural groups that lack or lose political clout. Particularly in a democracy, numbers matter and, once the number of poor in a society dwindles to a proportion that can be ignored while forging democratic alliances, political parties are left with no incentive to pursue the cause of the poor. Seen thus, the issue of poverty is a paradox of plural



democracy when it is wedded to global capitalism. And the paradox is both political-economic and moral' (Nandy 2004: 95).

We still have not found the political will and the moral stamina to confront this paradox.

## **The New Barbarism**

At the end of the Cold War, the mature democracies of the developed world were supposed to have arrived at *The End of History* (Fukuyama 1992), where others would eventually follow their triumphant model of progress. Thus, de Rivero perceptively observes: 'politicians, diplomats, economists and experts in international relations never imagined that the world situation would evolve into a sort of modern barbarism. On the contrary, it was thought that, after the collapse of Communism and the success of collective security in the Gulf War, we were poised on the threshold of a new world order based on capitalist democracy and global prosperity' (de Rivero 2001: 33).

Now with globalisation imploding our world, we seem to be witnessing the beginnings of *The Clash of Civilizations* (Huntington 1993), the West versus the rest, precipitating not so much a war on terrorists, but rather the terror of state-sponsored wars, even against their own people. Extremisms of all kinds are dragging our world into a maelstrom of violence and chaos, while affluent consumer societies are no longer willing to compromise their standard of living to make a more just, more peaceful world order, and national leaders are far more sensitive to their electorates, than to creating a level playing field for all.

In such a scenario, the least developed countries (LDCs) suffer the most. In a background paper for the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) '*Least Developed Countries Report, 2004*', Ignacy Sachs concludes:

'UNCTAD reports on LDCs provide an accurate analysis of their predicament. Whatever their diversity in terms of size, population, demographic density, and natural endorsements, geographic and geopolitical locations and history, they are caught in a structural poverty trap due to severe underdevelopment of their productive forces, compounded by an unfavourable international environment and the lack of genuine commitment on the part of affluent countries

to assist them. The LDCs are thus the main losers of the asymmetric globalisation' (Sachs 2004: 1802).

Earlier, national development projected higher standards of living for people, now globalisation promises a better world for those who enter the charmed circle of the world market economy. This is premised on a neo-liberalism that can only favour those who already have entitlements of wealth and privilege, economic and social capital such as the poor and the disadvantaged do not possess. Inevitably, such economic globalisation excludes those thus handicapped, and sharpens the economic inequalities and social disparities even further. In India, as in other developing countries, this market-friendly economy has reflected and strengthened iniquitous traditional social structures further, and created new and more iniquitous ones.

This globalisation from above is a hegemonic exploitation, whereas a globalisation from below could be a liberating movement. Numerous counter-cultural social movements point precisely to this. Yet, Africa, slipping off the map of our world is one of the most severe indictments of such top-down globalising. 'Make poverty history' is an inspiring slogan promoted in many first world countries today, but the negotiations at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and other multilateral organisations actually evidence a more cynical *politique reale*. Humanitarian aid tends to perpetuate dependencies; trade could end them. Nandy's reading of this situation cuts closer to the bone:

'presently the trendy slogan of globalisation can be read as the newest effort to paper over that basic contradiction; globalisation has built into it the open admission that removal of poverty is no longer even a central myth of our public agenda' (Nandy 2004: 95).

In India, while the old order is crumbling in ruins, the new one is distorting its own promise. So we now seem to have the worst of both: of the old and the new, of the East and the West, of tradition and modernity. What is left of our 'mixed economy', where the 'commanding heights' were to be socially controlled by the state for the common good? We are now privatising those 'heights' within a liberal capitalism that privileges the rich with an open market and private profit, leaving a residual socialism that marginalises the poor with manipulative politicians and an oppressive bureaucracy. However, neither do the contradictions in our society cancel each

other out, nor do they yield a new creative synthesis. Rather they add up to a new barbarism, technologically much better equipped, but humanly far more alienating.

## **The Myth of Development**

The development debate seems shipwrecked between the 'state' and the 'market'. Once the 'myth of development' was powered by the dream of removing poverty. Now the dream is turning into a nightmare for the poor, as disillusionment with development with its collateral damage spreads. We need to go back to our Indic roots and rediscover that in this paradox of 'Poverty and Progress' the problem to be addressed is our idea of 'prosperity', rather than our definition of 'poverty' (Kumar 1999: 6).

A sensitised conscience for the rich and an activist conscientisation of the poor should help towards good governance and perhaps manage the crisis for a time. But for how long is this model of development sustainable? Casual Cassandras have been predicting doom for decades, but now serious scientific researchers are projecting alarming scenarios of ecological degradation and environmental pollution, of climate change and unsustainable agriculture, of water famines and energy crises. This precipitous progression has gained, rather than lost momentum, and our world has yet to muster the will and determination to make the polluters pay. Climate change is just one more catastrophe waiting to happen.

Our present responses so far have not measured up to our multiple crises, of development and sustainability, of growth with equity. At best these have provided a sense of urgency in addressing our predicament. But this demands a deeper level of engagement. We need to go beyond the present parameters of our discourse and discern other dimensions at which to encounter our present dilemmas. Then a new reorientation could bring new hope. However, the continuing contradictions and conflicts on the ground have not as yet significantly been resolved, rather these have escalated to bewildering proportions.

## **Technological Divides**

The technological pursuit that enthralls India today is hardly the 'appropriate' or 'intermediate' technology urged by E. F. Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful* (1973). Rather it strives to be large

and succeeds in being ugly. Its energy-intensive applications and its fossil fuel dependency are hardly sustainable as we reach the ecological limits of the carrying capacity of our increasingly fragile environment. This same technology is more part of the growing problem rather than part of a viable solution. More of the same is only likely to intensify the vicious spiral, more inappropriate technology, more insoluble problems.

Moreover, the information and computer technology, which is at the cutting edge of India's surge into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is a high-end technology that employs and serves those who are already in the upper strata of our society. The global competitiveness of India in this arena means nothing to those excluded because the technology is beyond their grasp, and beyond their reach as well. The trickle-down effect, if any, is still painfully slow and not necessarily characteristic of a market economy. There is an urgent need for better planning and more deliberate implementation. As it is, the digital divide is replicating and further reinforcing the other kinds of socio-economic inequalities. This high-end technology may not be the undisguised blessing we presumed it was, and the sooner we address this, the less of a curse it might turn out to be. However, scientific technology must not mean a new colonisation.

### **Science and Superstition**

In India, modern technology that was expected to advance the 'scientific mentality' so dear to Jawaharlal Nehru, seems to have introduced a schizophrenia that compartmentalises people's lives into a craze for this science-based technology and its gadgetry, and an increasing reliance on irrational practices and religious ritualism. Whether these be traditional taboos or modern superstitions, astrological horoscopes or magic portions, they still affect the lives of politicians and professionals, businessmen and workers, rich and poor in disproportionate measure.

While acknowledging that the rationalism of the Enlightenment does have limits of its own, we cannot ignore the cultural contradictions of India's modernity. Meera Nanda insists that the Indian counter-Enlightenment has tended to subsume or co-opt scientific reason within the spirit-based cosmology and epistemology of the Vedas... Modern ideas and innovations are being incorporated in a traditional Hindu worldview, without diminishing many of its starkly irrational, occult and pseudo-scientific tendencies. (Nanda 2006: 491).

This happens with the worldviews of other religious traditions as well, where science is used to prove the scriptures or the scriptures to authenticate science. Ultimately, fundamentalist and extremist faith traditions can only lead to a kind of social schizophrenia, lived contradictions that cannot be creative.

## **Weapons of the Weak**

Yet in spite of these contradictions, India is far from being a failed state, it is still a heroic 'experiment' as yet in process. However, for the vast majority of ordinary Indians, it is still very much a wrenching struggle to cope and salvage something of their dignity and identity, with varying measures of success, and, we should add, failure too. Their inner resistance amounts to a non-acceptance of, and non-commitment to this social order, rather than an active engagement against, and a rejection of it. This has often been misread as apathy and fatalism.

However, in traditional societies there were more social spaces where such an inner resistance could find expression, where *Weapons of the Weak* that constituted *Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (Scott 1985), were used in self-defence quite effectively, because at the time traditional interdependencies were in place. In modernising societies, these are breaking down and being replaced by more asymmetric ones. Even as the state and civil society impinge on every aspect of people's lives, there is less social space to which to withdraw, or from which to resist. People must find newer ways to do this effectively, which now often involves protest and even rebellion, as we see rapidly spreading, as the insurgencies on the margins of our geography and the 'red corridor' of Naxalism witnesses. This is evidence that their inner resistance of our people has not been sapped as they look for alternatives for survival.

## **Grass-root Movements**

In the developing world, neo-liberal hegemonic globalisation relegates economic growth to market mechanisms and so depoliticises development. It relocates eco-political decisions away from the national state to multilateral institutions and multinational corporations and so undermines national governments. The overall effect was inevitably to devitalise national and especially local political

institutions. However, as D. L. Sheth emphasises ‘an important, if unanticipated, consequence of the decline of institutional politics was the revitalisation of old social movements’ (Sheth 2004: 46). For ‘based on such an assessment of globalisation’s adverse impact both for development and democracy, grassroots movements conceive their politics in the direction of achieving two inter-related goals: (a) re-politicising development and (b) reinventing participatory democracy’ (ibid.: 49).

Increasingly now, grass-root movements of protest and rebellion are more stable and better organised. They cannot be wished away. While there are movements of extremist violence against the state and its oppressive agencies, by and large this grass-roots politics is mobilised around new articulations of the old categories of class and caste, and now on new issues of gender and ecology as well.

Their inspiration is neither from the older party politics nor the newer modern technologies, but from Paulo Freire’s ‘conscientisation’ (Freire 1972) and E.F. Schumacher’s ‘appropriate technology’, from Gandhiji’s *ahimsa* and *satyagraha*, and Jay Prakash Narayan’s ‘*sampurna kranti*’ (total revolution). Against the exclusion and inequality of hegemonic globalisation, they urge the ancient Indic principle of *vasudaiva kutumbakam* (the world as one family). Together with Gandhi’s *swaraj* and *swadeshi*, this would amount to a bottom-up globalisation of solidarity and equity, a worldview of ever-expanding, always including oceanic circles. Rather than the ‘low-intensity’ democracy that suites a hegemonic globalisation, this could add up to a counter-hegemonic one (de Souza Santos 1997).

Today many of these movements have gathered momentum, and many more newer ones are making their presence felt. Together they do provide an incisive critique and point to new possibilities, but by themselves, they are not as yet able to implement a new agenda for an ‘alternative development’ and ‘another politics’. However, they have conscientised our marginalised people, the poor and dispossessed, Dalits and tribals, women and youth, workers and farmers, and thus created an awareness and an urgency even in our mainstream society and politics, that cannot be silenced now. Or else extremist violence may well be their last desperate alternative. Already such a dangerous possibility is coming into increasing prominence, as a fatal threat to the state.

Ecological movements, first typified by Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save the Narmada Movement) have cautioned us against large development projects, which, for environmental clearance, must now

satisfy more stringent criteria. Women's movements have advanced from early tentative beginnings to include women from all classes and castes, from cities and villages, professionals and housewives, and have become a force to reckon with. Framers' suicides have focused attention on the plight of agriculture and politicians are being compelled to respond to the problems of small cultivators. Tribal movements are more assertive of their identity and Dalits ones more confident of their political clout.

In spite of initial difficulties, with the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional amendment, passed in 1992, Panchayati Raj is taking root in our villages and is set to revitalise local self-government. Through the provisions of the Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996, tribal self-rule is coming into its own. Public interest litigation has come to stay, while human rights organisations monitor violations and file credible appeals in the courts, where they have been successfully vindicated. The more recent Right to Information Act, 2005, has immense potential to force greater transparency and accountability on governance at all levels.

True, bonded labourers are still cruelly exploited, and child labour has not been abolished, but such abuses, and others too, are now being brought out in the open and impinge more acutely on our political conscience. However, we can hardly pretend that all these new movements are positively oriented towards solidarity and equity.

## **An Explosive Mix**

Our intellectuals' critique and our artists' creativity have not given us the meaning and motivation for a new beginning. Identity politics premised on caste and religion have precipitated a 'politics of passion'. Religious identities have become more fundamentalist and easily manipulated into a 'politics of hate' that precipitates vicious communal riots. Caste and regional movements indulge an ethnocentric chauvinism, get progressively fragmented among themselves and co-opted by hegemonic elites. Extremist politics outside the gamut of parliamentary democracy programmatically espouses revolutionary violence, while cultural nationalism pragmatically promotes religious conflict within electoral politics.

All this makes for an explosive mix that now threatens the fundamental structures of our 'Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic Republic' as the Preamble of our Constitution proudly



proclaims. Now our sovereignty seems compromised to the sole superpower and threatened by closer regional ones, the socialist pattern of society hijacked to new economic policies; our secular credentials under serious threat from cultural nationalists and religious extremists, our democratic institutions ambushed by a criminalised politics.

However, the political agenda has also been crucially affected for the better. Thus, the necessity of guaranteeing fundamental rights and addressing basic needs can no longer be ignored by any government in power, and when they fail to do so they are penalised by the electorate when the voters have the opportunity to do so. The importance of bringing extremists into the mainstream political processes and not merely suppressing them with state violence is more widely accepted, as is the urgency of protecting and not isolating minorities, especially religious ones. Affirmative action for weaker sections of our society has gained growing legitimacy. Rights-based legislation, like the Right to Education Bill, and anti-poverty policies, like the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, attempt to respond to this new scenario and reaches out to the marginal and neglected among our peoples.

Periodically, all this *manthan* (churning) does get articulated in general elections that have made tectonic shifts in the political scenario. But these represent more a plebiscite that throws one set of rascals out only to be replaced by another. The same politicians and their parties get recycled in new avatars, and the political structures are replicated, not changed, even as dynastic, rather than democratic succession prevails on the national and regional political stage.

All said and done, India is today a contentious polity where the civil and social order is no longer taken for granted. It is contested in numerous and diverse ways by its billion-plus people. These protests and rebellions add up to more than *A Million Mutinies Now* since V. S. Naipaul wrote about them (Naipaul 1990). We need a new more innovative discourse to reflect and articulate our rich experiences with these contestations and to carry this forward in constructive and creative action, in a gentler, kinder inclusive society embracing all its citizens, rather than an 'India shining' for the few, while the many are left in darkness and despair.



## **From One to Many Modernities**

The term ‘modern’ implies not just a reference to a timeframe, but more importantly, they are distinguished by a substantive content. We begin here with some conceptual clarifications for our purposes: ‘modernisation’ is the social change that results in ‘modernity’ and is driven by ‘modernism’. Thus ‘modernisation’ is a social process, ‘modernity’ its social consequence, and ‘modernism’ its social ideology.

Modernity first derived its inspiration from the European Enlightenment, which was characterised as the ‘age of reason’ with ‘man come of age’. It was projected as an emancipation from tradition and as such precipitated fundamental social changes across the West, that were carried over to its colonies and eventually spread over the globe.

However, the process of modernisation is not unilinear and monolithic. There are differences and contradictions, nuances and complexities that drive the change process in various ways and in varying directions. For these processes are not just the result of a new and value-neutral scientific technology. There are ideological inspirations that drive modern technology and impact social and cultural systems in a society. Necessarily, this has different implications for different societies, even if these ideological inspirations are substantively similar in their common core.

Moreover, any social change is necessarily coloured by the cultural and institutional systems of a society, its historical experience and its geographic resources. The technological and ideological changes must be contextually internalised in these changing societies and inevitably, they will once again be nuanced accordingly, as some aspects are found to be more compatible and acceptable than others. Hence, when confronted with a multidimensional and complex process like modernisation, societies are affected in correspondingly multiple and varied ways. Thus, even within an overall commonality, substantively modernity will not mean exactly the same thing across such societies. Consequently, there will be multiple modernities, often at odds and even in conflict with one another, i.e., different societies with different responses to perhaps substantially similar exigencies of social change.

Nor can modernity be conflated with capitalism (Wood 2001: 35). The Cold War was an example of two competing ‘modernities’, both claiming to be the more progressive, yet emphasising different aspects

of the same European Enlightenment: the liberal capitalism of the first world and the socialist communism of the second. When modernisation reaches beyond Europe, bringing with it the ideology inspired by its Enlightenment, we can expect even greater differences and contradictions. Today the patterns of modernity differ across the Americas and between Western and Eastern Europe. Yet all these societies are basically within Western civilisation. Hence, it is now becoming apparent that even in the West modernity is not singular or uniform but decidedly multiple and complex (Hefner 1998: 87).

The present ethnic and religious conflict enveloping our world has precipitated so much violence and even a state-sponsored 'War on Terror'. All this is in no small measure due to the underlying social and political changes in these societies, consequent on the impact of modernisation on them. The motivating inspiration may well be alien to some ideologies of modernism, especially when these are perceived as Westernising or secularising influences. Yet, there can be no gainsaying the changes themselves have come with modernisation, precipitated by its scientific technology and carrying the burden of its ideological inspiration, albeit in an alternative context and all too often with other and unanticipated outcomes.

If modernity in the West was rooted in the European Enlightenment, its effects were most dramatically and drastically apparent in the industrial revolution. Classical social scientists, like Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, theorised the social consequences not just in terms of technological change but as driven by social processes that transformed society. Premised on such interpretations, early theories of modernity, such as ones by Talcott Parsons, Edward Shils, Daniel Lerner, Alex Inkeles and others, predicted a convergence in which modern societies would inevitably replicate the model of the West. Thus in 1966, S. N. Eisenstadt affirmed:

'Historically, modernization is the process of change towards those types of social, economic and political systems that have developed in Western Europe and North America from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth' (Eisenstadt 1966: 1).

For these social scientists, the West was thus seen as the yardstick against which the modernity of other societies was to be measured. But by 1998 Eisenstadt himself had clearly changed his stance:

‘early studies of modernization assumed that the project of modernity would not only continue in the West but spread and prevail through the world. The reality proved to be radically different... Not convergence but divergence has ruled the history of modernity’ (Eisenstadt and Schuchter 1998: 4).

Granted that there is a common substantive core to our understanding of modernity, in terms of scientific technologies and rational ideologies, the fallacy of only one modernity is today rejected in favour of ‘multiple modernities ... shaped by the historical experience of their respective societies’ (ibid.). The monopoly of the West over modernisation and modernity was challenged in newly developing societies, where it was not seen as neutral but as an instrument of cultural aggression.

In the West, modernity implied a social transformation, in which technological and economic, political and intellectual processes reinforced each other. Early Western modernity derived more from the totalising rationality of philosophers like René Descartes (1596-1650), than from the more pluralist reasoning of others like Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536). Its march through Europe was not a peaceful progression, but a history of ideological violence, terror and war. From the French Revolution through the Russian and the Chinese, military coups and mass movements, it has been closely associated with a millenarianism. We have too long ignored its destructive possibilities, rather than exorcising them. And so we have continuing testimony to Eisenstadt’s sombre conclusion: ‘genocide is the barbarism lurking at the core of modernity’ (Eisenstadt 2000: 12).

## **From Simple to Reflexive Modernities**

Thus, though the project of modernity that was essentially conceived as a liberative one, there is an inherent contradiction and dilemma at its core. As Anthony Giddens perceptively observes:

‘Modernity, one should not forget, produces difference, exclusion and marginalization. Holding out the possibility of emancipation, modern institutions at the same time create mechanisms of suppression, rather than actualization, of self’ (Giddens 1991: 6).

This makes the transition from tradition to modernity in non-Western societies ambiguous and paradoxical and unless we face up to this, it

cannot deliver on what promise it may have. Even in the West, the new social movements, like ecological and feminist ones, are today challenging the early Enlightenment's rationalist modernity.

Now in the context of globalisation, modernity is continually reinterpreted and repeatedly challenged by new understandings, innovative projects and counter-cultural agendas. This demands a collective response to the existential condition of people struggling to cope with the rapid and sweeping changes to which they are subjected. For

‘the modern world is a ‘runaway world’: not only is the pace of social change much faster than in any prior system, so also is its scope, and the profoundness with which it affects pre-existing social practices and modes of behaviours’ (Giddens: 16).

We are now coping with what some have called ‘the second modernity’ (Beck 2000: 12), to distinguish it from ‘the first modernity’, which, as we have seen, was associated with the Enlightenment. In the post-war period, it gave rise to the mega rhetoric of development as economic growth, high-tech, agribusiness, militarism. Rather this second modernity ‘now seems more practical and less pedagogic, more experiential and less disciplinary than in the fifties and sixties’ (Appadurai 1997: 10).

In a similar vein, Anthony Giddens argues that ‘the Enlightenment prescription of more knowledge, more control’ (Giddens 1994: 4), is no longer viable in our present-day world of ‘high’ or ‘late’ modernity’ where ‘the self, like the broader institutional contexts in which it exists, has to be reflexively made’ (ibid. 1991: 3). For modernist rationality corresponds to an earlier ‘simple modernisation’. It is rather misplaced with the ‘reflexive modernisation’ such as is precipitated by the impact of contemporary globalisation. For this is not a simple continuation but a qualitatively different and inherently ambiguous process.

By ‘reflexivity’ Giddens refers ‘to the use of information about the condition of activity as a means of regularly reordering and redefining what that activity is’ (Giddens 1994: 86). At the individual level such a feedback process creates a ‘reflective citizenry’. Moreover, ‘the growth of social reflexivity is a major factor introducing a dislocation between knowledge and control – a prime source of manufactured uncertainty’ (ibid.: 7). Such situations precipitated by human action, have largely new and immensely unpredictable consequences that cannot be dealt with by old and tried remedies.

In the old modernity, cultural identity was very much constructed in a territorial context and found its expression in the territorial nation-state. This allowed for multiple modernities across national societies, with their own particular historical narratives and identities. With globalisation these national identities get inscribed in the macro-narratives of larger global processes. However, given the accessibility and penetration of electronic media and social communication with the new information technologies, these macro-narratives are further 'punctuated, interrogated and domesticated by the micro-narratives of film, television, music and other expressive forms which allow modernity to be rewritten more as a vernacular globalisation' (Appadurai 1997: 10).

Thus, globalisation paradoxically precipitates localisation with localised regional histories and local cultural identities, as 'the conscious and imaginative construction of difference as its core ... differences that constitute the diacritics of identity' (Appadurai 1997: 10). This precisely is the premise, which grounds a reflexive modernity that allows for the opening of newer social spaces in more innovative ways, where society can be reconstructed and not just reproduced.

Hence, we still have to come to terms with *Modernity and Its Futures* (Hall, Held, and McGrew 1992). For now, more than ever before,

'modernity is a risk culture... Under conditions of modernity, the future is continually drawn into the present by means of the reflexive organization of knowledge environments' (Giddens 1991: 3).

All this puts *Modernity on Endless Trial* (Kolakowski 1990). However, we have not yet uncovered the limits of modernity, such as there may well be. In a globalising multicultural India, living in several historical periods in different stages of development, facing this challenge of a second reflexive modernity is so much the more critical and crucial, for the stakes are higher and the risks have multiplied.

## **Living in a Revolution**

In South Asia, modernity is historically enmeshed in the colonial experience. Like British rule itself, it was introduced incrementally and piecemeal, continually compromised between the Universality of the Enlightenment and the particularities of India (Kaviraj 2000: 143-

145). The national freedom movement replaced colonial rule with the nation-state, but it involved many contrary and contested understandings of nationalism, and what the challenge of modernity must mean for our future. The responses covered a wide spectrum. Among the most decisive ones that still impact the Subcontinent even today are: the religious nationalism of V.D. Savarkar and Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the democratic socialism of Nehru, the *swaraj* of Mahatma Gandhi, the creative autonomy of Rabindranath Tagore, the affirmative action of Babasaheb Ambedkar, to mention but a few.

In India the Nehruvian consensus, which began our tryst with destiny became the dominant inspiration after Independence. This has now come unstuck, and while the new emerging order still plays lip service to Gandhiji's *ahimsa*, it is increasingly embedded with violence: the aggressiveness of Hindutva and the fanaticism of religious fundamentalists, the extremism of the Naxalites and the prevailing atrocities of caste, not to mention the violent assertions of the state.

Those unwilling to pay the social costs of modernity seek an escape into the past, like the blind traditionalists, or into the future, like the uncritical modernisers. But we have already bitten the apple and compromised our innocence, we have been seduced by a developmental model and a rationalist modernity, both of which are now faltering, if they have not already failed. But as we endeavour to heal our past, we must try to redeem our present, because we cannot abandon it. There is no escape into the past or the future, no withdrawing from confronting this present challenge, without becoming irrelevant and getting lost in obscurity, assigned to the dustbin of history.

With continuing and rapid social change, people's experience of the new world opening up before them creates a dissonance between old understandings and new experiences. As this keeps mounting, the tension is no longer viable or sustainable. Modernity produces this culture-quake and the tsunami it precipitates threatens traditional societies struggling to cope. Masses of people are dragged into this vortex of rapid change, moving out of their earlier securities into a world they cannot quite comprehend. Those who can cope with such disorientation, become committed to the changes, not because they comprehend them but more because they benefit from them, even as others are left behind and go under.

With modernity we are going through a new Axial Age but far more rapidly, at breakneck speed. The first such one was between

800–200 BCE, when agricultural economies stabilised, trade expanded and old traditions, religious and cultural, were no longer persuasive or viable in a changed world. Eventually, a new cultural heritage displaced the old as a new civilisation was born. The Zoroastrian and the Abrahamic, the Buddhist and the Upanishadic, the Taoist and the Confucian civilisations marked this age in their respective societies with new mythic understandings and new ideological interpretations.

In India, we are *Living in a Revolution* (Srinivas 1992) and the incompatibilities and contradictions can no longer be contained in an unsustainable development model, neither are they likely to disappear and dissolve by exhaustion or default. At its deepest level, the challenge of modernity cannot be adequately met with technological inventions and political innovations, but only with a new myth to redeem and reorient ourselves with a creative and innovative ideology.

## Myth and Ideology

Raimon Panikkar elaborates the distinction between ‘myth’ and ‘ideology’. This can be crucial in coping with the transformation modernity brings. ‘Myth’ here is not understood in the pejorative sense as opposed to fact, but rather in its original Greek sense of ‘mythos’, as the ‘horizon of intelligibility’ (Panikkar 1983: 101), and hence ‘a form of consciousness’ (Crook 1996: 6). It is the taken for granted, unquestioned, pre-understanding, something that is accepted in ‘faith’, not an irrational blind faith, but a non-rational, pre-articulate understanding. Human society is grounded in such ‘myths’.

When myth is rationally articulated, it undergoes a ‘passage from mythos to logos’ (Panikkar 1983: 21) and develops into an ideology, i.e., ‘the more or less coherent and ensemble of ideas that make up critical awareness, ... constructed by the logos as a function of its concrete historical moment’ (Panikkar 1983: 5). We need ideologies to articulate and locate ourselves in our social world. And yet the more coherent and cogent the articulation of an ideology is the less able will it be to accept alternative understandings without reducing them to its own terms.

For ideology functions at the level of meaning, myth at the level of meaningfulness. Thus, ideologies are ultimately founded on myth, on the taken-for-granted, unquestioned understandings that precede



it. Hence, the richer and deeper the meaningfulness of the myth, the more open and accommodating will be the ideology that it can inspire. There are of course complex ways in which meaning is produced and contested. But this always happens within a context of meaningfulness. Thus as 'mythos' is articulated in 'logos', 'ideology' is contextualised by 'myth'.

Contemporary ideologues have understood this far better than traditional mythmakers. But such 'myths' are not created individually in a society. They emerge collectively, though we can facilitate their emergence and articulate them in ideologies. In sum, 'mythos' is what makes our world meaningful; 'logos' explains the meaning and its implications for our lives. We need both to cope with our everyday life. Having lost our old religious and cultural myths and abandoned our traditional social and political ideologies, we are still in quest of a new 'mythos' and a corresponding 'logos' in consonance with our age.

Joseph Campbell describes 'myth' as a collective dream that expresses the unarticulated depths of a people's unconscious, their deepest longings of which they themselves may not be consciously aware (Campbell 1991). Perhaps the Australian aboriginals better understood this mythic poverty of modern man when in their encounter with colonials they regretted: the white man, he hath no dreaming! We need a new dreaming for our contemporary predicament, for a fundamental reorientation, a new 'mythic' foundation for a new more authentic development, or rather a new *mythomoteur*, a founding myth, to refound our society. When we find such mythic *meaningfulness* for our society, then we can begin to articulate an ideological *meaning* that can be translated into a new social agenda. If this seems like a utopia, a nowhere society, then we must learn from liberation seekers how history can be made to follow myth (Nandy 1983: 63).

## **Incompatibilities and Alternatives**

The supposed Universal validity of Western technology, its aggressive rationality and ecological sustainability is now more than ever in question. It is no longer the panacea it was once uncritically thought to be. Indic civilisation with its deep cultural roots going back forty centuries, its huge demographic scale, and immense social diversity, is the place to work out a new paradigm for itself and the world. For India has been at the crossroads of cultures and civilisations, the origin of, and home to world religions and



philosophic systems. It has now arrived on the world stage as a dominant regional political and economic power, aspiring to project its influence, political, economic and cultural, beyond South Asia as a global power. If it falters and fails now, the consequences could be earth-shaking for ourselves and others in our region and beyond.

The alternatives to our present predicament are not in polar opposites that are dialectical contraries, but rather in promising possibilities, and sometimes even in inevitable compromises that make for dialogical complementarities. In our globalising world, dialectics at best may yield a *synthesis* but as we have all too often seen, this is usually in terms of the dominant thesis and the subaltern antithesis. Dialogue allows for a cultural conversion, an inversion of roles that can bring a new living *symbiosis*, if only we can honestly and courageously confront our narcissisms of grandiosity and victimhood, and our inadequacies of political will and social commitment.

Our present modernity seems to result in the transmigration of the Western ideological soul into the Indian body politic. More than neo-colonialism, this would be abandoning our Nehruvian tryst with destiny to pursue a powerful nation-state, grandiosely demanding respect and aggressively pursuing its self-interest. It would not be a society seriously and effectively committed to the commonweal of its people. During the freedom movement, Tagore and Gandhiji had warned against our nationalism getting trapped in chauvinism. Today religious fundamentalism, cultural nationalisms and political extremism are tearing apart the peoples on the subcontinent. The increasing conflict and violence on so many fronts could sweep the India of Gandhiji's dreams into the nightmare of communal conflict, civic strife and political chaos.

## Gathering the Fragments

Yet we also have the resources for at least an outline of a new mythic understanding that is being further sketched in a hesitant social ideology and etched into a stuttering political agenda, as it is gradually beginning to get rooted in a wider cultural consensus. Thus, our concept of justice must include affirmative action for an inclusive justice for all, especially Gandhiji's least and last Indian. Our ecological sensitivity must imply more than harmony and equilibrium with nature but responsibility to sustain and even regenerate it as well. Our quest for peace needs to include freedom and tolerance. Our

affirmation of an inviolable human dignity must be Universal, but more especially protective of the weak and vulnerable. Our desire for a respected cultural identity must not deny diversity and choice to others.

Only in transcending dialectic incompatibilities for more dialogic alternatives can we find our autonomy and interdependence for which we must take responsibility and in which we will find our freedom. There is still a long way to go for such a liberation, but the direction has been indicated. It is for us to stay the course, or we will find that even if we win all our battles, a very unlikely possibility, we will come to the tragic realisation that we have fought the wrong war! For now, we are at the crossroads. We can gather the fragments from what we have learnt and begin to meet the challenge of a more inclusive and human development. Drawing on our rich multicultural and plurireligious tradition to construct a liberating modernity, we can heal our past, redeem our present and open our society to a new and enlightened future, where India will shine for all and no one will be left in darkness, where all Indians will arise and walk tall, especially for the least and last.

Three words describe the present global crisis is stark surreal broad brush-strokes: greed, distrust, consumerism: *greed*, not just of the bankers who went bankrupt gambling with other people's money and bring down the whole system, but also their directors and stockholders who urged them on, as well as their debt-ridden clients with their unviable loans; *distrust*, not just among the banks but between the bankers and the public at large, suspicious of each other and more so of the unregulated market they had speculated on; *consumerism*, premised on a free lunch against the very basic of economic common sense, leaving the future to settled their debts, blind to the present realities overtaking them.

There is a poignant Gandhian counter-point to all these three that were once dismissed out of hand but now speak directly to our situation: *need* rather than greed for there is enough for everyone's need not for everyone's greed; *trust* over distrust, since we hold what we have as trustees for the common good and this must not be betrayed; *frugality* not consumerism because we are humanised by the quality of our life not our standard of living.

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## 9. SEARCH FOR IDENTITY, QUEST FOR DIGNITY: THE DALITS' LONG MARCH

A paper for the CBCI-SCSTBC Conference on 'Building Inclusive Communities through Dalit Empowerment' 6-8 Mar 2009 Bangalore, published in *Vidyajyoti*, No. 10, October Oct 2010, pp.744-760./5052 words. (This presentation draws on *Changing Gods: Rethinking Religious Conversion in India*, Penguin, India, 2007, and *Mobile and Marginalised Peoples: Perspectives from the Past*, edited with Shereen Ratnagar, Manohar, N. Delhi, 2003)

INTRODUCTION: THE DOMINANT HEGEMONY  
THE 'SELF' AND THE 'OTHER'  
INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE RIGHTS  
INCLUSIVE AND EXCLUSIVE IDENTITIES  
IDENTITY AND INTEGRATION  
CHALLENGING INFERIORISED IDENTITIES  
THE RESILIENCE OF CASTE  
CONCLUSION: IN PURSUIT OF DIGNITY  
REFERENCES

### **Abstract**

Development too has been a very real threat to the cultural identity and human dignity of marginalised peoples. We need to restructure our economic development and political participation. An accompanying cultural hegemony subverts their identity, and undermines the cultural resources, which they could have mobilised to resist this dominance.

## **Introduction: The Dominant Hegemony**

Modernising societies subject their people to a growing socio-cultural homogenisation, This devalues and threatens their traditional identities. Moreover, such societies subjugate the masses to the expanding eco-political hegemony of the upwardly mobile elites. This subordinates and excludes the older more static ones. Eroded identities and displaced elites are a volatile, explosive mix. Moreover, their feeling of being marginalised and alienated, undermines people's self-respect and violates their sense of dignity, leaving them with feelings of inferiority that give further credibility to their perceived grievances. The middle class too is disoriented by rapid modernisation and so in spite of being relatively advantaged. It has lent strong support to revivalist and fundamentalist developments.

Development too has been a very real threat to the cultural identity and human dignity of marginalised peoples, even where in countries like ours there is an official policy of protection and promotion. Obviously, we need to restructure our economic development and political participation if it is to reach and include the people who need it most. But the structural violence that such 'development' and 'progress' inflicts on these people is but part of the indignity to which they are subjected. For there is also an accompanying cultural hegemony that subverts their identity, and in doing so undermines the very cultural resources they would have collectively found in their community identity, and which they could have mobilised to resist this dominance, affirm their dignity and struggle for their place in the sun.

We have a constitutionally established secular, socialist democracy. Rights for religious minorities and affirmative action for the marginalised are written into our Constitution but our democracy is more procedural, with periodically conducted elections, than substantive in terms of liberty, equality, fraternity. Rather these are displaced by an agenda of the powers that be, pushing the advantage of the rich, the powerful, the majority, in a numbers game that counts rupees and votes and with the same cynicism, even as we flatter ourselves as being the largest democracy in the world.

As riots tear us apart with alarming frequency, it has become apparent that they involve either religious or caste communities. Yet, while we are all suitably alarmed at their increasing severity, the root causes of this violence are rarely addressed. Such collective violence is often seen as a spontaneous response of community outrage. Rather

it is politically motivated and manipulated to run its course. The consequent polarisation yields a rich electoral payoff for interested parties.

The mutual goodwill of our fellow citizens is no longer taken for grant, while fear and resentment seem to grow like a cancer in the innermost recesses of our hearts. Newspapers are filled with reports of child abuse and domestic violence, atrocities against people on the margins of our society: religious and ethnic minorities, the oppression of Dalits and tribals, injustice to the poor and the needy, the old and infirm, ... Our the response seems to be less one of compassion, concern and care than an authoritarianism that is unsympathetic to the genuine needs of our peoples, manipulative of their real concerns, a betrayal of their deepest desires and hopes. The hegemony of the dominant upper class/caste elite coots the subalterns to a nationalist/religious agenda, alien to their true interests and real concerns.

Religious nationalism and fundamentalism have a remarkable affinity, they feed on each other, politicising and radicalising one another. Both respond to the modernising secularists but each addresses a different aspect: their eco-political hegemony that excludes masses of people and impoverishes them in a life that discounts human dignity is challenged by the religious nationalists; their religio-cultural dominance that disregards traditional religious identities and undermines their self-respect is contested by the religious fundamentalists. But none of this has brought the promise of liberty, equality, fraternity any closer.

As a result the spiral of violence engulfs us, even as the erosion of goodwill overtakes us. And as we become more and more blasé about the violence around us, anger and hatred stalk our land unimpeded. With repeated civil disturbances and political turmoil, how many of us feel secure and safe in our society or even our homes? How long can we ignore the deep structural fissures that divide our society, and like tectonic plates grate against each other and produce tremors that shake the very foundations of our world?

The convenience of tackling the symptoms rather than the disease, downstream consequences rather than upstream antecedents serves us ill in this time of real though perhaps not always acknowledged crisis. Issues of social prejudice and cultural hegemony, of economic oppression and political exclusion are so interwoven that they must be confronted together. However, it is often the cultural factors of this complex that are all too easily set aside or taken for



granted and not suitably dealt with. Without pretending to prophesy any apocalypse or final dénouement, this paper attempts to address some of these issues so endemically imbricated in our society. Hopefully, it will make a small contribution towards unravelling them.

## **The 'Self' and the 'Other'**

Identity and dignity are intimately connected. Identity answers to, 'who am I?'; dignity to, 'what respect am I due?'. The affirmation or the negation of one carries over to the other. The right to identity must include as well the right to dignity, to recognition and respect. Both intimately concern the 'self', both necessarily implicate the 'other'. For one's identity is never developed in the isolation of a walled-in consciousness but in interaction with significant others. I discover myself, my horizon of meaning and value, with and through others. Who I am, is always reflected off, and refracted through others. What I am due, is always in a social context mediated by others. The denial of recognition and affirmation by others amounts to a negation of my human identity.

Indeed, the other is more integral to oneself than one might want to admit. The other helps to make sense of my experiences, but the other also interrogates my world. For the other always puts a question to one's self, and when the other is different the question can be threatening. But neither can simply be wished away. One can ignore the question only for a while, one may even be tempted to destroy the questioner, but the questioning cannot be so easily silenced. History bears witness to how dominant persons and groups have sought 'final solutions' to eliminate or subordinate others in genocide and ethnocide, in cultural assimilation and religious conversion.

As with individuals so too with groups, identity and dignity is mediated both from within and without. Both are necessary to give a sense of self-understanding and self-location in society. The individual is affirmed, or negated in the group, as the group is in society. At the individual level, this mediation is essentially through interpersonal interaction; at the social level it is also through myth and symbol, values and norms, collective memories and popular histories (Kakar 1993: 50). Neither individuals nor groups construct their identities in isolation. For the group as with the individual, identity is very much a social production, although not entirely a passive one.

Modern development brings rapid and radical change. The strain and stress can precipitate a disorientation in personal identity. In such situations, a crumbling self can lean on group support as a dilapidated building is trussed up by a scaffolding. In a world increasingly characterised by anxiety, uncertainty and disorder, there is an urgent need for the reassurance of security, trust and a sense of solidarity in a collective identity. Such identities become 'vehicles for redressing narcissistic injuries for righting of what are perceived as contemporary or historical wrongs.' (Kakar 1993: 52) Collective action is resorted to in order to redress individual insecurities. The group solidarity then becomes a substitute for lost attachments, a support to heal old injuries and right historical wrongs. Such collective remedies to individual trauma easily become totalising and aggressive. Leaders manipulate and mobilise groups, confirmed in their self-righteousness, disregarding the dignity of its own members or other groups. In any situation of societal breakdown, it is not difficult to see why extremist responses come into prominence.

Moreover, this construction the sense of self in the context of a hostile other is necessarily in function of the needs of the insecure individual and the group. What is unconsciously disowned and rejected in ourselves is projected and demonised in the other, what is desirable in the other is denied and attributed to the oneself: we are non-violent, tolerant, chosen, pure; the other is violent, intolerant, polluted, damned; they may seem strong, compassionate, devote, but they are not, we actually are.

## **Individual and Collective Rights**

To contain and defuse such collective passions, we must recognise and guarantee both, equal dignity and unique identity for every individual person and each human community. The first is founded on human rights and is committed to enforcing equitable rights for all; the second is premised on collective rights, and is responsible for ensuring the cultural identity of each group. In the first individual rights, in the second collective ones are privileged. Taken together then, individual rights must protect and guarantee personal identity and dignity, collective rights must sustain and promote group identity and dignity.

However, individual and collective rights are not always in consonance. The dilemma between individual and community, the personal and the collective, becomes evident here. Treating all equally

could lead to homogeneity, where some are more equal than others in violation of the rights of more vulnerable individuals. This happens in modernising societies when the relationships between individuals are unequal, as happens with caste communities, where lower caste individuals are more deprived. Conceding some kinds of cultural rights to groups can be oppressive for individuals in them, as happens in patriarchal communities where empowering men further disadvantages the women. However, we can and must find ways in which human rights are sensitive to the cultural specifics of a community, which in turn do not violate fundamental rights of individuals.

In other words, a homogenizing Universalism cannot be so absolute as to negate cultural and religious diversities, but rather made to respect and even celebrate these differences within the limits set by collective rights. However, neither can these, whether religious or cultural, be unconditional or in violation of more fundamental human rights and freedoms. The 'non-recognition', or worse the 'misrecognition' of either, becomes oppressive and distorting, projecting a negated, wounded identity. This is precisely what prejudice is all about.

## **Inclusive and Exclusive Identities**

Identities that are defined negatively against others in terms of 'what one is *not*', will tend to be exclusive and dismissive of others. This creates in-groups and out-groups, stereotypes and scapegoats. Those affirmed positively, prescinding from others in defining 'who one *is*', will tend to be inclusive and not disregarding of others. This allows for openness and receptivity. 'We *are not* like that', is less open to a broader inclusion in a larger common ground than 'this is how we *are*'. Exclusive identities emphasise differences and set up oppositions and polarities with the other. Sudhir Kakar, the psychoanalyst, explains how they help increase the sense of narcissistic well-being and attribute to the other the disavowed aspects of one's own self. (Kakar 1992: 137) Inclusive ones are inclined to affirm similarities and complementarities with the other. These make for tolerance and flexibility. For example, identifying with one's language or religion need not negate or be hostile to other languages and religions and yet when used thus, language and religion have been among the most effective markers to divide a society into 'them' and 'us'.

In South Asia, the most prevalent exclusive and antagonistic collective identities are caste and/or religion-based. All claims to

individual and collective rights are demands by the claimants to have their identity recognized and their dignity affirmed. The denial of one or the other, as often happens to religious groups in secularised societies, is perceived as a threat of annihilation, whether intended or not, and inevitably this generates dangerous political passions. Religious nationalism and fundamentalism thrive on such negative politics, which have become so violent and destructive in the Subcontinent. Caste politics could follow the same destructive trajectory.

The greatest threat to our diversity today is not from any external threat but from our own internal traumas, with collective identities on a collision course, and basic human dignity, especially that of the poor and the cultural identity particularly that of the marginalised, are sacrificed for chauvinist partisan gains. For such consolidated and totalised collective identities subsume all the other identities of group members, and allow little space for a consensus across groups, and less place for personal freedoms within, and for individual rights against the group.

## **Identity and Integration**

Structural plurality becomes the basis for a 'politics of interests', mobilising groups around 'what they want'. If this is not integrated into a system that protects fundamental rights and promotes equitable distribution, it engenders class conflict. Cultural plurality is a fertile ground for the 'politics of identity', mobilising groups on the basis of 'who they are'. If this is not incorporated into a pluralism that recognises cultural differences and affirms collective rights, it breeds collective passions. Exclusive identities, whether based on religion, caste, race, or any other common ethnic trait, once imposed easily become an effective basis for group mobilisation and ethno-politics. The identity politics precipitated by these have been among the most violent and destructive.

Unique identities pertain to the cultural domain. When these are aggregated from the individual to the group, they can become more intractable and uncompromising than ever. This is precisely what happens with exclusive and total identities. They subsume all other individual identities into the group one, and oppose this to the identities of other groups. This is a death knell of any kind of cultural pluralism in society. Religious nationalisms and fundamentalisms are prone to this.

Rather we need inclusive multiple identities both for individuals and groups, identities that are layered and prioritised according to the context around a core identity that gives stability and continuity to the person and the group. This will demand flexible identities and overlapping porous group boundaries. Gandhi himself is a remarkable example of such an open yet rooted person:

'I do not want my house to be walled on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any of them.' (*Young India*, June 1921: 170)

Identity politics is an effective motivator for individuals and a powerful mobiliser for groups. But in recognising 'who we are' we have to discover 'what we want'. If the politics of identity is not rationalised by the politics of interests, it can oppress others and suppress its own. For both individuals and groups, we need an integrated and holistic approach that will recognise the Universal demand of equal dignity for all, and comprehend the particular exigencies of the unique identity of each.

Democratic pluralism cannot exclude identity politics, though its relationship with the politics of interest is certainly a problematic one. Collective identities mobilise group interests. These interests in turn consolidate corresponding identities. A constructive integration will demand that a larger concern and a deeper unity direct and subsume both. Caste communalism and religious fundamentalism have severely undermined such a politics of integration. These have deliberately exploited communal riots and civil disturbances to polarise our society for electoral gains. This further multiplies the divides and deepens the fissures in society.

The politics of integration must be a quest for an egalitarian, just and free society. In our quest for economic equality, creating class-consciousness is never merely to invert class divisions and perpetuate them. It is to mobilise a class struggle for a classless society, where social inequalities are abolished. In our quest for social justice mere positional change in the caste hierarchy without an attempt to eliminate it, will only perpetuate casteism. Rather caste mobilisation must be for a casteless society, where caste hierarchy has been demolished. So too if religious identities are activated in our quest for religious liberation, it must not be for dominance or isolation, but to create a free and inter-religious pluralism, where religious differences are complementary, not antagonistic.

## Challenging Inferiorised Identities

In this struggle to affirm their identity, for recognition and self-respect, only a deep and comprehensive approach to social change can be effective for Dalits in a caste society. However, for any real mobilisation of cultural resources, we need a cultural pedagogy that will help counter the cultural violence to which the agencies of socialisation subject such people, whether these be the formal education system or the informal encounters of everyday living, whether in the mass media or the market place.

It is in these very areas of social life and living encounters that we need to resist the hegemonic 'pedagogy of violence' (Lele 1995) perpetrated by dominant groups, with a pedagogy of affirmation for struggling subaltern peoples. We need to break the 'pedagogy of silence' (Heredia:1996) which allows such cultural violence to be internalised by a pretended neutrality that cannot but perpetuate the status quo. We need instead a pedagogic creativity and relevance that will shatter the 'culture of silence' (Freire 1972) in which they are imprisoned and isolated, rather than a misguided attempt merely to preserve a cultural inheritance, as one would an endangered species in a protected environment. The endeavour, then, must not be directed towards such a preservation or "museumification" of their culture, for the real concern is not about the mere survival of this culture. Rather the project must be one of empowerment, of enabling these people to grow as subjects of their own history, not mere objects in an alienating process of the other's development.

Collective identities must be located within the social context and material history of a group, and problematised as a dynamic process in which a social unit produces and reproduces itself (Heredia 1997). It is precisely because such identities are constructed within the dynamic historical context, that they can be challenged and reconstructed once again. To assume otherwise is to adopt an ahistorical and static perspective. Yet we must not be naive about the very real odds stacked against such reconstruction and empowerment in the contemporary circumstances of our marginalised peoples. It is even possible that this seminar could be misread and misused. Yet the goal is both possible and even feasible.

For the kind of inferiorisation to which these people are subjected can only be reversed by a collective movement affirming their ethnic identity. But first the groundwork for such a movement must be put in place. Our efforts must add up to not just a rediscovery of their

traditional identity, but also a reconstruction of it in creative and relevant ways to enable them adequately and actively to engage with their changing situation and not be merely passive victims of their declining circumstances.

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Moreover, we want to distance ourselves here from the unhelpful controversies between the 'primordialists' and the 'instrumentalists', the 'survivalists' and the 'evolutionists', the 'maximalists' and the 'minimalists', to mention but a few. Rather we will position ourselves with those for whom ethnic identity is 'seen as a *historical phenomenon*, subordinated to existing class and centre-periphery contradictions, and as an element operating in cultural dialectics.' (Devalle 1992:16) For there are three essential dimensions that must be put together in describing any collective identity:

1. An objective foundation for identity in the material history and existential group relations of that society.
2. A subjective construction of this in an articulation and motivation of common myths and rituals, symbols and values.
3. A contextual recognition by others of this group differentiation even if it be only to contest it.

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## **The Resilience of Caste**

Caste hierarchy involves a complex set of cumulative oppressions, psychological and social, eco-political and religious. Louis Dumont (1970) has rightly stressed how the untouchable outcastes at the bottom of the caste hierarchy were functionally necessary to sustain the purity-pollution ideology legitimising the Brahmins at the top; indignities at the bottom sustained the dignities on the top! Besides the rural feudal structures, capitalist industrialism accentuated class as a category of



exploitation. Indeed, the cumulative caste-class inequalities were fundamental to the structure of Indian society, to which colonialism added a further political dimension.

Dalits experience multiple and cumulative discriminations, psychological and social, economic and political, religious and cultural. These add up across many interrelated areas of their lives each implicating the other in complex ways that leave such people trapped. A positive intervention in one area may be neutralised and reversed by the negative consequences this precipitates in another.

Atrocities against Dalits are not just random violence against the weaker and more vulnerable in our society. There is a diabolic method in this unconscionable madness, even if it is not explicitly recognised. For this violence is used to reinforce caste barriers that seem threatened, and the greater the threat sometimes the greater is the corresponding response. Atrocities on Dalits are still endemic in our society and we seem unable and/or unwilling to exorcise them. Untouchability has been Constitutionally abolished, yet even today implicitly and explicitly its overt and covert practices are widely prevalent.

Their life situation denies them fair access to better their life chances, and if they seek to escape the religious traditions that oppress them, they are resisted by those, who oppose their seeking another future elsewhere. These urge reform that Dalits have waited for too long now. There are others who take advantage of these Dalits and co-opt them to their own religious community leaving them there to the same plight in the new situation. But whose interests and concerns are at stake here? Who will speak for these Dalits and voice their anguish and reflect their pain?

Those who oppose Dalit conversion are often, not always, the very ones who oppose secular reforms that would immensely benefit these Dalits: such as affirmative action and an effective implementation of reservation quotas for them, land reforms and protective labour legislation, an employment guarantee scheme, or the many poverty alleviation programmes. These would benefit all those below the poverty line, of which seventy per cent and more are Dalits.

Across all communities, religious and otherwise, caste in India has proved to be notoriously endemic. It defines Indian society even today. Earlier religious movements within Hindu society, particularly those among the *bhakti* cults, had opposed caste and sought greater equality. However, these were eventually encapsulated as religious



sects and given their own niche in the caste hierarchy, becoming in the process sub-castes in their turn. In choosing to convert to Buddhism, Ambedkar was looking for a 'new beginning'. But his neo-Buddhists Dalit converts are now facing the same plight that defined and contained earlier religious protest movements against caste hierarchy.

Indeed, whether Dalit conversions were to Christianity or Islam, Sikhism or Buddhism, the egalitarian ethos of these traditions were not as resistant to caste hierarchies as their official teachings proclaimed. Often religious conversion met with less resistance when caste purity/pollution taboos were continued among the converts, indicating that in such cases caste was an even more defining marker of identity than religion. In these communities, caste hierarchies of their own prevailed and were perpetuated in practice by a rigorous endogamy. Inter-marriage was more likely across religious than caste boundaries. This is but a carry-over from the practice among indigenous religious traditions, as with Hindu and Sikh jats, both agricultural castes, or Hindu and Jain *vanias*, both trading castes.

The depressed classes are always precariously placed in our society. At times conversion to Christianity has meant a transference of dependence from the more exploitative patronage of the landlord to the more benevolent paternalism of the missionaries. Indeed, much of the resistance to their conversion was the loss it meant of bonded and cheap labour to the dominant castes. Often such change as conversion did bring did not represent a complete liberation as might have been hoped for, but at least it was an indication of some positive improvement in their life chances.

Today liberation theology has proved to be an effective motivator and mobiliser for Christian involvement in social issues and Dalits have embraced it to project their demands nationally and even internationally, as they did at the United Nations World Conference Against Racism, at Durban, South Africa, in August 2001. These Dalits are now insisting not only on their separateness from caste Hindu traditions, but also on their distinctiveness within the Christian fold. Hence, their attempt to express their collective experience and to reconfigure their subaltern subjectivity as distinct from dominant caste groups with counter-cultural images, such as their drum, so evocative of a people that have no voice in their society, a symbol of divine power, rather than the sacred 'word', the mantra of priestly ritual.

## **Conclusion: In Pursuit of Dignity**

This essay sketches issues and presents perspectives that should help contextualise and facilitate more concrete strategies of cultural action for liberation that hopefully will come from the more specific papers of the seminar, and thus make for a more fruitful exchange within an intelligible framework of reference. For here we are dealing with a complex and sensitive challenge.

However any effective action strategy to mobilise ethnic identity, must be careful not to negate or fight shy of class consciousness. This will make the response broader-based by bringing it into alliance with similarly placed disadvantaged groups in our society. It will also prevent a people's movement from fragmenting itself into their different component ethnic groups or getting stratified into classes across and/or within these communities themselves. This is indeed a very real danger. We already have seen an intimation of something similar in other ethnic and/or caste-based movements that have time and again in specific instances been divided and ruled from the outside, or dominated and co-opted from within. The inability of their leaders to put together a sustained and unified movement is also evidence of stronger sub-identities being manipulated against the larger interest of the movement, whether intentionally or otherwise.

What exactly the contours of such a movement will be, it is not clear now, and certainly it is not for an outsider, or non-Dalit to attempt to put this together prematurely. However, if the general direction of a viable movement is to be chartered, then our conclusions would seem to point to the need for mobilising a dynamic and adaptive ethnic identity, with a class consciousness that will redress their marginalised status, and forge linkages with similarly disadvantaged groups.

For this they must demand a cultural autonomy, which has for so long been effectively denied, as well as a reversal of the unequal exchange relationships, which have till now marginalised and exploited them. Together this will have the potential of questioning our models of growth and contributing to a new paradigm of development. In fact the response our society gives to such questions, will be a touchstone of the authenticity of its own democratic integration.

Moreover, it serves little purpose to romanticise a particular way of life. Rather we believe that like every human identity, must be dynamic and multiple to actualise the human potential that is present

in every human group. The danger however, in romanticising a marginalised people is to condemn them to exclusion, that we ourselves are only too reluctant to embrace, except in the security of our intellectual fantasies!

Today masses of people are moving out of their earlier isolation into a world they cannot quite comprehend. Those who can cope with such disorientation and are committed to the changes, often because they benefit from them, must develop new pertinent 'myths' and relevant theologies and/or ideologies. What the great confessional faiths once did must be done again in this new age. 'Mythos' is what makes our world meaningful; 'logos' explains the meaning and its implications for our lives (Panikkar: 21). We need both to cope with our everyday life. Having lost our old myths and abandoned our traditional beliefs, we are still in quest of a new 'mythos' and a corresponding 'logos' is consonance with our age.

This in the final analysis is the quest for the Dalits quest for identity with dignity. And the journey has begun.

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# 10.

## GOA 50 YEARS AFTER LIBERATION: LIGHT AND SHADOW

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THE POLITICAL TRAJECTORY

MULTIPLE CRISES

THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

CONCLUSION

### **Abstract**

Goa is the smallest state in the Union of India. After 50 years of liberation from five centuries of colonial rule, its challenge now is to be a beacon of light for the rest of the Union rather than a replication of its shadow side.

## **The Political Trajectory**

The democratic experience in Goa since liberation can be divided into four periods (de Souza, 2004). The first, from 1963 to 1977 was the two-party system, with the Maharashtra Gomantak Party (MGP) and the United Goan Party (UGP). The former had the support of the Bahujans, the latter that of the Christians. This two-party system seemed to work for a while.

However, with the breakup and collapse of the UGP the Congress made its entry into Goan politics, first as Congress (Urs) and then as Congress (Indira). This changed the political scenario from a regional two-party system to a 'national versus a regional party' one. This was the second period from 1977 to 1989, which saw the politics of manoeuvre being played out on the political stage even as the centre of decision-making began to shift to Delhi and North India. This weakened the bond between the people of a local constituency and its elected representative.

The third period, from 1989 to 2003, began with a surfeit of defections and chief ministers playing musical chairs. Goa has had the largest number of chief ministers in the shortest period of time. In assembly elections during this period, Goa had 44 defections although they were only 40 members in the legislative assembly (MLAs). Three very important decisions at the national level were taken in this period: the anti-defection law was passed by Parliament in 1985, but it was subverted and had to be corrected through the 91st Amendment; statehood came to Goa in 1987. By now another national party, the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), made its entry in the state politics in Goa. In the Congress versus BJP contest, the decision-making was even more focused on Delhi and the politics of manoeuvre increased further.

The fourth period, from the 91st Amendment in 2003 till today, was marked with an amendment to the anti-defection law to make it even more stringent. Now a defector had to resign and be re-elected. But even this could not end defections—in a small constituency, ways were found of subverting this, as happened in the by-election of Pinguinim in 2005. (de Souza 2010). The candidate defecting to the opposition party resigned but was re-elected in the by-elections with that party's support.

The factional politics of manoeuvre focuses on short-term partisan gains that compromise long-term state objectives. This results in a revolving-door scenario in state politics. Between January 1990 and

December 1994, Goa had seven governments, some chief ministers lasting eight months, or 19 days, or even as little as two days (de Souza, 2004).

Some pertinent questions now need to be considered further: is it true that the representatives of our democracy lack the requisite moral fibre for good governance? The only thing that controls them seems to be the legal system. But legality can never govern all of human conduct. Again, are small constituencies better or worse? Smaller constituencies were thought to bring the representatives closer to the people, but this has hardly happened in practice. Is the overall impact on political behaviour positive or negative? Is it encouraging more participation or more manoeuvring? Certainly, in Goan politics, small is not politically beautiful!

## **Multiple Crises**

We must read the multiple social crises of the state against this background of 'democracy's inconvenient fact' in the murky political meddle of Goan politics since liberation. The first is the political crisis of subaltern inclusion. The broader participation in a more inclusive political process does have its ambiguities. For the subaltern classes, their moment in history has arrived. After being marginalised for ages, at last they see their chance for a place in the sun. Their politics is played by improvised rules. The elites, however, perceive this as an institutional decay. The new politics has taken away many of their taken-for-granted advantages and privileges. Forced to play the game by the new rules, they are perhaps more subtle and less crude in their manoeuvres.

Yet none of this has reversed the unequal class relations between the haves and the have-nots even as new players assume the old roles. The politics of rent-taking and the politics of patronage continue with other rent-takers and new patrons. The changes turn out to be more positional than structural. Eventually, a broader inclusion and more active participation do yield a 'democratic dividend'. This is the positive aspect of democracy in our country. But this can also be overwhelmed by the democratic deficit, the negative aspect of democracy—the cynical and self-seeking politics of power. When democratic institutions are thus corrupted from within they must lose credibility and finally collapse. In the resulting uncertainty and confusion, the disconnect between government and people is an

invitation to majoritarian and populist regimes that are only too willing to step in and bridge the gap.

The second is the economic crisis of Goa's development. What is the economic model of development we want for Goa? Though the country itself is struggling with this question, Goa is a small state and it could decide for itself rather than follow on other states or wait for an answer at the national level. Some states have begun ruthlessly exploiting their natural resources, but this may well damage their environment to the tipping point of un-sustainability, if they have not already gone beyond the point of no return in places. Himachal Pradesh, on the other hand, has decided quite clearly to focus on agro-industry, a far more sustainable and egalitarian development. Can this be a viable choice for Goa? Will the mining lobby destroy the natural beauty of Goa and drive the state into an environmental disaster? What is the future we envisage for Goa? Should it be urban-industrial or agro-industrial, high-tech or service-oriented, capital intensive or employment-oriented? Should tourism be a priority sector and so, should it be high-end or low-end tourism? These are policy decisions that have to be made for the next 50 years. But we may be too preoccupied with immediate gains to balance the development of Goa between progress and sustainability.

There is a civic crisis in Goa of rising expectations of the subaltern and the new social equations this brings about. People have to adjust to a whole new society in which the roles and status of individuals is being redefined. Unfortunately, this could lead to mere positional circulations of elites rather than an egalitarian society. We see this in politics: at election time voters are free to throw out one set of rascals, only to see them replaced by more of the same, *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*.

There is the religious crisis that derives from the legacy of Western colonial Christianity. How do we cope with the wounded memories of religious conversions in Goa? We must come to terms with our past. Merely condemning or condoning it does not heal our present wounds or lighten the burden we carry into our future. How do we heal the hurt and redeem the guilt that still remains? There is today a religious revivalism, fundamentalism and even extremism that opens old wounds and exacerbates them. Rather than healing these wounding memories, these are exploited for partisan political purposes. This precipitates communal tensions that are tearing apart the fabric of Goan society.

Yet would it be chauvinistic to claim that Europe gave nothing to Goa. Part of the positive colonial legacy in Goa is the European

Enlightenment that came to Goa much before it reached the rest of the subcontinent. An example of this is inheritance law. Goa has a common civil code imposed by the colonial rulers. This remains a Constitutional ideal for the rest of the country but is still a long way from being realised. Personal laws must be made more gender-just, in the face of opposition from conservative leaders in the name of their religious tradition. A small state like Goa can be an exemplar in this and in other ways for the rest of the country as well.

The cultural crisis of collective identity in Goa is evident in the rapid change it is undergoing. This leaves traditions and institutions crumbling while the new ones are not yet in place. This creates a collective identity crisis. In a globalising world, the winds of change will inevitably blow about our house, but we need not close our windows and shut our doors for fear of being blown off our feet, if only we had them firmly on the ground. However, when cultural crises get politicised, another dynamic begins to play out, as has happened with the politics of language. The on-going controversies on the medium of instruction in schools, on the script to be used for Konkani, are less concerned with the practicalities involved than mobilising people to affirm linguistic identities.

Once collective identities are embedded in language, then they spill over into a politics of passion. What is the language of Goans, and what ought it to be? How far is the cultural identity of Goans embedded in their language? These are questions best taken forward by the social sciences and the creative arts, not defined by politicians and used for an electoral payoff. A common language is a crucial component of identity for a community but it is not the only one. Some identities have prevailed with a borrowed foreign language, not a local one. Urdu is not indigenous to any of the provinces of Pakistan. Hindi has superseded many regional languages in North Indian states, like Bhojpuri, Maithili, Magadi, Kadhoboli.... Yet regional identities still survive. In the British Isles, English has displaced Gaelic and Welsh, but the Scots, the Irish and the Welsh still have their own identities. The early emigrants brought English across the Atlantic with them and made it official for all who came later, but Americans are not English.

Goan identity could be positioned as an Indo-European interface, a Janus-faced construction looking both East and West. With its ancient pre-colonial history, and five centuries of Portuguese rule, Goa is uniquely placed on the subcontinent to be the bridge between the two, representing an Enlightened Europe for India and presenting



an incredible India to Europe. Goans would have to construct such a unique identity, though its welcoming openness and its sensitive tolerance, once a traditional component of Goan culture now under increasing stress.

## **The National Context**

The multiple crises in Goa must be seen in the larger context of the contemporary situation in the country where similar contradictions and dilemmas are even more evident. Our Parliament is failing, our democratic institutions are corroding. After being carefully nurtured by Nehru but later manipulated by his daughter, these democratic institutions have by now lost much of their credibility and legitimacy. They are increasingly perceived to be manipulated by corrupt politicians and their partisan and short-sighted politics. This is not unusual when the democratic base is broadened to include the excluded. It is a process that must be pursued as vigorously as it must be carefully monitored and corrected to be put back on track. Or else, in the resulting confusion, such a democratic inclusion may be co-opted by authoritarian leaders and majoritarian politics. We already have some waiting to project themselves on the national stage from the shadows of their divisive state policies that favour some and rubbish others.

As a people, we seem to be divided on our vision for the country. Do we want to be a powerful nation, a major player on the world's stage, or a just and decent people, a model for all of enriching unity in our multiform diversity? Are we still inspired by the ideals of our freedom struggle and the Constitution our founding fathers gave us or are we exchanging these for a mess of pottage of affluence and consumerism? The frequent comparisons we make of ourselves with China are a revealing indicator of this ambiguity. There is danger that our impatience with the very obvious democratic deficit may bring us to compromise and not build further on our equally real democratic dividend. Democracy is like trench warfare with incremental gains rather than major battles and victories. Every country that has put democracy in place has gone through such crises and some have lost out with them as well. The peoples who have won their freedom from colonial rule have so easily submitted to dictatorships and authoritarianism. The countries on the fringe of the South Asian

subcontinent are evidence of this and might well presage our own future if we do not stem the rot soon.

India was the first country in the non-Western world to promulgate a democratic constitution as the sun set on the British Empire. In spite of a brief intermission with Indira Gandhi's Emergency, 1975-77, its popular endorsement explains 'India's unusual record as a robust, non-Western democracy' (Sen 2005, 13). The active, and at times even chaotic participation of *The Argumentative Indian*, accounts for 'the tenacious persistence of that system, in contrast to many other countries where democracy has intermittently made cameo appearances' (ibid.). We are justly proud of our electoral democracy and it is indeed a great achievement. India is the only country ever to have Universal suffrage from the beginning of its democratic republic. No other democracy started thus. The democratic right to vote was always restricted at first to property owners, then gradually expanded to other male citizens, and lastly to women. And even then indirect ways of restricting the vote to 'our kind of people' was widely practised. India's electoral democracy is a lesson to the world. The sheer size of our electorate and the logistics involved, dwarf any elections elsewhere. There are electoral abuses and subversions by corrupt and criminal politicians that need urgent electoral reform and better and more stringent electoral laws. Yet by and large our elections are acknowledged to be free and fair, even though admittedly there is surely room for making them more so.

But our real problem is substantive democracy, the values and norms that are the basis of democratic procedures. These cannot be legislated; they must be socialised in an alert and active citizenry. Without this we will forfeit our democracy, our democratic rights will be compromised and our civil liberties will not last. As Lord Acton said, 'The price of liberty is eternal vigilance.' This is even more so when we are constitutionally committed to pursue liberty with equality and fraternity.

This is an immense challenge to our hierarchical and patriarchal society, still so feudal and riven with caste and factionalism. But we do have a tradition of discussion and debate. Traditionally, in village panchayats all had a right to participate, though all were not treated equally. Persons denied a hearing could legitimately protest by going on a *dharna* (a sit-in) to draw attention to their cause. Discussion was the way of building a consensus for addressing a problem, but it is a slow and even fragile process. This perhaps is why democracy has taken root in India to the extent it has, for democracy can be perceived

as 'government by discussion' (Buchanan 1954, 120). But lest we focus too exclusively on the democratic deficit it is appropriate to recall some recent successes of our democratic dividend. The Right to Information Act, 2005, has forced a certain transparency on our governance. A Constitutional Amendment in 2009 has made education a fundamental right for children between six and fourteen years. The right to food to provide food security to the poor, is on the anvil as is the right to work. A Lokpal Bill once enacted into law will empower an ombudsman against corruption across the board.

## Conclusion

This is the larger national context in which Goa is embedded. The dialectic between the dividend and deficit of democracy at the national level is reflected at the state level, and Goa is no exception to this. To perceive Goa thus lends perceptiveness to the crises we experience and challenges we must face. Our future will be assured when the democratic dividend outweighs the democratic deficit. After 50 years of liberation we must realise that the way forward depends not just on our leaders but on all of us as citizens as well. As we make demands on our politicians and leaders, we must also make corresponding demands on ourselves as citizens. Tempting shortcuts in dealing with the scenario just sketched only become disastrous short circuits once taken.

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# 11.

## MODERNISATION AND NEW AVATARS OF CASTE

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MODERNISATION AND ITS CHALLENGES

PERSPECTIVES ON CASTE

DIVERGENT APPROACHES

HISTORICAL SOURCES

THEORETICAL UNDERSTANDINGS

DIALOGUE FOR PRAXIS

REFERENCES

### Abstract

Modernisation in India is significant but will the modernizing elites be able to carry the tradition-bound masses or will caste transmute into new avatars?

### Introduction

Fr. Paul de la Guérivière was a man of action with a passion for ideas. In this sense, he was a true organic intellectual'. (Gramsci 1996: 6) In the best tradition of a Jesuit sent on a mission he rooted and grounded himself where he was missioned to become an integral part of the people and their struggles for liberation. Here was a rare activist intellectual, willing to engage with, and open to other people's ideas on their terms, without reducing them to his own. In my encounters with Paul G, as he was affectionately called, I found a man of understanding and depth, who never seemed to age. I write this in gratitude to a Jesuit icon. This contribution is meant for the students and the young activists with whom Paul G worked with throughout his long life.

## Modernisation and Its Challenges

The process of modernisation in India is of significance not only because of the size of the country and the one billion-plus people involved, but also because India is one of the oldest surviving civilisations that has maintained a continuing cultural unity down the centuries of its diverse history. The more remarkable is this since it has been achieved without being tied to any particular political system or an organised church. It is interesting to speculate whether the modernisation process will result in a new history: will the modernizing elites at the 'centre' be able to carry the tradition-bound masses at the 'periphery'? (Shils 1970: 1) Or will caste transmute into new avatars?

Clearly modernisation implies a process of social change, but change in a particular direction. A good starting point to describe this direction might be Daniel Lerner. Moving away from an exclusively economic perspective, he distinguishes modernisation as 'the process of social change in which development is the economic component.' (Lerner D 1968: 386) Because economic measures are easily susceptible to comparison often enough they have been used to measure the development of a society and then infer the extent of its modernisation from it. But modernisation as a social process is more comprehensive than economic development and not reducible to econometric quantification.

The characteristics that Lerner lists as the 'operational values' of modernity are:

- (1) a degree of self-sustaining growth in the economy...
  - (2) a measure of public participation in the polity...
  - (3) a diffusion of secular-rational norms in the culture...
  - (4) an increment of mobility in the society... and
  - (5) a corresponding transformation in the model personality...
- (ibid.)

S. N. Eisenstadt's conceptualisation of modernity is in basic agreement with Lerner but he has a more institutional emphasis. (Eisenstadt 1968: xxv) He extends A. Gerschenkron's thesis from the (Gerschenkron 1962) economic field to all major institutional spheres. Thus for him the two distinguishing characteristics of modernisation are 'a high level of structural differentiation and of so-called 'social mobilisation' and 'a relatively large-scale, unified, and centralized institutional framework.' (Eisenstadt 1966 : 43)

A valuable contribution of Eisenstadt is that he conceives of modernisation not as an inevitable process, as some have conceived evolution, but as a problematic one. In fact the 'central problem and challenge of modernisation' is precisely 'the problem of *sustained* development, i.e., the ability of developing an institutional structure capable of absorbing continually changing problems and demands.' (Eisenstadt 1968: xxiii) Inadequate institutional solutions to this problem might lead to disintegration or to regression and we have historical examples of this. The successful outcome of this modernisation process depends on 'a strong centre, structural autonomy and flexibility of social strata.' (*ibid.*: xxvii)

Once modernisation is seen as a multi-dimensional process, the tradition-modernity dichotomy begins to have less meaning, except as representing two ideal types at the extremes of the continuum. For as the Rudolphs are at pains to show traditional elements persist even in so 'modern' a society as the United States, and they conclude 'that there may be certain persistent requirements of the human condition that tradition, as it is expressed in the past of particular nations, can and does satisfy.' (Rudolph & Rudolph 1967: 4) So too, elements of modernity can be found in traditional societies and once modernisation is initiated, these become the points of departure that will assist and colour the process.

With reference to India, the official concept of modernity can be found specified in the Constitution. In the proclamation of fundamental rights, in the abolition of any legal concession to caste and communal discrimination—except in the promotion of the advancement of the backward sections of society—in the directive principles towards a democratic socialism, the Constitution of India attempts to set forth a general programme for the reconstruction of Indian society. (Galanter 1962: 331-358) The five-year plans have been far-reaching efforts to implement a programme of planned socio-economic and political development. The commitment of the Indian elites to the goal of modernisation is apparent but the development of an institutional structure to cope with the challenge still remains a crucial problem.

## Perspectives on Caste

In our society, 'turn in any direction you like, caste is the monster that crosses your path. You cannot have political reform, you cannot have economic reform, unless you kill this monster.'

(Ambedkar 1968: 37) 'Caste has been the fundamental institution of traditional Indian society', writes Andre Beteille. (Beteille 1971: 225) Indeed it is so basic to Hindu society that M. N. Srinivas can say, 'it is impossible to detach Hinduism from the caste system.' (Srinivas 1962: 150) But the non-Hindu communities in India are also pervaded by caste, for although Christians, Muslims and Sikhs were ideologically opposed to such an ideal of 'institutional inequality', to borrow a term from Lloyd Fallers, (Fallers 1973) they presented no practical alternative social organisation, at least no viable one in the Indian context, and so ended up being acculturated into the caste system.

As an institution caste has both structure and values, it is both a principle of social organisation and a social ideology. One would naturally expect to find the fullest expression of this institution in Hindu society where it originated, but other communal groups on the sub-continent have closely related if more latent expressions of the same.

In the context of the modernisation process, caste is of special interest because it represents the very anti-thesis of the usual conception of modernity. Talcott Parsons' pattern-variables (1951: 53-109) were first used by Bert Hoselitz to distinguish developed from underdeveloped societies, (1960) to define modernity. Here caste comes out at the opposite extreme each time: affective not neutrality, collectively not self-oriented, particularistic not Universalist, ascriptive not achieved, specific not diffused. Given, then, the centrality of caste in Indian society and its antithetical relation to modernity, we can see immediately that any change in this institution would be of critical impact on the modernisation process in India. Indeed, we can expect a crucial 'multiplier effect' for any change in this area.

However, when we come to the empirical evidence available, the indications are not as direct as one might expect. In fact we find investigators concluding to opposite trends. Thus G. S. Ghurye, considered the doyen of Indian sociology and a persevering observer of the changing social scene concludes a study in 1952 thus:

'The community-aspect of caste has thus been made more comprehensive, extensive and permanent. More and more of an individual's interests are being catered for by caste; the feeling of caste solidarity is now so strong that it is truly described as caste patriotism.' (Ghurye 1952 : 169)



In later updated editions of the work he reaffirms his basic thesis and in 1969 is still bemoaning 'caste patriotism' as an 'unhealthy atmosphere for the growth of national consciousness.' (Ghurye 1969) M. N. Srinivas following his teacher is even more pessimistic:

'In general it may be confidently said that the last hundred years has seen a great increase in caste solidarity, and the concomitant decrease of a sense of interdependence between different castes living in a region.' (Srinivas 1962: 75)

Not only is there an increase in the intensity of caste feeling, but a greater spatial extension of it. Srinivas sees caste as adapting and extending in the context of the changing social scene. The 1957 general elections gave evidence of the extent caste considerations have pervaded democratic politics and awakened the intelligentsia to the de facto realities influencing the voter. Dr. Kathleen Gough's study in South India gives an example of a caste-labour union and there are numerous instances of caste associations of all types from welfare societies to pressure groups. We are all aware that 'caste is an institution of prodigious strength and it will take a lot of beating before it will die.' (Gough 1960: 59)

However, these authors seem to be sketching only half the scene. There is another set that points to a different picture. Thus Beteille speaks of 'many areas of life that are becoming progressively 'caste free' as 'a relatively closed social system is being transformed into one which is relatively open.' (Beteille 1971: 6) And yet caste can be oppressive but it can also provide a basis for struggle against oppression. It can at once be a traditionaliser and a moderniser. It has the potentiality of being a two-pronged catalyst: as a purveyor of collective identity and annihilator of the same hierarchical order from where collective identity is drawn. (Kothari 1994: 1590)

However, the basic difference here seems to arise from the frame of reference within which the data is being interpreted. The question that is implicitly being asked especially by the first group —those who see an increase in casteism — is this: is caste disappearing? And their observations provide an emphatically negative answer. But then no social institution 'disappears', especially one so embedded as caste. The *more realistic* question to ask is: what new forms, new avatars is caste taking, if any, in the changing situation and how do these affect the modernisation process?

However, to set the question thus raised in a broader framework, it is imperative to grasp the meaning of caste and its historical context. For all change no matter how drastic it is always includes some

continuity with the past that is crucial to a complete understanding of the present, and more so to a projection of the future, but first we must delimit more carefully what we mean by caste.

## Divergent Approaches

There are two different senses in which caste is used and these give rise to two divergent interpretations of its origin and meaning. 'As an ethnographic category it refers exclusively to a system of social organisation peculiar to Hindu India, but as a sociological category it may denote almost any kind of class structure of exceptional rigidity.' (Leach 1960: 1)

Social scientists more anthropologically inclined tend to the first sense. These define caste with a list of cultural traits that supposedly form a syndrome. Hutton enumerates seven such characteristics: endogamy, restrictions on commensality, hierarchical grading of castes, the concept of pollution related to food, sex and ritual, association with traditional occupations, hereditary ascription of caste status, the prestige of the Brahmin. (Hutton 1946: 49)

However, this procedure has been rightly criticized for such lists give us 'a *combination* of distinct features, a combination which apparently springs from an historical accident.' (Dumont 1972: 63) And so it does not get us beyond a purely historical explanation of caste. Going beyond this, then, some anthropologists have attempted a 'structural analysis' to get to the 'deep structural' principle from which the traits derive. A.M. Hocart was the first to single out the principle of hierarchy in relation to caste. (Hocart 1950) He held it to be essentially a religious hierarchy deriving directly from religious ceremony. Modifying this somewhat and elaborating it further, Dumont concludes to the opposition between the pure and the impure that is constitutive of this ritual hierarchy and the separation of the jatis, the local sub-castes.

This approach, then, has tended to stress the attributional or cultural dimension of caste as opposed to the interactional or structural one, and so restricts the term to the Indian context. Dumont has argued this brief with repeated emphasis and summarises his case in 'Caste: a phenomenon of social structure or an aspect of Indian culture?' (de Reuck, A. and J. Knight. eds., 1967: 28-38)

On the other hand, sociologists, searching for a more general and comparative scheme in which to conceptualize caste have interpreted

the phenomena within the stratification model. Stratification systems are seen to lie on a continuum from closed to open. Thus Owen Lynch considers that 'the difference between a real class system and a real caste system is based upon which end of the continuum, from mutually exclusive to cross-cutting status-sets, they approach.' (Lynch 1969: 12) Writing in the New York Tribune in 1853, Karl Marx used his economic class stratification model to explain caste in India and rather precipitously already then predicted the inevitable collapse of the caste system before the progress of industrialisation. (Marx **1942**: V. II, 652) The failure of his prophecy would seem to be an indication of the limitations of his theory on caste, at least in the historical context of India.

The classic Weberian model of class, status and power has provided a more adequate and more frequently used schema for a sociological understanding of caste. Here caste is interpreted as a special kind of status group based on the principle of a 'clan charisma' that is inherited. The proliferation of castes is accounted for by 'caste schism'. (Weber 1968: 180, 194) that may derive from several factors, migration, new sect formation, occupational differentiation, etc.. This model allows for the interaction of the different orders. Hence while caste differentiation is primarily religious, political power cooperates to legitimate it and economic interests help to sustain it. (ibid.: 183, 189) The fact that the phenomena of caste are not reduced to a single dimension provides a take-off point for a multivariate analysis that has been used to extensively in stratification studies

This second approach lays greater emphasis on the interactional aspect of caste in contrast to the attributional one, and so has tended to stress the homology between caste and other stratification systems.

## Historical Sources

The difference between these two approaches is carried even to the sources of evidence they fall back on. Two principal sources can be distinguished: the literacy and the historical. The first derives from the sacred books of the law, the *Smṛiti* and the *Dharmashastra*, which provide instructions on the divine origins of the social order, the detailed regulations which should govern social intercourse, punishments for disregarding the injunctions,... prescriptions for cleansing after ceremonial pollution... the reinforcing doctrine of the natural inequality of the great social classes due to their descent from differential origins. (Pohlman 1951: 375)

The second source derives from objective historical and field research. In the West, India was first studied by Indologists who were interested in her languages and literature, they were not historians or social scientists. So one can understand why the literary source of evidence was predominantly used in early studies on India, and how the ideological approach to caste was adopted. But this was essentially a Brahminical view. Today there is an increasing emphasis on the second source and a consequent change in the historical picture of caste. Although there is divergence between these two pictures of caste, they must be considered in conjunction if a comprehensive understanding is to be attempted, for there is always an important reciprocity between social ideological and social reality.

The official Hindu ideology of caste is expressed in the scheme of the *varnas* into which all sub-castes are grouped. Srinivas recounts for us its main features:

(1) There is a single all-India Hierarchy without any variations between one region and another; (2) there are only four *varnas*, or, if the Harijans, who are literally 'beyond the pale' of caste, are included, five; (3) the hierarchy is clear: and (4) it is immutable.' (Srinivas 1966: 23)

But he criticizes the concept as being too one-sided: 'concentration on *varna* also meant stressing the attributional or ritual factors in mutual caste ranking at the expense of economic and political factors.' (Srinivas 1962: 8) And elsewhere he concludes: 'the fact that the concept continues to be relevant for understanding some aspects of caste and has only helped to perpetuate the misconceptions and distortions implicit in it.' (Srinivas: 1966: 1)

Srinivas insists that the social reality of the caste system is not *varna* - the ideological categorisation - but *jati* - the sub-caste that is the actually interacting group. Here that he finds evidence to challenge and modify the ideological implications of *varna*. But just when we might expect the 'the devaluation of *varna* as a scientific concept' we find 'its inflation as the social ideology of mobility movements.' (Rudolph & Rudolph: 1967: 117) Indeed if *varna* is not a behavioural concept, it does in fact underlie 'jati', (Dumont 1970: 162) and its reality shaping possibilities cannot be denied.

Srinivas is far too acute a sociologist, however, not to give weightage to the ideological elements in the institution of caste. In his concept of 'sanskritisation' he has made a crucial contribution to our understanding of caste in its historical context. For her he links the ideological hierarchy with interactional mobility and does away with

the old stereotype of caste as an institution that admitted of no change or mobility.

Srinivas defines the process for us thus: 'Sanskritisation is the process by which a 'low' Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual, ideology, and way of life in the direction of a high, and frequently, 'twice-born' caste.' (Srinivas 1966: 6) He considers the most important reference group in this process, the Brahmin but in his later writings concedes the prevalence of other reference models as well. In fact the 'culturally patterned expressiveness of the Kshatriya' is more accessible and has been more widely used than the 'culturally patterned asceticism of the Brahmins'. (Srinivas 1966: 6)

Historical evidence for this process is now undisputed. 'Sanskritisation has been a major process of cultural change in Indian history, and it has occurred in every part of the Indian subcontinent. It may have been more active at some periods than at others, and some parts of India are more Sanskritized than others, but there is no doubt that the process has been Universal.' (Srinivas: 1966: 23) For instance, K. M. Pannikar maintains that the last true Kshatriyas were the Nandas who disappeared in the fifth century. (Panikkar, 1956: 8) Since then the Sudras have produced an unusually large number of royal families. In fact it was always the king, the secular power that determined the hierarchical order of castes on the advice of the Brahmins, the religious authority.

Strictly speaking Sanskritisation can occur independently of the acquisition of economic and political power but this would hardly result in social mobility in any meaningful sense for Srinivas. More usually a dominant group would sanskritise its lifestyle and be able to claim higher status and use its power in support of its claim. There were two important channels of mobility in pre-British India. The inherent political instability of pre-British India, especially at the lower levels provided one important such source until the *Pax Britannica* froze the political situation. The other was the availability of land through geographic emigration until over-population crowded out that possibility too.

Thus through the process of Sanskritisation, changes in economic interest and political power of groups could be accommodated for it provided a symbolic justification in terms of the caste ideology for the de facto results of the interactional process. It is important to note that the changes we are considering are positional not structural and the mobility here refers not to individual mobility in the span of a lifetime, or familial mobility across a generation, but to communal

mobility that spans many generations. Such social mobility cannot be measured by the criteria developed for an individualist society as in the West. In fact by such criteria it may not even be noticed. What is important for our consideration here is not the extent of this mobility but its kind. The need to symbolically justify *de facto* mobility by Sanskritisation is an important indication of the crucial role of ideology in any process of modernisation and change in India. This is a point to which we shall return later.

The beginning of the British period in India sees a new process of social change emerging which Srinivas calls 'Westernisation'. He rejects Lerner's term of 'modernisation' because it implies a rationalisation of means as well as goals and so he regards it as less ethically neutral. (Srinivas 1966: 23) He uses 'the term 'Westernisation' to characterize the changes brought about in Indian society and culture as a result of over a hundred and fifty years of British rule, and the term subsumes changes occurring at different levels – technology, institutions, ideology, values.' (ibid.: 52) This process includes humanitarianism, egalitarianism and secularism.

Notice that 'Westernisation' runs in a direction opposite to that of 'Sanskritisation', but whereas the latter has affected the whole of Indian society for centuries, the former is a comparatively recent and incomplete phenomenon, largely an urban one besides, but rapidly spreading to developing rural areas as well. However, there is a basic similarity between the two, both are at the cultural level: 'to describe the social changes in modern India in terms of Sanskritisation and Westernisation is to describe it primarily in cultural and not structural terms.' (Srinivas 1962: 55) Further, both processes are based on a 'psychology of borrowing'. And so we should not be surprised, in the context of modernisation, to find a continuance between the two. In fact Srinivas does well to point out that the Brahmins, who were the most important model and the top of the Sanskritisation process, were the first to Westernize. (ibid., 86) And long before the British left with India's Independence, there was already an elite committed to the modernisation of India. Referring to the Indian Mutiny of 1857 Srinivas writes:

"The Mutiny shook the rulers and forced them to an agonizing reprisal of the policy toward India. It resulted in their turning away from innovation, in abandoning the reform of Indian institutions and customs however repugnant to them. But just as the British hopes of the early modernisation of Indian

began to fade, the new class of the Westernized elite was beginning to emerge in some strength. The white man was aware that his burden had already begun to shift onto brown shoulders, and that very soon he would start resisting the transfer of his burden.' (Srinivas 1966: 83)

## **Theoretical Understandings**

We have distinguished two basic approaches to the institution of caste: one interactional with an emphasis on structure and the stratification model, the other ideological with an emphasis on culture and a hierarchical model. Both approaches are concerned with the same changing social reality of caste today but we need hardly be surprised to find them make divergent interpretations and conclusions about its relation to the modernisation process.

The interactional approach is the more prevalent one today. However, the unidimensional model has been found inadequate, especially the orthodox Marxist model with its economic reductionism seems hardly credible when the religious and political overtones of caste are reduced to an epiphenomena in the superstructure. But the valuable contribution of the Marxist has been to urge the use of a conflict model in the understanding of caste today. When this is set in the context of a multi-dimensional interpretation, the conclusions are the more insightful.

The classic multidimensional model of Weber has greater potentiality for a better understanding of caste and has been frequently used ever since Weber himself first applied it to caste. Andre Beteille has applied the Weberian model in a careful case study of a South Indian village. (Beteille 1971) The village was chosen within the ambit of influence of a fair-sized town and so while we might have to be careful of any conclusive generalisations, we may at least regard the case study as indicative of the direction in which rural India is changing.

Beteille concludes to a shift from a closed to an open stratification system. Whereas fifty years ago the caste structure largely subsumed economic and political gradations, today with the emergence of caste-free occupations and power resources other than the ones tied to land, there is less status consistency between the three areas of caste, class and power, and a trend to the autonomisation of each. As the village gets articulated with the outside world it is drawn into its economic and political system, which ultimately changes the cultural order as



well. 'Social mobility, economic change, and political modernisation lead to the creation not only of new relations, but also of new values, new attitudes, and new aspirations.' (*ibid.*: 222) Thus while 'the caste system still constitutes in many ways the basic structure of Indian society,' (*ibid.*: 146) and though it is a drag on modernisation the direction of the change for Beteille is clear. And so he concludes:

'In sum, the process of economic change and political modernisation have led the productive system and the organisation of power to acquire an increasing autonomy. In the concrete, the overlap between the hierarchies of caste, class, and power has been progressively reduced. A new economic order is emerging in the towns and cities which is not based upon caste in the same way in which the traditional order was. The economy of the village is drawn increasingly into the orbit of this new economic order. Similarly, the new political order is at least formally independent of caste, and it too has an important effect on the social life of the village.' (*ibid.*: 225)

Beteille is more concerned in his study with the evidence for this change than in explaining the interactional dynamics involved.

Using Robert Merton's reference group theory, Owen Lynch attempts to do this. According to Merton 'reference group theory aims to systematize the determinants and consequences of those processes of evaluation and self-appraisal in which the individual takes the values and standards of other individuals and groups as a comparative frame of reference.' (Merton 1957: 234) Applying this to caste Lynch distinguishes three types of reference groups: a reference of imitation, of identification – 'to which an individual refers when identifying himself' – and 'a negative reference group which stands as one's enemy or as the denier of the claims of one's group.' (Lynch: 1969: 9) The reference chosen will always be in terms of 'gaining and legitimating access to strategic resources in a particular society.' (Lynch 1969: 219)

The Sanskritisation that was the chief channel of mobility in pre-independence India can very easily be described in terms of this theory. But the socio-economic changes in post-independence India and particularly the dominant status of 'citizen' and 'voter' that lower caste groups have activated makes political participation serve as a fundamental alternative towards mobility instead of Sanskritisation. Indeed, the whole Buddhist movement among the Dalits is rightly interpreted as a rejection of Sanskritisation. Lynch predicts 'that political participation as presented in this book is the path that mobility movements will increasingly follow in India.' (*ibid.*: 214)



The effect of this participation on caste as an adaptive institution is clearly twofold: a conservative one on the internal social organisation of caste which will tend to preserve its integrity to mobilize the more effectively; and a more creative one in its external relations to other castes as they attempt to maximize their share of scarce resources to power, prestige and wealth, and evolve a 'civil politics of primordial compromise' (ibid.: 209) since the very interdependence brought about by the market economy and democratic politics would give groups the power of countervailing the objectives of the others. The first effect will tend to conserve caste loyalties, the second to create new ones. Thus Lynch concludes: 'The very process of modernisation itself brings forth and exacerbates the competing loyalties of citizenship and caste statutes in the struggle of a new state to become a nation.' (ibid.)

*The Politics of Untouchability* (Lynch 1969) studied the Chamars, a Dalit caste in Agra that converted to Buddhism. But the conclusions can almost directly be extended to the Dalit Buddhists of Maharashtra and is largely valid for most lower-caste mobility movements. However, insightful as Lynch's study is it does not take cognizance enough of the fact of conflict that is increasingly in evidence today. For this we will follow the Rudolphs.

One can see that they are clearly using a stratification model from the way they describe their starting point: 'At independence Indian society encompassed active but receding feudal classes, a growing, vigorous but divided bourgeoisie, a visible important but still immature industrial economy, and a massive peasantry.' (Rudolph & Rudolph 1967: 18) What is peculiar to Indian society is the relative weight in traditional Indian society of micro- as against macro-institutions. The decentralized proliferation and relative autonomy of micro-institutions has immunized Indian society to the pressures of revolution and reaction, since 'India's traditional macro-institutions were difficult to attack or defend nationally.' (ibid.: 18) For as Iravati Karve wrote: 'Hindu society has survived over 2000 years of continuous pressure from foreign conquerors and new religions. The survival became possible through its very structural looseness.' (Karve 1961: 127)

The persistence of caste, then, is not the subject of *The Modernity of Tradition*, but the way caste has 'transformed and transvalued itself' (Rudolph & Rudolph 1967: 23) and 'contributed to the success of political democracy by helping India's mass electorate to participate meaningfully and effectively in it.' (ibid.: 29) A decisive

role in this process is played by the caste association. (ibid.: 24) These are 'para-communities that enable members of castes to pursue social mobility, political power, and economic advantage.' (ibid.: 36)

At first the caste association does carry over many of the traditional ascriptive and sacral features of caste, but as it begins to come to terms with the new changing social realities and realizes the limits of its mobilisation potential based on ascriptive and sacral features, these atrophy since they are no longer relevant to the self-interest of the association, which now functions more like a voluntary pressure group. Intense loyalties and exclusive identities characteristic of a traditional ascription organisation are now subject to cross-cutting pressures and diluted as associations interact – conflict and compromise, differentiate and coalesce – as they jockey for a share of the scarce resources. The caste associations, then, play a crucial role in 'both levelling the sacred and hierarchical caste order and replacing it.' (ibid.: 24)

The Rudolphs distinguish three types of mobilisation that follow each other. First, 'vertical mobilisation': 'the marshalling of political support by traditional notables in local societies that are organized and integrated by rank, mutual dependence, and the legitimacy of traditional authority.' (ibid.: 25) Here the dominant caste is the agent of mobilisation and such a process can function only as long as the subordinate groups do not challenge the legitimacy of the traditional order. Second, 'horizontal mobilisation': 'the marshalling of popular political support by political parties (and other integrative structures) from viable, but internally differentiated, communities through parallel appeals to ideology, sentiment, and interest.' (ibid. 27) Here the agent of mobilisation is the political party.

As the caste association evolves from a traditional ascriptive community to a voluntary interest group, it undergoes an internal differentiation as new identities and interests do not coincide. This is paralleled by an external integration into larger associations that express new shared interests, symbols, and norms. This results in 'the decompression of caste', 'a dilution and diffusion of affective and structural bonds,' (ibid.: 101) as alternative channels for profit, prestige, and power emerge.

The analysis of caste in *The Modernity of Tradition* focuses on the interactional and structural aspects, but the authors are aware of the need for 'a profound change in the nature of human sensibility' for 'a Universalisation of fellow feeling' that will parallel the

‘Universalisation of power’. (ibid.: 103) Here the official ideology as enshrined in the Constitution of India is far ahead of the sensitivity of the people. However, the authors describe how ‘four processes are making Indians more alike and, in doing so, are laying the necessary but not sufficient conditions for national integration: ascriptive boundaries are expanding; the culture and status of the twice-born *varnas* are spreading to the Sundra castes; Westernisation is affecting the ideas and occupations of broader sections of society; and secularisation is dismantling ritual barriers and disarming sacred sanctions.’ (ibid.: 111)

But these processes are most effective in the midrange of the caste hierarchy. If we would follow the authors’ suggestion and use ‘untouchability’ as a test for fellow feeling, then we would see in the status of the Dalits today that there still remains much to be done before inequality and discrimination is remedied. What is of more interest, however, is the conflict model they have used to interpret present caste conflicts as playing a constructive role in modernisation, though these conflicts have alarmed many observers yet. This conclusion to the functionality of conflict is very much in the mainstream of conflict sociology and its extension to the area of caste – an area seen as one of traditional cooperation – is a valuable contribution to our understanding of caste today.

The interactional approach to caste draws attention to the structural aspect as opposed to the cultural one. However, for an institution like caste, the supporting ‘ideology’ is of critical importance to a proper understanding. Louis Dumont is emphatic in rejecting any explanation of caste that derives ‘exclusively from the morphology of groups, without considering the ideology which in every case underlies behaviour.’ (Dumont 1972: 261) In fact, conventional stratification theories have an implicit ideological bias that derives from an individualist Western culture. That is why Lloyd Fallers rejects their cross-cultural application and prefers the concept of ‘institutionalized inequality’. In the Indian context Dumont has made an incisive statement against the use of a stratification model for caste in his *Homo Hierarchicus* and has forced attention to the ideological approach once again. (Dumont 1972)

In urging the relevance of the principle of hierarchy Dumont notes how alien it is to the modern mentality. ‘Modern man is virtually incapable of fully recognizing it. For a start, he simply fails to notice it. If it does force itself on his attention he tends to eliminate it as an epiphenomenon.’ (ibid.) Modern man’s ideology is decidedly

egalitarian and individualistic, diametrically opposite to a hierarchical and collectivist one. But whereas equality is an ideal to be socially realised, hierarchy is a reality that is a societal given. For if a society is functionally differentiated it must also be value integrated to be viable. This inevitably introduces a rank order and the principle of hierarchy with it.

Thus Parsons (Parsons 1951) notes that if action is to be goal oriented it must be evaluative in terms of the goal. 'But given the process of evaluation, the probability is that it will serve to differentiate entities in a rank order ....it is a condition of social system that there should be an integration of the value-standards of the component units to constitute a common value system.' (cited. Dumont 1972: 19) Commenting on this Dumont observes: man does not only think, he acts. He has not only ideas, but values. To adopt a value is to introduce hierarchy.' (Dumont 1972: 54)

A hierarchy, then, integrates a society by reference to its values. Dumont defines hierarchy 'as the *principle by which the elements of a whole are ranked in relation to the whole.*' (ibid.: 104) However, this ranking is not in terms of 'a scale of power' but of 'a gradation of statuses'. For hierarchy expresses, not the material unity of a society brought about by a generalized medium of exchange like power, or money, or prestige. This is precisely how the stratification model derives. Rather it essentially expresses its conceptual or symbolic unity, one that includes that social order in a cosmic one.

The symbolic unity is elaborated in the hierarchical relation, 'a relation between larger and smaller, or more precisely between that which encompasses and that which is encompassed.' (ibid.: 24) Elaborating this further Dumont explains: 'in every society one aspect of social life receives a primary value stress and simultaneously is made to encompass all others and express them as far as it can.' (Dumont 1967: 33) In the context of the caste system, which is a religious hierarchy, this would mean that 'functions in which the religious aspect is minimal are *encompassed* within a system that is decisively shaped by religious functions.' (ibid.) This religious hierarchy is ritually expressed in the opposition between the 'pure' and the 'impure'. It is this fundamental dichotomy that underlies the separateness and distinction between caste, while including them all in a hierarchical whole.

Dumont then sketches this hierarchical relation in the different spheres of social activity—the division of labour, commensality and connubiality – and he attempts to establish the

hierarchical principle as the basic structure of Indian society in spite of regional and communal differences of detail. We cannot follow him through the maze of evidence and detail, but what does need to be stressed here is that the ideology of *Homo Hierarchicus* (Dumont 1972) is a religious and ritualistic one, and his orientation collectivist and holistic. In fact, for him the 'individual' as a 'normative subject of institutions' (Dumont 1972: 180) is quite unknown in India. The idea of the individuality exists outside the caste hierarchy, outside society, in the sanyasi who renounces the world and society.

Dumont's concept of hierarchy as applied to caste, which he considers a case of 'pure hierarchy', is indeed challenging but not without its critics. McKim Marriott in a recent study finds a remarkable consensus about caste hierarchical rankings but he links it primarily to dimensions of community structure and not to an ideology. He concludes his study thus:

the ritual hierarchy itself in part grows out of, expresses, and tends to remain positively correlated with, and therefore indirectly influenced by economic, political, and other non-ritual hierarchies of interaction. Most castes appear ultimately to achieve positions in the ritual hierarchy which are in harmony with their relative possession of wealth and power. (Marriott 1965: 97-98)

Dumont is aware of such 'status consistency' but he still insists on the primacy of attribution over interaction as factor in the ranking order. Thus in reference to the untouchables he writes 'that the overwhelming religious (sensibility) infuscates these castes in effect expresses and encompasses their strict secular dependence on the dominant castes.' (Dumont 1972: 180) While there is social mobility, through the symbolic justification implied in the process of Sanskritisation, this is accommodated as positional, not structural change. This is in effect a reaffirmation of the hierarchical principle.

The ideological emphasis of Dumont derives from the French structuralist approach that attempts to analyse social organisation in terms of the 'deep structures' that subsume, encompass, the interactional aspects. This approach is fairly successful in an analysis of a stable social situation where we would expect a consistent reciprocity between structure and culture. But in the context of social change there may arise inconsistencies and strains between these two elements as cultural lags develop, in which either element could be a

primary factor precipitating the change. A comprehensive explanation of change must include both elements, especially in the context of modernisation, since this implies both structural and cultural changes of far reaching consequences.

Dumont's analysis while very insightful in its interpretation of the traditional caste system, needs to be complemented in its analysis of the changing social situation today. However, his efforts do establish the importance of the principle of hierarchy not only in the Indian context where it finds an expression in the pure form of caste, but as a Universal principle of human society. For where hierarchy is suppressed it re-emerges in pathological proportions: either as racism or totalitarianism. It is interesting to note that the United States, a society that has consistently denied hierarchy in favour of a democratic egalitarianism, has been so deeply racist. For 'in a Universe in which men are conceived no longer as hierarchically ranked in various social or cultural species, but as essentially equal and identical, the difference of nature and status between communities is sometimes reasserted in a disastrous way: it is then conceived as proceeding from somatic characteristics – which is racism.' (ibid.)

Myrdal from a very different perspective comes to a similar conclusion: 'race prejudice is, in a sense, a function, (a perversion) of egalitarianism.' (Myrdal 1962: 83) Again it is interesting that a society like China, that has been so emphatic about socialist equality and the denial of any class or occupational status distinction is so completely totalitarian. As Bottomore writes: 'it must be considered whether the abolition or even the decline, of social classes does not open the way for the growth of a mass society, in which the political elite has unbounded power.' (Bottomore 1966: 75)

Given the egalitarian emphasis of modernisation, Dumont does help us to rediscover the likely re-emergence the principle of hierarchy is likely to take if it is suppressed in a society as profoundly hierarchical as India. There is indeed a definite and deliberate effort to suppress the caste ideology. The Constitutional out-lawing of caste is just the tip of the iceberg. More important would be the protective discrimination in favour of the lower caste groups and perhaps most important the anti-Brahmin movements that have ousted the king-pin of the caste structure from their once privileged position.

Dumont is aware that the social mobility in evidence in India today is no longer contained by the caste hierarchy. He notes that we are witnessing 'the transition from a fluid, structural Universe in

which the emphasis is on interdependence and in which there is no privileged level, no firm units, to a Universe of impenetrable blocks, self-sufficient, essentially identical and in competition with one another, a Universe in which the caste appears as a collective *individual* (in the sense we have given this word), as a substance.' (Dumont 1972: 269) This is the 'substantialisation' of caste', each caste group becoming a moral individual entity that confronts other such groups. On the behavioural level this implies the substitution of competition for cooperation, from the ideological point of view this would mean the transformation of structure into substance. (ibid.: 275)

This fits in with the development of group conflict that we described earlier in connection with the horizontal mobilisation of caste. But it does raise a further question. Whereas the old cooperation of interdependent caste groups was contained by the hierarchical ideology, what ideological consensus will contain this new group competition and conflict? In the modernized west this function is performed by and large by a democratic egalitarianism. But even here when the ideological consensus, that has been hammered out over generations of painful controversy and radical social change, breaks down, we see the national and even the international scene engulfed, or threatened to be engulfed, in crisis and conflict.

The democratic socialism that India is officially committed to amounts to a basic rejection of the caste hierarchy, which is now re-emerging as communalism, which is the political expression of the communal group, religious, linguistic, or regional. For with the horizontal extension of caste groups there is a fusion into new groups based on sectarian religion, language, region, or whatever. Already once in 1947 the sub-continent was torn apart by religious communalism. As yet the target of Hindu revivalism in recent years has not been the Dalit but the Muslim. The linguistic reorganisation of the states in the early 1960's precipitated a wave of linguistic antagonism that still boils over. And it would not be farfetched to regard the 1972 Bangladesh war as an expression of regional ethnic communalism, Muslim Bengali versus Muslim Punjabi.

Dumont underscores for us the need for an encompassing cultural ideology, for this will not automatically grow out of the interactional process that is dissolving caste. The hope that 'modernisation should have shattered caste from the outset' (ibid.: 272) was innocent of any consideration of the importance of hierarchy



in India. Given the collectivist orientation of Indian society we need hardly be surprised that caste has found expression in communalism of various kinds. Srinivas observes that 'the concept of the unity of India is essentially a religious one.' (Srinivas 1962: 105) The secularism implicit in the rejection of the caste hierarchy requires the acceptance of a new concept of India as a unified political, economic, cultural entity, if communalism is to be contained by nationalism.

## Dialogue for Praxis

Let us now attempt to draw together the treads of this discussion. The interactionists, whether they use a unidimensional Marxist interpretation or a multidimensional Weberian one, whether they adopt a functional model or a conflict one, generally conclude to a change in social relations in the direction of modernisation as we have defined it. The attributional approach, on the other hand, especially as developed by Dumont, sees in the suppression of hierarchy, its re-emergence as communalism. At the cultural level the first implies an individuation of the social ideology. At the structural level the second discovers the substantialisation of caste. There is then a certain divergence in those two approaches that derives from their original points of departure. But this insight can be used to bring the contributions of each into relief.

Van de Berghe has criticized the insistence that value-consensus is 'the necessary basis of social integration as claimed by some functionalists, notably by Parsons.' (de Berghe 1967: 138) He points that 'pluralist societies have often been held together by a mixture of *political coercion* and *economic interdependence*.' (ibid.: 139) However, in disagreeing with this one can point out that the very exercise of power or the existence of interdependence requires some level of value-consensus however general it may be, if there is to be a continuing human community at all and not one of 'total conflict'. Obviously these are interrelated. Among the interactionists the functionalists stress the growing interdependence as a contribution to modernisation, while the conflict theorists give us an insight into the functionality of conflict in the same direction. The attributionist insistence on the need for an ideology to support the interdependence, to contain the conflict, and to provide the value-consensus for modernisation adds an important complement to our understanding.

What is more problematic is the socialisation of the periphery into an ideology that will not suppress the principle of



hierarchy but express it in terms that are functional for modernisation, besides containing the inevitable stress and strain that any social change implies. If 'modernity constitutes perhaps the greatest challenge that mankind has posed for itself in the course of human history,' (Eisenstadt 1966: 161) this is nowhere more true than in India.

Before concluding let us return to the question raised at the beginning of this paper: will the modernizing elites at the 'centre' be able to carry the tradition-bound mass at the 'periphery'? It would seem from our analysis that the political and economic involvement of the masses in the modernisation process is rather in evidence and increasingly so. With the contemporary politicisation and mobilisation caste identities today assumes new avatars, less premised on religious ritual and more tuned to group interests. The essential ambiguities of caste mobilisation cannot be wished away. They must be faced. Only when social mobilisation takes into account a class analysis and identifies class interests, will such a movement be a progressive force and not a reactionary one. For this we will need to initiate a dialogue between Ambedkar, Gandhi and Marx.

The Dalit littérateur and organic intellectual from Karnataka, D.R. Nagaraj (2012) has made an important contribution on the Gandhi-Ambedkar relationship and their legacies to the Dalit cause: one a socio-religious approach to change values, beliefs, attitudes; the other a socio-legislative one to give Dalits a new identity. We need to carry forward this discussion with the class analysis of Marx. All three can be complementary in a comprehensive praxis, for one without the other is unlikely to bring sustainable change to the enduring casteism in our society.

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# 12.

## **DIVERSITY AND DIFFERENCE: CONSTRUCTING IDENTITY AND AFFIRMING DIGNITY IN A PLURALIST WORLD**

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### I. PLURALITY AND PLURALISM

STRUCTURAL AND CULTURAL PLURALITY

PLURALISM AND RELATIVISM

### II. IDENTITY AND DIGNITY

Constructing The 'Self' and the 'Other'

Individual and Collective Rights

Inclusive and Exclusive Identities

### III. DIVERSITY AND DIFFERENCE

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## ***Abstract***

Indic civilisation has served as a common meeting ground for diverse historical or religious traditions. However, in an imploding globalising world, a multicultural, pluri-religious society becomes problematic, and hegemonic dominance or exclusivist posturing by the protagonists does not make for social integration or communal harmony.

## **I. Plurality and Pluralism**

‘Plurality’ is the social reality of diverse social groups in a more inclusive social order. As a positive response to such complexity and diversity; ‘pluralism’ is a social ideology that attempts to integrate rather than negate this plurality. In a free and open society such as we aspire to be, imposing a dominant perspective or worldview is no longer possible. An open democratic society must be premised on consensus, not coercion. Homogenising plurality by suppression or force can only make for an unstable and potentially violent situation. Thus we begin with a de facto plurality and work towards a de jure pluralism.

### ***Structural and Cultural Plurality***

In any society, structure and culture are necessary dimensions. Structural plurality implies a set of distinguishable and diverse interrelated social institutions incorporated into an integrated social system. Cultural plurality refers to distinct cultures or subcultures with distinctive individual and collective identities within an overarching civilisational unity. Structurally, the market and the state, the economic and the political systems integrate diverse groups in a common social order. Culturally, a common religion, language or historical tradition becomes the basis for a more inclusive civilisational unity.

In western democracies, plurality is more structural, whereas in post-colonial societies, especially in South Asia, plurality is decidedly more cultural. More often than not, the cultural dimension is more resilient in its segmentation in a plural society. Caste or race, religion or language groups have more stable and less porous boundaries than class or interest groups, political parties or ideological movements.

There is an obvious interaction between the two dimensions. Yet some common basis is necessary for some minimum of socio-cultural integration, just as the acknowledgement of common economic-political interests are for some orientation towards co-operation rather than conflict. Otherwise, a common meeting ground becomes the occasion for misunderstanding and hostility. Europe was such a battleground in the last century. South Asia is a good example of such an implosion in our globalising world today. Europe is moving ahead with the European Union, but the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is still mired in mutual suspicion.

However, the necessity of pluralism today is not to be perceived as an unnecessary evil to be repressed; or tolerated as a necessary one to be constrained. Rather it is an inescapable challenge that will not go away. It must be constructively met or it will disable, if not destroy us. Enforcing uniformity only escalates the spiral of violence.

In coping adequately with our globalising world, our starting point today can only be the de facto given of our plural social reality. In working towards a pluralism adequate to this plurality we conclude to a de jure pluralism for our world. For the law of pluralism is written into all reality. Moreover, this pluralism must not just be an acceptance but truly a celebration of difference because it reaches across differences to a truly an enriching and ennobling encounter.

Ultimately, we need a pluralism that will celebrate and reconcile our differences, affirm and subsume our identities in a larger organic whole. The historic strength of Indic civilisation has been its capacity to tolerate difference and allow such diversity. Indic traditions have demonstrated a resilient identity in spite of the drastic changes they have faced. Their continuity in change has given an overarching civilisational unity to our cultural diversity.

### ***Pluralism and Relativism***

However, pluralism must not be equated/conflated with relativism, whether religious, ethical or political, especially when this is associated with non-commitment. This eventually ends up reinforcing the status quo, where a value-free stance so easily becomes a valueless one and where all are equal but some more so than others. This is hardly compatible with an authentic humanism, whether religious, ethical or political.

Pluralism, as Raimon Panikkar explains, is the necessary consequence of 'recognising the contingency of everything that is

human' (Panikkar 1998: 120). The human is never the ultimate absolute but always in relationship to it. This does not amount to relativism. For pluralism is not about the equality of differing and contradictory truths, but about equal respect for others, who hold different truths. We owe this respect to others, even as we expect the same for ourselves. This is the inevitable contradiction that fundamentalists of all hues must face.

In our multi-cultural and pluri-religious society, pluralism is a psychological challenge, a cultural imperative, an economic political necessity, a theological given. We need a pluralism inspired by a humanist, liberating, this-worldly ethic, premised on tolerance and sustained by dialogue. For a genuine pluralism is possible only within such a context.

## **II. Identity and Dignity**

### ***Constructing The 'Self' and the 'Other'***

Identity and dignity are intimately connected. Identity answers to, 'who am I?'; dignity to, 'what respect am I due?'. The affirmation or the negation of one carries over to the other. The right to identity must include the right to dignity. One's identity is never developed in isolation but in interaction with significant others. However, this is never an entirely passive process. I discover myself, my horizon of meaning and value, with and through others. 'Who I am' is always reflected off, and refracted through others. 'What I am due' is always in a social context mediated by them. The denial of recognition and affirmation amounts to a negation of my human identity.

Indeed, the other is more integral to oneself than one might want to admit. The other helps to make sense of my experiences, but also interrogates my world. For the other always puts a question to one's self, and when the other is different the question can be threatening. One can ignore the question only for a while, one may even be tempted to destroy the questioner, but the questioning cannot be so easily silenced. Rabbi Heschel rightly insists: 'to meet a human being is a major challenge to mind and heart' (Heschel 1991: 7). History bears witness to how dominant persons and groups have sought 'final solutions' to eliminate or subordinate others in genocide and ethnocide, in cultural assimilation and religious conversion. Most of these attempts have failed.

As with individuals so with groups. The individual is affirmed, or negated in the group, as the group is in society. At the individual level, this mediation is essentially through interpersonal interaction; at the social level, it is also through myth and symbol, values and norms, collective memories and popular history (Kakar 1993: 50).

Modern development brings rapid and radical change. The strain and stress can precipitate a disorientation in personal identity. In such situations a crumbling self can lean on group support as a dilapidated building is trussed up by a scaffolding. In a world increasingly characterised by anxiety, uncertainty and disorder, there is an urgent need for the reassurance of security, trust and a sense of solidarity in a collective identity. Such identities become 'vehicles for redressing narcissistic injuries, for righting of what are perceived as contemporary or historical wrongs' (Kakar 1993: 52).

Collective action is resorted to, in order to redress individual insecurities. Group solidarity then becomes a substitute for lost attachments, a support to heal old injuries and right historical wrongs. Such collective remedies to individual trauma easily become totalising and aggressive. Confirmed in their self-righteousness, leaders manipulate and mobilise groups, disregarding the dignity of other groups as well as the dignity of their members. Thus in any social breakdown, it is easy to see why extremist responses come into prominence, and where dangerous fundamentalisms of various traditions and ideologies come from. Anthony Giddens is particularly pertinent when he writes: 'fundamentalism originates from a world of crumbling traditions' (Giddens 1999: 4).

This construction of the sense of self in the context of a hostile other is necessarily a function of the needs of the insecure individual and the group. What is unconsciously disowned and rejected in ourselves, is projected on and demonised in the other. What is desirable in the other is denied and attributed to oneself. We are non-violent, tolerant, chosen, pure; the other is violent, intolerant, polluted, damned. They may seem strong, compassionate, devout, but they are aggressive, devious and fanatical.

### ***Individual and Collective Rights***

To contain and defuse such collective passions, we must recognise and guarantee both, equal dignity and unique identity for every individual person and each human community. The first is founded on human rights and is committed to enforcing rights equitably for all



individuals, e.g., the right to life and liberty of conscience... The second is premised on collective rights and is responsible for ensuring the cultural identity of each group, e.g., the right to language, religion...

The dilemma between individual and community becomes evident when individual and collective rights are not in consonance. Treating all equally could lead to some becoming more equal than others in violation of the rights of more vulnerable individuals. This happens in modernising societies when the relationships between individuals are unequal, as in caste communities, where lower-caste individuals are more deprived. Conceding some kinds of cultural rights to groups can be oppressive for individuals in them, as in patriarchal communities, where empowering men further disadvantages the women. However, we can and must find ways in which human rights are sensitive to the cultural specifics of a community, which in turn do not violate fundamental rights of individuals.

In other words, a homogenizing Universalism cannot be so absolute as to negate cultural and religious diversities. It must respect and even celebrate these differences within the limits set by collective rights. However, whether religious or cultural, these rights cannot be unconditional or in violation of more fundamental human rights and freedoms. The 'non-recognition', or worse the 'misrecognition' of either, becomes oppressive and distorting, projecting a negated, wounded identity. This is precisely what prejudice is all about.

### ***Inclusive and Exclusive Identities***

Identities that are defined negatively against others in terms of 'what one is *not*', will tend to be exclusive and dismissive of others. This creates in-groups and out-groups, stereotypes and scapegoats. Those affirmed positively, prescinding from others in defining 'who one *is*', will tend to be inclusive and not disregarding of others. This allows for openness and receptivity. 'We *are not* like that', is less open to a broader inclusion in a larger common ground than 'this is how we *are*'.

Exclusive identities emphasise differences and set up oppositions and polarities with the other. Sudhir Kakar, the psychoanalyst, explains how they help increase the sense of narcissistic wellbeing and attribute to the other the disavowed aspects of one's own self (Kakar 1992: 137). Inclusive identities are inclined to affirm similarities and complementarities with the other. These make for tolerance and

flexibility. For example, identifying with one's language or religion need not mean hostility to other languages and religions. Yet when used thus, language and religion have been among the most effective markers to divide a society into 'them' and 'us'.

Secular nationalisms have used a national language, even created one to promote a linguistic uniformity in their societies for better governance and efficiency, just as religious nationalisms seek to revive and impose their religious tradition for greater homogeneity and uniformity. Without a vigorous multi-lingualism and a vibrant religious pluralism, the cultural and religious diversity of a society will not survive. Linguistic nationalism was among the earliest threats to our unity-in-diversity in India, when Hindi was sought to be imposed as the national language. Allowing space for regional languages has defused this threat. Religious nationalism and fundamentalism are now a greater threat to our religious diversity and political unity and we seem unwilling or unable to learn from our past.

In South Asia, the most prevalent exclusive and antagonistic collective identities are caste and/or religion-based. A vigorous and dangerous politics of identity has been constructed on these. All claims to individual and collective rights are demands by the claimants to have their identity recognized and their dignity affirmed. The denial of one or the other, as often happens to religious groups in secularised societies, is perceived as a threat of annihilation, whether intended or not, and inevitably this generates dangerous political passions. Religious nationalism and fundamentalism thrive on such negative politics.

### **III. Diversity and Difference**

#### ***Diversity in Unity***

We are coming to value diversity as something potentially enriching and even uniting at a higher level of unity. This is certainly true of the rich religious traditions of this land, when they are not manipulated for narrow political gain or subversive communal interests. Such an enriching unity must inspire us to reach out to each other in a common concern and in a shared faith, bringing us together with our differences into a unity in diversity, one that does not negate our peculiarities, but rather accepts and respects, even celebrates them.

In India, unity in diversity is official policy. Yet today, such multiculturalism is under a menacing threat from rationalist secularism and religious fundamentalism. Democratic pluralism is no quick-fix solution to the rising expectations of our people, but it seems to be the only feasible alternative if this reality of diversity and difference is to be accepted and not suppressed.

Ultimately, our response to pluralism must begin with rejecting inequalities and accepting differences, affirming equal dignity for all and respecting the unique identity of each, reaching out to live and celebrate similarities and differences as parts of a larger organic social and cultural whole. Our pluralism is not so much to promote our unity over and above the reality of our diversity, but rather to protect our diversity in our quest for unity. Not unity-in-diversity so much as diversity-in-unity.

### ***Identity and Integration***

Structural plurality becomes the basis for a 'politics of interests', mobilising groups around 'what they want'. If this is not integrated into a system that protects fundamental rights and promotes equitable distribution, it engenders class conflict. Cultural plurality is a fertile ground for the 'politics of identity', mobilising groups on the basis of 'who they are'. If this is not incorporated into a pluralism that recognises cultural differences and affirms collective rights, it breeds collective passions. Exclusive identities, whether based on religion, caste, race, or any other common ethnic trait, once imposed easily become an effective basis for group mobilisation and ethno-politics. The identity politics precipitated by religion has been among the most violent and destructive.

Unique identities pertain to the cultural domain. When these are aggregated from the individual to the group, they can become more intractable and uncompromising than ever. This is precisely what happens with exclusive and total identities. They subsume all other individual identities into the group one, and oppose this to the identities of other groups. This is a death knell of any kind of cultural pluralism in society. Religious nationalisms and fundamentalisms are prone to this.

Rather, we need inclusive multiple identities both for individuals and groups, identities that are layered and prioritised according to the context around a core identity that gives stability and continuity to the person and the group. This will demand flexible identities and

overlapping porous group boundaries. Gandhi, as we shall see, is a remarkable example of such a rooted yet open person

I do not want my house to be walled on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any of them (*Young India*, June 1921: 170).

#### **IV. The Politics of Identity**

Identity politics is an effective motivator for individuals and a powerful mobiliser for groups. But in recognising 'who we are' we have to discover 'what we want'. If the politics of identity is not rationalised by the politics of interests, it can oppress others and suppress its own. For both individuals and groups, we need an integrated and holistic approach that will recognise the Universal demand of equal dignity for all, and comprehend the particular exigencies of the unique identity of each.

Democratic pluralism cannot exclude identity politics, though its relationship with the politics of interest is certainly a problematic one. Collective identities mobilise group interests. These interests in turn consolidate corresponding identities. A constructive integration will demand that a larger concern and a deeper unity direct and subsume both. Caste communalism and religious fundamentalism have severely undermined such a politics of integration. These have deliberately exploited communal riots and civil disturbances to polarise our society for electoral gains. This further multiplies the divides and deepens the fissures in society.

The politics of integration must be a quest for an egalitarian, just and free society. In our quest for economic equality, creating class-consciousness is never merely to invert class divisions and perpetuate them. It is to mobilise a class struggle for a classless society, where social inequalities are abolished. In our quest for social justice mere positional change in the caste hierarchy without an attempt to eliminate it, will only perpetuate an inverted caste hierarchy. Rather caste mobilisation must be for a casteless society, where caste hierarchy has been demolished. So too if religious identities are activated in our quest for religious liberation, it must not be for dominance or isolation, but to create a free and inter-religious

pluralism, where religious differences are complementary, not antagonistic.

### ***Social Identity and Social Space***

When they are constructed as inclusive and compatible, not as exclusive and antagonistic, social identities, especially religious ones, can find their expression in fidelity to their tradition and in harmony with others in society. For this, we need a less constrained and more open perspective on religious identity, one that acknowledges its necessary place in a society, without defining individuals and groups exclusively in terms of the religious communities, to which they belong.

We have seen how religious fundamentalists and extremists emphasise a religious identity to subsume and consolidate other identities around a religious allegiance. Once such totalised identities are perceived as permanent and solidified, they cannot respond to change with any flexibility and so become defensive and even aggressive. Yet under the present pressure of social change, collective identities cannot but be in flux, and ways of coping with the consequent anxiety become imperative. A transfer of affiliation outside the fold is often among the most threatening of such identity changes.

A stable core identity can be layered and contextualised. This allows for inclusive and overlapping group and community boundaries. Since identities are both defined from within the group and imposed from without, intra- and inter-groups interrelationships will play a critical role in such identity construction. Threatening intra-group interactions between dominant and subordinate members will make for defensive insecure identities. Antagonistic inter-group encounters will promote exclusive and closed identities. Thus dysfunctional families induce negative and insecure personal identities in their individual members, while casteist and racist groups project hostile and exclusive group identities for themselves and others in their societies.

We need to ground social identities in a viable social space where the positive and the secure, the generous and the inclusive are internalised and integrated in individuals and groups, lest they are transmuted by other less amenable group and social pressures. Such a space is found not with isolated individuals or in state politics, but in the intermediate social structures of civil society, the social space,

where citizens live out their lives outside their families and the formal institutions of the state.

This would be a positive step in depolarising religious identities. If religion is located in such intermediate structures, it can find its social expression in the family and the community, without being prejudiced by state politics, unless such politics itself is communalised and projects its interests and concerns into the civic community. Politicians find it difficult to resist this temptation, but once indulged, it is even more difficult to reverse. For when religion explodes into electoral politics, there is no telling where it will lead or if the violence will be contained. Once one gets on this tiger, it is difficult to get off!

The recent history of the subcontinent is a telling indictment of such short-sighted politics. The change of social identity that religious conversions imply is one of the most provocative issues enmeshed in this. For insofar as conversions do impact other areas of social life they become real concerns. We must deal with these within the appropriate social space, and not just in terms of electoral politics and its payoff.

## **V. Civil Society and the State**

### ***Polarisation and Pluralisation***

There are two contrary ways of handling such multiple identities. If polarisation heightens the salient sectional identities, then pluralisation attempts to reduce the significance of these. Here Kuper identifies

‘two antithetical possibilities in the process of change. In one pluralisation proceeds by individuation and homogenisation or by Gleichschaltung or uniformisation (to borrow the term used by van den Berghe in this connection)’ (Kuper 1971b: 485).

This would demand the diffusion of sectional particularistic identities and their coalescence into a more common Universalistic one. However well this may work in the public domain of *Gesellschaft* (community), in the more private one of *gemeinschaft* (society), it would undermine intermediate institutions and structures, and lead

to the atomisation of people into a mass society, about which Kornhauser and others have warned (Kornhauser 1960).

‘The second process of depluralisation through an intermediate phase of sectional aggression seems paradoxical’ (Kuper 1971: 485). The argument here is ‘that before ethnic identity can be transcended it must be asserted in order to ensure the stature, participation, and self-respect of everyone in the local community’ (Kuper 1971: 485). But the potential for organised violence here, is no less than the potential for the more random violence in mass society. Kuper himself finally concludes: ‘it is clear that depluralisation is charged with a high potential for destruction and violence’ (Kuper 1971: 486).

Sometimes the polarisation between competitive or conflicting and unresolved group identities, may not find any overt expression, but remain buried in a ‘culture of suspicion’ (Subramaniam 1999). While this may remain somewhat subterranean, leading to an apparent feeling of security and harmony, it is indeed a very superficial calm and can easily be triggered by some untoward event into a storm of violent communal conflict.

### **Community and Society**

If following the sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies (1957), we consider ‘community’ as *Gemeinschaft*, i.e., based on more direct ‘face-to-face relationships’, and consequently the area of ‘private space’, then ‘society’ as *Gesellschaft* will be in the ‘public space’, of ‘indirect relationships’. The first is more the sphere of family and religion, of particularised and personal interactions; the second more that of the economy and the polity, of more generalised and formal relationships. The state must be the guarantor of the personal and collective rights of citizens at both levels: for instance, at the first, protecting gender rights from patriarchal domination and community rights against outside interference and manipulation; at the second, promoting economic justice and political freedom.

At both these levels, but especially at the second, the state must create a neutral space and a larger social unity, wherein civic society can effectively function, not as a uniformity, where differences are suppressed, but with all the rich diversity that ‘community’ (*Gemeinschaft*), brings to ‘society’ (*Gesellschaft*). Society will then be a community of communities, just as at a more disaggregated level, the community will be a group of groups, and a neighbourhood a family of families.

Some aggressive secularists have attempted to banish all religion from the public to the private sphere with disastrously contrary effects. Situating religion in the domain of 'community' rather than 'society', as we have described these terms, allows for a religious expression in the family, the community and civil society. Other particularistic and ethnic identities too can find a similar social space, provided they do not compromise individual rights for collective ones. The state can then be neutral to such identities or even promote the more vulnerable ones, while keeping its focus on the economic and politic realities, which fall more properly within its domain.

When there are failures in political 'society', these are readily reflected in and projected into a particular civic 'community', thus drawing it into the identity politics of the state and inevitably, any change in identity becomes extremely problematic to all concerned. Restraining such identities to the family and the community in civil society, provides a buffer against their co-option into state politics.

If community identities were inclusive enough to accommodate the new ones in some acceptable way, identity change would not mean a change of community, just as it does not necessarily demand a change of family, if the identity change is accepted in the old one. Further, a change of one's family, as may happen with marriage, does not always amount to a change of one's community. So too a change in community need not necessarily mean a change in one's socio-cultural tradition, if this change is contained in a larger civilisational unity; for instance, Indic civilisation as embracing all communities under its cultural umbrella. I can still be a member of my family, my community, my society, after I change to another community's tradition. This is precisely what multiple identities are all about.

Thus a change in one's community identity need not mean an alienation from one's cultural or political allegiance. This tends to be the case when community change is historically associated with conquest and the imposition of an alien culture. It is only after the violence and oppression ceases that an authentic integration can bring about a civilisational unity, though this may at times take centuries to evolve. An overarching civilisation is by itself no guarantee of inter-community harmony. Blood-feuds within the clans, and even within families, are at times bloodier than those with distant outsiders.

For civil society to function effectively and harmoniously, even within a civilisational unity, there must be a corresponding politics operative at the level of the state. For, if civic society simply reflects



political parties and their divisions, then it is already a divided and contentious social space. Yet, if community identities are not to be politically co-opted, politics must not be driven by vote banks, but restrained by more rational interests, focusing on real economic and political concerns.

Only a constructive dialogue between civil society and the state will be able to beat a path through this minefield. But it must be a dialogue premised on a creative pluralism and tolerance of diversity and difference.

## **VI. Political Secularism and Religious Tolerance**

Just as in a multicultural society, democratic pluralism must be the common meeting ground of contending parties, so too in a pluri-religious one, is religious tolerance. In the bewildering plurality of India this becomes a matter of survival or out society, not just the nation. Today a viable pluralism and a meaningful tolerance can only be sought in the complementary models of Gandhian religious sensitivity and Nehru's secular rationalism, as they evolved and found expression in the freedom struggle they lead.

### ***Gandhian Relevance***

Gandhi used the positive resources in the Indic, especially Hindu tradition to popularise his understanding of pluralism and tolerance that included more than just the cultural or religious. Moreover, he credited all these traditions, especially religious ones, with similar resources and the same fundamental values. Hence, Gandhi's relevance for any discourse on tolerance is seminal, whether in this country or abroad.

For Gandhi the unity of humankind was premised on the *advaitin* oneness of the cosmos. Unity in diversity was the integrating axis not just of Hindu, but of Indian culture. An enriched diversity would contribute to an invigorated pluralism and an enhanced unity. In Gandhi's understanding of Indian culture and civilisation, this was its strength and the reason for its survival.

Gandhi's understanding of the *dharma* transcended a particular religious tradition. It was rather founded on duty, as prior to rights. Thus the *dharma* he promoted was fundamentally grounded in his conception of *ahimsa* and *satya*, and inseparable from either. Hence, rejecting the elite-mass dichotomy that privileged high culture and

esoteric religion, he harnessed the old religious symbolism to electrifying effect, releasing people's energies and generating fearlessness among the masses. He realized that underpinning popular religiosity was an attachment to the moral order, to *dharma* over *adharma*, and that only the non-violent and fearless can be truly tolerant and compassionate, not the anxious and the insecure. For Gandhi, tolerance, like *ahimsa*, was a matter not of weakness, but of strength.

However, Gandhi's reformist Hinduism has its own inherent limitations, particularly on the issue of caste. Here his attempt to establish a basic social equality within the *varnashrama dharma* was doomed to be rejected by the more radical and militant movements on the right and on the left. More recently the rediscovery of Gandhi by counter-cultural groups has called for a critical rethinking, not just an undiscerning repetition of his reformist programme (Hardiman 2003). I believe there is still a radical relevance to his message today for our destructive and violent age.

To be sure, such a construction of tradition is already being contested. The opposition to such pluralism is increasingly authoritarian and fascist, uninhibitedly ethnocentric and chauvinistic. This we must challenge not by denying our past, but by critiquing it; not by fleeing from the present crisis but by confronting it; not by escaping into utopia but providing for our future. Gandhi's rooted openness to all cultures and his equal respect to all religions, *sarvadharmā samābhava*, is a good place to start as a contextual, relevant basis for such tolerance.

### ***Nehruvian Rationalism***

Nehru's understanding of tolerance, whether religious, social or political, was derived less from a reform or revival of Indian traditions, than inspired by the modernist Enlightenment. His modernist rationalism made him critical of traditional culture, particularly where he perceived it as unjust and regressive, like caste and patriarchy. As an unbeliever, his secularism was a matter of the religious neutrality, *dharma nirapekshata*. People's religiosity was to be respected by the secular state. But a religious tolerance premised on this remains somewhat alien to the masses even though it claimed constitutional legitimacy for itself.

Such statutory secular tolerance based on the European Enlightenment does not inspire mass support in this country. If it is to be liberating for the masses, it cannot be imposed as part of a dominant hegemony, as middle-class rationalists are wont to urge. Grounding tolerance in middle-class sensibilities truncates it by excluding the mass of our people. This was the decisive difference between the Gandhian and the Nehruvian approach.

Unfortunately, the Gandhian discourse, which had dominated our freedom struggle, was decisively upstaged by the Nehruvian one in the post-independence period. In the Indian context, its intrinsic weakness gradually led to a collapse from within. A dichotomy between the 'secular-minded elite and religiously-oriented masses' cannot be the basis for a project for tolerance, religious or otherwise. It inevitably turns out to be alien and then becomes oppressive, as some anti-secularist have argued (Nandy 1992).

This rationalist secularism of Nehru is particularly vulnerable to a religious backlash. The *Hindutvawadis* (followers of Hindutva) dismiss it as 'pseudo-secularism'. Their own 'positive-secularism' in a Hindu *rashtra* leaves little scope for religious tolerance. But then, Hinduism is a broad civilisational concept, whereas Hindutva is a narrow communal ideology. Pan Islamism is not less dismissive of rationalist secularism as is fundamentalist Evangelical Christianity.

Ashis Nandy discussing 'The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance' argues that an aggressive secularism is not a viable facilitator for religious tolerance (Nandy 1992: 69-93). By putting religious traditions on the defensive, it makes them the more vulnerable to fundamentalism and extremism from within. For him cultural nationalism and nationalist secularism are both pathologies of civil society. He distinguishes between 'religion as ideology' and 'religion as faith'. From the second, he urges the recovery of traditional 'religious tolerance from everyday Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, and/or Sikhism, rather than wish that ordinary Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists and Sikhs will learn tolerance from the various fashionable secular theories of statecraft' (Nandy 1992: 86).

Nandy surely makes a point with his mistrust of secularism as the basis for popular religious tolerance, but neither is popular religiosity always benign or tolerant. It has pathologies of its own. It needs to be exorcised of its demons and superstitions, freed from its prejudices and exclusions. A secularism premised on reason has the potential for such an exorcism; a secularism, which is democratic can affirm religious freedom and cultural tolerance against religious oppression and ethnic chauvinism. Nehru's *dharma nirapekshata* did have this

potential but it was more for the Westernised elite. Gandhi's *sarvadharmā samābhava* has a wider more inclusive appeal to all our peoples.

The multiple identities of Amartya Sen's *Argumentative Indian* (2005) is very much a part of this negotiated tolerance, in our multi-cultural, pluri-religious tradition of unity and diversity, of uniqueness and Universality. Yet today this tradition is under threat from rampant religious and nationalist fundamentalisms, premised on *Identity and Violence* (2006) satiated with *The Illusion of Destiny*. We will need both Gandhian sensitivity and Nehruvian rationality to meet and transcend this challenge. This is now becoming a matter critical and crucial of survival, and it calls not for argumentative polemics and debate, but more an understanding tolerance and dialogue.

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# 13.

## RELIGIOUS DISARMAMENT: METAPHOR FOR TOLERANCE AND DIALOGUE

From *Learning Non-Violence*, edited by, Gangeya Mukherji, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2016, pp. 66 – 95. (This paper draws on my earlier work, especially *Changing Gods: Rethinking Conversion in India*, Penguin, New Delhi, 2006)

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## Abstract

Against the background of the historical trajectory of violence in religious traditions, we will first clarify an understanding of violence and the relationship of power and peace. This will be the basis for an elaboration of the ideal of tolerance, which in turn becomes the sine qua non for a multidimensional dialogue.

In the context of violent religious conflict, religious disarmament becomes the metaphor for a radical reorientation to deeper tolerance of the 'other' and more open inter-religious dialogue.

## I. Introduction

The complexities in understanding violence in religious traditions have made for many ambiguities and dilemmas in their practice of non-violence and their pursuit of power and peace. This leads to contradictions and conflicts between intended religious ideals and perceived social reality. In a pluri-religious society like ours, such situations become all the more dangerously explosive, unless addressed imaginatively and with fairness. Or else, they readily become chauvinistic and politicised in the quest for dominance and hegemony. In such circumstances the spillover into horrendous collective violence is predictable. From religious wars and communal riots to genocides and ethnic cleansing, violence gets legitimised as an acceptable means to religious ends, often articulated in idealised and tantalising metaphors of Ram Rajya (the reign of Ram), Dar ul-Islam (Land of Peace), Kingdom of God ...

Political ideologies have been no less incendiary, and if anything worse than religious traditions, in their history of violence, once again sanctioned as necessary means to nobler ends: justice, peace, revolution, a war to end all wars, ... Yet such secular utopias have proved as illusionary as religious eschatology. Only till recently, it was politically correct and academically acceptable to announce the end of history<sup>1</sup> with the arrival of mature democracies in the West. Now the same political establishment is concerned over the coming clash of civilisations<sup>2</sup> which are defined more in religious rather than cultural or political terms. This becomes a convenient device for blaming the violence on religious theologies rather than secular ideologies.

But the unanswered question still stares at us: can the contradiction in using violent means to non-violent ends be resolved within the paradigm of contemporary political realism? The response of such real politique to violence has too often been more violence, which, even when defensive, too easily spirals out of control and sooner rather than later tips over into hostile aggression. This is a nihilistic paradigm from which a more constructive discourse must break free. Any viable alternative understanding cannot be based on the Hobbesian premise of '*homo homini lupus*' (man is a wolf to man). The imperative is to find another model for *homo socialis*, which must be internalised in civil society before it can survive let alone address the rough and tumble of power politics today.

Against the background of the historical trajectory of violence in religious traditions, focused on the Christian West, we will first clarify an understanding of violence and the relationship of power and peace. This will be the basis for an elaboration of the ideal of tolerance, which in turn becomes the sine qua non for a multidimensional dialogue. In the context of violent religious conflict, religious disarmament becomes the metaphor for a radical reorientation to deeper tolerance of the 'other' and more open inter-religious dialogue.

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, New York: Avon Books, 1992.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993.



## II. Historical Strategies

No mainstream religious tradition advocates violence as an end-in-itself. At the most, it is legitimated as a means of last resort in a just cause. Yet, ‘religion and violence have never been strangers’.<sup>3</sup> In fact, it has all too often been used to motivate and ‘amplify pre-existing possibilities for social tension into unprecedented paroxysms of religious violence’.<sup>4</sup> Secular rationalists too easily use this anomaly as a scapegoat and forget the horrors of the last century: two World Wars, a Cold one and many hot ones, wars of liberation and pre-emptive ones, wars on terror and wars of terrorists..., all precipitated by secular political ideologies. But even all this cannot gainsay the history of religious violence and the contradictions between religious teaching and expedient practice that is so patent in the mainstream traditions.

While non-violence is not equally privileged across religious traditions, even those that give it pre-eminence must come to terms with violence in the real world in which we live. This cannot be wished away. Hence, they devise ‘different strategies incorporating and normalising violence’.<sup>5</sup> Common to all tradition was the distinction between especially dedicated religious persons, priests, monks, nuns, who were expected to live the ideals of non-violence in their pursuit of salvation, and the laypersons in the worldly professions, who had to cope with the realities of a violent world.

Thus, the Vedas ritualised violence; the Upanishads turned it into metaphors and *maya*. In the Jain tradition, which puts the greatest emphasis on ahimsa, the heroic ethic of the ascetic *muni* is translated into the heroic ethic of the warrior aristocracy<sup>6</sup>, where self-defence,

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<sup>3</sup> Richard King, “The Association of ‘Religion’ with Violence: Reflections on a Modern Trope”, in John R. Hinnel & Richard King (eds.), *Religion and Violence in South Asia: Theory and Practice*, London: Routledge, pp. 226-257.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Gottschalk, “A Categorical Difference: Communal Identity in British Epistemologies”, in Hinnel & King (eds.), *Religion and Violence in South Asia*, pp. 195-210.

<sup>5</sup> Laurie Patton, “Telling Stories about Harm: An Overview of Early Indian Narratives”, in Hinnel & King (eds.), *Religion and Violence in South Asia*, pp. 11-40.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Dundas, “The Non-Violence of Violence: Jain Perspectives on Warfare, Asceticism and Worship”, in Hinnel & King (eds.), *Religion and Violence in South Asia*, pp. 41-61.

*virodhihimsa*, is justified.<sup>7</sup> For Buddhists the ideal of the absolute non-violence of the *dhamma* is only possible for the Buddha and the bodhisattvas, for ordinary people it remains out of reach.<sup>8</sup> Islam has legitimised violence in the cause of justice even as it privileges of peace and spiritualises jihad.

### ***The Christian Tradition***

However, as Gandhi insisted, it is best for us to critique our own religious tradition and not point fingers at others. Hence following the Gospel injunction of ‘first take the log out of your own eye...’ (Matthew 7:5, Revised Standard Version) the focus here will be on the Christian tradition.

Whereas in the Old Testament the priority was for justice and eventual peace, in the New Testament the emphasis is on love and especially forgiveness. The proverbial teaching on revenge, turning the other cheek (Matthew 5:38), is not to encourage evil but to oppose evil with good. The persecuted early Church was pacifist as Tertullian, Justin Martyr and St Cyril testify, for they saw violence and war as in contradiction to their faith and conscience.<sup>9</sup> But once Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, and the need to defend the Empire from barbarian attack and eventual invasion became critical, St Augustine proposes the just war theory to legitimate the defence of the state and in the cause of peace. This would be then God’s war, *bellum deo autore*.<sup>10</sup>

The Christian Crusades from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> centuries were launched with the blessing of the Church, because of European fears of being overwhelmed by Muslims, thus making war against infidels respectable. But later wars between Christian princes, particularly the religious wars after the Reformation, needed a more robust and refined legitimisation. This was provided first by the medieval scholastics led by St Thomas Aquinas with his distinction of *jus ad bellum* (the right to go to war) and *jus in bello* (rights of combatants

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>8</sup> Rupert Gethin, “Buddhist monks, Buddhist kings, Buddhist violence: On the Early Buddhist attitudes to Violence”, in Hinnel & King (eds.), *Religion and Violence in South Asia*, pp. 62-82.

<sup>9</sup> Peter D. Bishop, *A Technique for Loving: Non-Violence in Indian and Christian Traditions*, U.K.: SCM Press, 1981, 12.

<sup>10</sup> Stanley Windass, *Christianity Versus Violence: A Social and Historical Study of War and Christianity*, London: Sheed and Ward, 1964, p. 32.

in fighting), and further elaborated and nuanced by the neo-scholastics of the Renaissance<sup>11</sup>:

1. The cause has to be just.
2. The right intention must be maintained throughout hostilities.
3. The war is truly the last resort, all peaceful means having failed.
4. The means of waging war must be fair.
5. The good legitimately hoped for from war must be of greater benefit to mankind than the evils it involves.
6. Victory must be certain
7. The ensuing peace must be just and of such a nature as to avoid a further war.

Colonial imperialism with its wars of conquest and the racism, genocide, ethnocide, slavery, ... that went its wake, brought unimaginable horrors, in spite of whatever good it may have done to colonised peoples. Christianity could not escape being implicated in this colonial violence, which has not been forgotten or forgiven by the colonised, notwithstanding the yeoman service of Christian institutions and many heroic missionary figures who resisted colonialism.

The postcolonial period has now brought a theology of liberation that was developed in Latin America and spread to Asia and Africa. It focuses on the structural violence in society, a residue of the colonial times in no small degree. It has now taken root in churches all over the world.<sup>12</sup>

In the Christian tradition, then, while non-violence was always one of the earliest means of resisting evil, and even the privileged one for some Christian theologians and moralists, it was not the only legitimate one. The just war theory was an early vindication of violence and survives in more refined and nuanced theories today. However, these prove entirely inadequate to cope with modern warfare. For here, there is no more a distinction between combatants and non-combatants and any prudential judgment of the inevitable harm done in lieu of the possible good that might result is extremely

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<sup>11</sup> P. Regamey, *Non-Violence and the Christian Conscience*, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966, p. 252-253.

<sup>12</sup> Rudolph C. Heredia, *Changing Gods: Rethinking Conversion in India*, Delhi: Penguin, 2006.

problematic, if at all it can be made. In 1965, the Second Vatican Council's *Gaudium et Spes*, the 'Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World' unambiguously condemned modern warfare with its weapons of mass destructions: 'Any act of war aimed indiscriminately at the destruction of entire cities or of extensive areas along with their populations is a crime against God and man himself'<sup>13</sup>, and goes on to call for a total ban on the arms race and war<sup>14</sup>. Even the defensive use of such weapons becomes dangerously problematic. MAD, mutually assured destruction, is an apt acronym for its madness.

The authentic Christian cannot but protest the savagery and hatred of modern war. For 'the horror that the Christian feels is not that of being killed, but that of killing; not that of being a martyr, but of being a murderer; not the fear of suffering with Christ, but that of crucifying him afresh in the person of our fellow men. This is the backbone of our tradition, and must be the backbone of an informed Christian conscience.'<sup>15</sup> And yet, in spite of privileging non-violence today as the only truly moral option left to us, the ancient gods of war, the Roman Mars, the German Wotan, have not been entirely exorcised from the modern Christianity, as is evidence by the Prussian, Carl Von Clausewitz's 1812 essay on the *Principles of War*, admitting no consideration of moderation in the defence of the state, which still survives today as textbook military theory.

However, politics and theology notwithstanding, the definitive judgment of the Christian religious tradition on violence is the image of Jesus dying on his cross. It is the paradox of power in powerlessness that is at the heart of this Christian mystery. For accepting 'judgment by violence is to dig a grave for justice',<sup>16</sup> Gandhi's ahimsa can help Christians to rediscover themselves, 'to explore the traditions of non-violence, and restore them to a central place in Christian lives'.<sup>17</sup> For it is only with love and forgiveness, even for our enemies, and compassion, especially for the last and the least, that violence can be exorcised from our lives.

From this quick overview of the trajectory of violence in these religious traditions we see they all have resources that can be mined

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<sup>13</sup> *Documents of Vatican II*, (ed.), Walter M. Abbott, New York: Guild Press, 1966, 294.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 294-297.

<sup>15</sup> Windass, *Christianity Versus Violence*, p. 129.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

for the values and praxis of non-violence, even as they develop strategies to cope with the violence in the real world we must live in. Whether or not this actually happens depends on the context and the response at the time. The contexts have been very varied, and the responses at times ambiguous. However, the dichotomy between the real and the ideal, theory and practice, the charismatic and the institutional, are not peculiar to religious traditions. Rather, if we perceive them as more vulnerable to these tensions and in danger of betraying their true mission and message, it is surely because so much more is expected of them, and some would say rightly so.

### **III. The 'Myth' of Peace**

#### ***Means and Ends***

In common parlance, peace is often understood as the opposite of war and conflict. These necessarily imply the use of force, which is legitimated as a means to an end pursued, as happens with what has been called a just war or a justifiable conflict. All too often such use of force is seen as a preamble to peace, a war to end all wars, a conflict now to minimise greater conflict later! This amounts to a negative perception of peace through its opposite. But it does give us one crucial element in our understanding of peace, namely, that as a minimum, peace is not compatible with the continuing use of force. But the problem of a peace founded on the use or threat of force remains. This was the basis of the Pax Romana, '*si vis pacem, para bellum*' (if you want peace, prepare for war!).

However, all would agree that war can only be the means of last resort for peace, not because it can ever be justified as a good or indifferent means to an end, but rather because it is legitimated as the lesser of two evils: subjugation by an unjust tyranny versus a violent rejection of it. But war must not be seen as inevitable or endemic to the human situation. Indeed 'the chief reason warfare is still with us is neither a secret death wish of the human species nor an irrepressible instinct of aggression nor, finally and more plausibly, the serious economic and social dangers inherent in disarmament, but

the simple fact that no substitute for this final arbiter in international affairs has appeared on the political scene.’<sup>18</sup>

Thus we realise that war can never be an end in itself. We must always question the purpose of war: war for what? Victory, honour, revenge, redress, or peace? All these except peace are further fraught with moral ambiguities. Even the peace we seek must be qualified lest common parlance degrades its potentially rich meaning.

### ***Force and Violence***

When force, as active aggression or as passive restriction, harms or destroys that which it is applied to, then is it concomitant with violence. Sometimes by extension the exercise of any vehement force is also called ‘violence’, though more precisely it is when force violates, that it constitutes violence. In this sense violence by definition cannot be justifiable, except when used in self-defence, to oppose and protect oneself from violation. This is counter-violence, rather than violence per se. Moreover, only when it is proportionate to the violence it opposes can this defensive use of force be justified. Such counter-violence is then instrumentally justified by a rationalisation in terms of its ends.

It should be quite apparent that peace is not reconcilable with violence. Certainly not with violation, since any peace brought about by such means would itself be an unjustifiable peace. Moreover, it is difficult to see how force can be a morally neutral means when used in a human context. To justify force in terms of the ends it is used for would seem to imply this. But when force is used in a human context, it impinges on human beings who are ends in themselves. And even when it is used to protect the dignity of such human persons from being violated by other persons, or by impersonal structures, such violence can only be thought of as a preliminary for peace, not something compatible with it.

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<sup>18</sup> Hannah Arendt, *On Violence*, New York: Harcourt, Brace World, 1970, p. 5.

More pertinently, the exercise of such 'justifiable force' or 'counter-violence' cannot be uncritically accepted, since the exercise of violence in a human context involves more than just the victims and the violators. For our capacity for violence too easily engulfs all around. There are no non-combatants in a war, just as there are no bystanders in a general revolution. All around are somehow implicated. And yet, as with the ancient Romans, force and violence are still often thought of as a viable means to peace.

However, if peace itself is not compatible with force and violence, how does one protect such a peace against the use of the violent forces, when these threaten to engulf it, not just from without but from within as well? Here we must understand that if peace implies the absence of force and violence, it does not mean a negation or the absence of power. However, we need to understand what kind of power is compatible with a stable peace.

### ***Understanding Power***

Power is still mostly understood after the classic definition of Max Weber, as the capacity to impose ones will against resistance. This is an understanding of power as domination, as 'power over', that implies a zero sum game in which there must be losers in order that they may be winners. In this understanding violence will necessarily be implicated in any exercise of power, in fact here 'violence is nothing more than the most flagrant manifestation of power'.<sup>19</sup> C. Wright Mills draws the logical consequence of a politics based on this: 'all politics is a struggle for power; the ultimate kind of power is violence'.<sup>20</sup> One cannot help but notice the Hobbesian assumption underlying such a notion of power. In the 'war of all against all' such an understanding makes for good survival sense. For if the final integrating principle of society is coercion, then the powerful must prevail and impose a minimum consensus for a viable social order. It is precisely this power as domination which corrupts, and when absolute, corrupts absolutely!

In this situation, peace can never be a reality. It can only be simulated by a forced imposition of some measure of consensus by

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<sup>19</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, New York: Viking Press, 1969, p. 35.

<sup>20</sup> C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1956, p. 171.

some rules of the game, to contain the inevitable conflict and competition implicit in such an understanding of society lest it go out of hand and lead to the destruction of the players themselves; in which case there would be no winners but all losers. But at the very most this can achieve a balance of power, which all too readily becomes a balance of terror. Such a precarious balance can be the basis for only a precarious peace.

However, there is another understanding of power that is more functional and has been articulated by Talcott Parsons. In this sense, ‘power *to*’ is efficacy or capacity to achieve or affect something. Thus the social expression of such power concerns persons rather than things. This empowering a group is to enable it to ‘not just act, but to act in concert,’ and then such power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence as long as the group keeps together.<sup>21</sup>

Such multiple capacities need not be in any inherent contradiction with each other, though they may well need to be controlled and coordinated, if they are to complement, and not conflict with each other. The underlying assumption here is that of consensus as the fundamental principle of integration which makes for cooperation between persons and groups rather than competition or conflict.

But no society is integrated exclusively by consensus or coercion, and in no society would power be premised on just one or the other principle. For even where there is coercion and competition, there can still be a coincidence of interests, that make for some measure of cooperation, just as when there is consensus and cooperation there still could be a conflict of interests that makes for competition or worse.

Hence in either understanding, of power *over* and power *to*, there must be control and coordination for any viable social order. This cannot be done by mere coercion and sheer force, but must be based on some level of consent, that legitimates power, and stabilises it. This is what Weber called ‘authority’. Hence, in his *Politics as a Vocation*, the state is defined as ‘a human institution that (successfully) claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory.’<sup>22</sup> However, legitimacy can still be questioned and subverted, particularly by those under this authority, as would happen when power is dominating and not enabling. It is rather the monopoly

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<sup>21</sup> Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, p. 44.

<sup>22</sup> H. H. Gerth & C. Wright Mills, “Politics and Vocation”, in, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1967, p. 78.



of coercive power by the state that is needed to constrain the use of such power by other political players that is essential to the modern state. Unfortunately, the state often becomes the perpetrator of the violent use of power against its own subjects, not the protector of all its citizens. In sum, 'power is indeed the essence of all government, but violence is not.'<sup>23</sup>

This is what makes a balance of power, which implies power over others, even when this is a 'legitimated' one, inherently unstable and open to realignment. A peace premised on such a balance would be acceptable only when there is no other alternative. However, power as efficacy and capacity, implies not a balance but rather a complementarity of power, which requires coordination more than control. However, power whether as domination or as enabling, will inevitably become violent if becomes an end in itself. Indeed some like Sorel,<sup>24</sup> Pareto,<sup>25</sup> Fanon,<sup>26</sup> seem to have glorified violence, but them it was as a means to destroy the old order and bring to birth a new age.

What is important to note in this conceptualisation and understanding of power and violence is that it is based on a pre-understanding of the human, and a pre-option for underlying ethical values, as the foundation on which a social consensus can be built. It would be naive to assume that the real situation of society is actually reflected by such pre-understandings and pre-options, rather these express the 'ought' of an ideal. Clearly the balance of power and the peace that follows would be more practical in very many of our human situations, but it would certainly be far from the longing for peace that is so much part of our deepest human yearnings.

This is precisely why one can speak of the 'myth of peace', where 'myth' is a pre-rational, not an irrational but rather a transrational, grasp that can only be expressed in symbol and metaphor. Such myths are collective dreams that express the unarticulated depths of a people's unconscious, their deepest longings that they themselves may not be consciously aware of.

Following Panikkar, we shall attempt to give some content to such a longing for peace. After the Romans, St. Augustine defined peace as 'the tranquillity of order'. But tranquillity is still a rather passive understanding, and surely peace must have a more positive content.

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<sup>23</sup> Arendt, *On Violence*, p. 51.

<sup>24</sup> Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, New York: Collier Books, 1950.

<sup>25</sup> Vilfredo Pareto, *Sociological Writing*, Selected and Introduced by S. E. Finer, (trans.), Derick Mirfin, Fredrick Praeger, 1966.

<sup>26</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, New York: Grove Press, 1961.

Thus besides justice, which is implied by order, there must be freedom, if this just order is to be compatible with human dignity. Moreover, if the dialectical tension between justice and order is effectively and constructively resolved, then we would have a third element in our understanding of peace, that is harmony. Each of these three elements, justice, freedom and harmony, can be described, but we still need to put them together in a collective myth. At this profound level, peace can be an end in itself, as in fact salvation myths have expressed. This is the peace that is reflected in popular greetings: pax shalom, salam, shanti,... that needs to be explored as a foundation for a brave new world.

The tragedy of modern humanity seems to be that it has too few creative and inspiring myths to live by. In desperation we revive and cling to images and symbols that draw on the darkest recesses of our destructive potential. We believe that Gandhi with his non-violence and satyagraha, his swaraj and swadeshi, has much to teach us about this peace that we progressively realise must be the foundational myth of our societies today.

### ***Justice, Freedom, Harmony***

In sum then, our understanding of peace necessarily implies the negation of violence, not only unjustified violation, which is obviously the very contradiction of peace, but also what is sometimes considered as justifiable force. For even with defensive force and counter-violence, there are moral ambiguities involved that rarely make for an acceptable or stable peace. But peace does not imply the absence of or the negation of power. For, power as domination, even when it is considered just and legitimate, can at best lead to a passive and negative peace, a peace that can only be as precarious as any balance of power must inevitably be. Rather an authentic understanding of peace would be premised not on power over, not on power as domination, but on power to, power as enabling. This can make for a strong and stable peace that is more than mere tranquillity, and would include justice, freedom and harmony in our social order.

## IV. Tolerance

### ***Truth and Tolerance***

The reality of pluralism faces us with the question of tolerance. The term in English dates from the 16th century, though the notion itself is much older. For as a philosophical problem tolerance concerns the reconciliation of truth with freedom, i.e., the claims of truth versus the legitimacy of diverse opinions.<sup>27</sup> The implications of this for a society today are as painful as they were for Socrates in ancient Athens, which was not a very heterogeneous city! In the Roman Empire the problem reached acute proportions in the persecution of Christians. With the Edict of Milan in 313 AD, these ended not so much in religious tolerance, as in eventual Christian dominance.

The post-Reformation religious wars left a divided and exhausted Christendom, which now began the pragmatic separation of church and state. However, this did not always guarantee real tolerance, as the limitations in the 'Act of Toleration', 1689, in England evidenced.

Yet 'the English Enlightenment was the greatest promoter of the notion of tolerance though mostly at the expense of theology and the binding force of the knowledge of truth, to which common sense was preferred.'<sup>28</sup> In France the strongly anti-clerical Encyclopaedists 'paved the way for the republican and democratic notions of the state,'<sup>29</sup> though its narrow rationalism provided 'a very doubtful basis for the tolerance which was always in demand.'<sup>30</sup> Thus in the modern West, the social origins of tolerance are to be found less in its monotheistic dogmatic religious beliefs than in the pragmatic resolution of intractable religious and political conflicts.

But tolerance is more than a matter of conflict resolution and emancipation. It is as multifaceted as the dimensions of the pluralism underpinning it: from intellectual worldviews to ethical values, from religious beliefs to cultural patterns, from political ideologies to economic systems, from linguistic divisions to geographic regions. In fact 'there is no generally acknowledged definition of tolerance in the

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<sup>27</sup> Werner Post, "Tolerance", in Karl Rahner (ed.), *Sacramental Mundi*, vol. 6. pp. 262-267.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 265.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 266.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 265.

concrete'.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, a merely formal definition would run into practical difficulties.

### ***The South Asian Scene***

In Sanskrit and Arabic there is no exact equivalent for 'tolerance'.<sup>32</sup> But again the notion itself is not unknown or unacknowledged. For the basis for pluralism was well established in the orthodoxy of ancient Indian traditions: Jaina non-violence, Buddhist compassion, Upanishadic Universalism, sufi-bhakti mysticism. Indian orthopraxis, however, was less tolerant and could be quite violent. These are still living traditions even today.

But there were significant landmarks that have stamped South Asian history. Thus, Ashoka issued the first recorded edict for tolerance:

On each occasion one should honour another man's sect, for by doing so one increases the influence of one's own sect and benefits that of the other man ... Again, whosoever honours his own sect or disparages that of another man, wholly out of devotion to his own, with a view to showing it in favourable light harms his own sect even more seriously. Therefore, concord is to be commended, so that men may hear one another's principles and obey them.<sup>33</sup>

In medieval times, so Humayun Kabir argues convincingly, Akbar's was 'the first conscious attempt to formulate the conception of a secular state'<sup>34</sup> in the country, but this was not followed through by his grandson Aurangzeb. In this century Gandhi's satyagraha for swarajya was a valiant attempt at a non-violent reconstruction of our society, but it could not succeed in preventing the violent partition of the country. Today, we seem to have all but abandoned Gandhi as our society gets increasingly mired in violence of all kinds and at all levels.

Thus in India, the intellectual acceptance of pluralism has not always gone along with the existential practice of tolerance. Indeed,

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 262.

<sup>32</sup> Jamal Khwaja, "Concept and Role of Tolerance in Indian Culture", in R. Balasubramanian (ed.), *Tolerance in Indian Culture*, Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research, 1992, pp. 89-120.

<sup>33</sup> Cited in Romila Thapar, *Ashoka and the Decline of the Mauryas*, London: Oxford University Press, 1961, 255.

<sup>34</sup> Humayun Kabir, *The Indian Heritage*, Mumbai: Asia Publishing House, 1955, p. 21.

we seem to have reached a flash point in our continuing crisis, when even the acceptance of religious-cultural pluralism is being contested by an aggressive 'cultural nationalism', which is very much the intolerant imposition of the dominant castes, threatening the existence of other minorities.

### ***Levels of Tolerance***

In our understanding, tolerance cannot have merely a negative or passive meaning. Rather it must also imply an active and positive response to coping with our differences. Thus we can distinguish levels of tolerance from reluctant forbearance to joyful acceptance. Here we are not considering the ethical constraints on tolerance in a negative sense, i.e., the boundaries beyond which tolerance would be unethical. This would require another discussion. Rather we focus more positively on the limits to which tolerance can be constructively extended.

Following Raimundo Panikkar, we can distinguish four levels of tolerance.<sup>35</sup> The first is tolerance as a practical necessity, i.e., bearing with a lesser evil for the sake of a greater good. This amounts to passively accepting necessary evils, and is little more than political pragmatism.

The second level is based on the realisation that the human grasp of any truth is always partial and never complete. Certainly this is true of religious or revealed truth. Such a philosophical realisation makes us cautious in absolutising our own 'truths', and even more so in rejecting those of others we disagree with, and from such philosophically founded tolerance will come respect.

At the third level, ethical or religious tolerance derives from the moral imperative to love others, especially those different from us, even our enemies. This is far more demanding than the acceptance and respect at the earlier levels of tolerance. Yet the different 'other' here is still the 'object' of one's love. Such love can even make us celebrate our own differences, but it cannot overcome or transcend them completely in a higher unity.

Overcoming this objectification of the other is 'a mystical experience of tolerance'. Panikkar explains that here tolerance 'is the way one being exists in another and expresses the radical

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<sup>35</sup> Raimundo Pannikar, *Myth, Faith, and Hermeneutics*, Bangalore: Asian Trading, 1983, pp. 20-36.

interdependence of all that exists'.<sup>36</sup> In the final analysis it is only this kind of mystical tolerance that can overcome and transcend the contradictions and conflicts between religious traditions, bringing them into a higher communion.

### ***Dimensions of Understanding***

At each of these levels, the political, the philosophical, the religious, the mystical, following Panikkar again, we can distinguish two dimensions of understanding, or rather pre-understanding.<sup>37</sup> Thus our comprehension can be in terms of a more or less explicit meaning that is conceptually grasped; or in the context of our pre-understanding, of implicit pre-judgments and presumptions, in terms of a meaningfulness that can be only symbolically represented. These are the dimensions of 'ideology' and 'myth', respectively.

Myth as defined by Panikkar, is 'the horizon of intelligibility' for us, 'over against which any hermeneutic is possible'.<sup>38</sup> It is taken for granted, unquestioned, a part of our pre-understanding, something we accept in 'faith'.

Once it is rationally articulated, myth is demythicised and so is our faith, in a 'passage from *mythos* to *logos*', from myth to reason, as the articulated conscious word. This then develops into an 'ideology', which in this context Panikkar describes as: 'the more or less coherent ensemble of ideas that make up critical awareness, i.e., the doctrinal system that enables you to locate yourself rationally... a spacio-temporal system constructed by the logos as a function of its concrete historical moment.'<sup>39</sup> These distinctions have crucial implications for our understanding and practice of tolerance. For the more coherent and cogent the articulation of an ideology is, the more likely it is to reduce other understandings to its own terms, or reject them, if they cannot be fitted into its own horizons. We do of course, need ideologies for we need to articulate and rationalise our understanding in the various dimensions of human experience. But ideologies must be able to accept alternative understandings, and open themselves out into broader and deeper perspectives. This will depend on the myth,

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 25-34.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

the pre-understanding, from which it derives. For the more extensive and intensive the meaningfulness of the myth, the richer and denser its symbolism, the more open and accommodating the ideology that can be built on it.

Hence we can conclude with Panikkar: '*the tolerance you have is directly* proportional to the myth you live and inversely proportional to the ideology you follow.'<sup>40</sup> (emphasis in original text) What we need, then, is a metanoia of our myths to escape and be liberated from the paranoia of our ideologies, whether religious, political or otherwise. Both myth and ideology are found in all the dimensions of tolerance indicated earlier, though there is obviously a greater affinity for ideology in political and philosophical tolerance, as there is for 'myth' in the religious and mystical one.

### ***Difference and Indifference***

In Asia, plurality is so deeply and intricately woven into our society that any attempt to homogenise it can only be suicidal. But ways of coping with it range from indifference and non-engagement, all the way to affirmation and celebration. Given the intricacies of our social interdependence, the first approach can only end with a nihilistic relativism if it does not collapse in annihilating chaos. The second must open into ever broader dimensions and deeper levels of tolerance. Indeed, the constructive and creative practice of tolerance, is the only viable way to cope with the bewildering diversity and difference that both challenges and confounds us, it is both a precious treasure and dangerous legacy! However, there is always a danger of celebrating difference in seclusion and not in dialogical encounter with the other. Such incommunicable uniqueness cannot but collapse into a nihilistic relativism, which is very far from the radical relativity on which a creative pluralism and a respectful tolerance must be premised.

### ***Limits of Tolerance***

The limits of tolerance must be set up within a regime of human rights. However, to be sustainable our tolerance must go beyond legal norms. It must be founded on positive values that are sensitive to the

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

other and expressed in multiple ways in the diverse arenas of inter-personal and social encounter. To mention but a few: being non-authoritarian and non-judgmental in personal relations, a non-dogmatic religious openness, a positive appreciation of cultures and languages other than one's own, a commitment to equitable gender relations, a respect for egalitarian group rights and fundamental individual rights, an ecological awareness and aesthetic sensitivity.

These must be given some substantive content in terms of moral values: justice truth, humanity, compassion, love . . . and spelt out in behavioural norms: non-violence and respect for life, social solidarity and a just economic order, truthfulness, gender relations in terms of equality, partnership and respect.

## **VI. Dialogue**

### ***Real Tolerance to Authentic Dialogue***

Especially in strained circumstances, tolerance needs dialogue to be sustainable. Moreover, any dialogue inevitably becomes problematic and unstable, if tolerance is pursued by just one party. The level of tolerance we accept sets the context for the degree of dialogue we are able to pursue. As with tolerance, dialogue can be pragmatic and political, and restrict itself to adjusting and coping with differences, or it can be intellectual and philosophical and seek to complement the truth of each partner. Further, dialogue may be ethically and religiously motivated to grow in the love and concern of each partner, or mystically inspired to culminate in a higher union of both, in a deeper comprehension of truth and love.

In this 'difference' we must find the basis of dialogue, in which my 'self' and the 'other' are both discovered and enriched. As we unveil our 'self' in the 'other' and the 'other' in our 'self', we find that our deepest identity and bonding transcends all differences in an immanent I-thou communion. Indeed, dialogue is the most constructive and creative practice of tolerance, the only effective way to really cope with the bewildering diversity that challenges and confounds us, as a precarious legacy and a precious treasure.

This is the real trouble with the colonial world. It is a transported, transplanted alien world. It was an age of controversy and conquest not pluralism and dialogue. Moreover, an authentic dialogue is really possible only between equals, otherwise it just becomes unequal



exchange and manipulation. And it is only now in a post-colonial world that we have the possibility and must assume the responsibility for such a multicultural and inter-religious dialogue.

### ***Dialogue and Dialectics***

For Panikkar ‘dialogue’ is a most fundamental condition of existence. It is our way of being. ‘Dialogue is, fundamentally, opening myself to another so that he might speak and reveal my myth.... Dialogue is a way of knowing myself and of disentangling my own point of view from other viewpoints and from me.’<sup>41</sup> Thus we can speak of a ‘dialectical dialogue’ which would pertain to the encounter of ideologies, while a ‘dialogical dialogue’ would be more pertinent to the meeting of myths. Dialogue and conversation, then, are intrinsic to the human condition, the very language of our existence, the necessary site for interpreting all our experience.

‘Difference’, then, as Gadamer insists ‘stands at the beginning of a conversation, not at its end,’<sup>42</sup> awaiting the moment of coherence, of fulfilment, of a ‘fusion of horizon’ that will complete the hermeneutic circle and set it off again for us – ‘we who are a conversation’.<sup>43</sup> We are constructed and deconstructed in dialogue with ourselves and others. Indeed, ‘the conversation that we are is one that never ends.’<sup>44</sup> For dialogue and conversation are intrinsic to the human condition, the very language of our existence, the essential hermeneutic of all our experience.

Gadamer explains how ‘to be in conversation, however, means to be beyond oneself as if to another’. For, as he insisted in 1960 all genuine dialogue must be premised on an authentic hermeneutic: ‘to recognise oneself (or one’s own) in the other and find a home abroad — this is the basic movement of spirit whose being consists in this return to itself from otherness.’<sup>45</sup> But we would emphasise a further implication of such

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 242.

<sup>42</sup> Hans Georg Gadamer, “Destruktion and Deconstruction”, in Diane P. Michelfelder & Richard E. Palmer (eds.), *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*, 1989, New York: State University Press, p. 113.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

dialogical hermeneutics: ‘the challenge to recognise otherness or the alien in oneself (or one’s own)’.<sup>46</sup>

### ***Domains in Dialogue***

As with tolerance, so too with dialogue we must distinguish various levels and dimensions of this involvement with one another, for dialogue is surely more than a verbal exchange.

In such an understanding of dialogue, we can then distinguish various dimensions of this involvement with one another, following the fourfold dialogue urged by the Catholic Church recently in the context of inter-religious dialogue, but certainly relevant to an inter-cultural one as well<sup>47</sup>:

1. ‘*the dialogue of life*, where people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit, ....’
2. ‘*the dialogue of action*’, in which we ‘collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people’.
3. ‘*the dialogue of religious experience*, where persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, ....’
4. ‘*the dialogue of theological exchange*, where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages, ....’

Such a distinction of domains, of life, action, experience, articulation, not a separation between them, allows for a multiplicity of diverse dialogues with a variety of different partners, even with non-believers outside any religious tradition.

The *dialogue of life* is at the level of sharing and encounter of our ‘myths’, which then is deepened in the dialogue of religious and cultural experiences. This can be an even deeper level of not just mythic communication but mystical experience as well. Collaborative action requires some level of ideological and political consensus, which can then be intensified and sharpened in a theoretically articulated exchange. Thus life and experience are at the level of ‘myth’ and mysticism; action and theory at that of ‘ideology’ and politics.

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>47</sup> *Dialogue and Proclamation*, Vatican City: Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, 1991.

Moreover, dialogue implies a reciprocity between the 'self' and the 'other' that can take place in various types of encounter and exchange between persons and groups. A more nuanced understanding of dialogue requires a specification of various kinds of involvement of the 'self' with the 'other'. For in each of these areas of exchange we distinguish degrees of dialogue corresponding to the levels of tolerance, premised on differing understandings of the self and the other, and the encounter between the two as delineated above.

At the pragmatic level of tolerance, where the other is perceived as the limitation of the self, dialogue becomes a practical way of overcoming differences, rather than by confrontation that could result either in the assimilation or in elimination of the other. At the intellectual level, where the other is seen as complementary to the self, dialogue seeks to overcome the limitations of the self with help of the other, rather than instrumentalise the other in the pursuit of self-interest. At the ethical level, the self accepts moral responsibility for the other. Here the self reaches out to the other to establish relationships of equity and equality. At the mystical level, the other is perceived beyond a limitation or a complement or an obligation, as the fulfilment of the self. Here dialogue calls for a celebration of one another.

### ***Inter-religious Dialogue***

If we grant that dialogue is essential to the human condition then it must be a dialogue that breaks the silence and opens communication, discredits suspicion and creates trust. Hence we need to create a culture of dialogue so that dialogue is a constant accompaniment of all we do.

There is always the danger of celebrating our own 'difference' in isolation and seclusion from others and not in dialogue with them. Such an inwardly turned dialogue eventually becomes a monologue, whether of individuals or of groups. This inbreeding can only lead to a genetic decline of the group's cultural and intellectual DNA. In regard to others, the outsiders, it 'shades over into the celebration of indifference, non-engagement and indecision.'<sup>48</sup> This further negates creative pluralism, undermines respectful tolerance and destroys any real possibility of a culture of dialogue.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

A constructive engagement will demand a radical change, a *metanoia* of our hearts, to free us from the *paranoia* of each other. The imperative for dialogue can now be summed up in a few pertinent sutras:

to be a person is to be inter-personal;  
to be cultured is to be inter-cultural;  
to develop is to participate and exchange;  
to be religious is to be inter-religious;

Psychologists have convinced us of the first; sociologists are trying to teach us the second; political economists are promoting the third; theologians are coming to realise the fourth.

In 1995, the 34<sup>th</sup> General Congregation of the Society of Jesus in Decree 5 gave a particularly relevant mandate for dialogue to the Jesuits: 'to be religious today is to be inter-religious in the sense that a positive relationship with believers of other faiths is a requirement in a world of religious pluralism.' (Dec. 5, No. 130) Raimundo Panikkar rightly insists that 'dialogue is not a bare methodology but an essential part of the religious act par excellence.'<sup>49</sup>

### **Cultural Hermeneutics**

Hermeneutics, as Paul Ricoeur<sup>50</sup> and Hans Gadamer<sup>51</sup> (1977) have argued, is a matter not just of interpretation, but rather of seeing, and seeing 'through', to the 'surplus of meaning' contained in the 'circle of the unexpressed'.<sup>52</sup> Now 'the hermeneutical phenomenon is at work in the history of cultures as well as in individuals, for it is in times of intense contact with other cultures (Greece with Persia or Latin Europe with Islam) that a people becomes most acutely aware of the limits and questionableness of its deepest assumptions.

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<sup>49</sup> Raimundo Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, New York, Paulist Press, 1978, p. 10.

<sup>50</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, Texas: Texas Christian University Press, 1976.

<sup>51</sup> Hans Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, (trans) & (ed), David E. Linge, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977.

<sup>52</sup> Linge, "Introduction", in Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, p. xxxi.

Collision with the other's horizons makes us aware of assumptions so deep-seated that they would otherwise remain unnoticed.'<sup>53</sup>

We need a new and creative dialogue of cultures as a prelude to a dialogue of religions, whether inter- and intra religious ones. This will enable us to see 'beyond' as well, beyond our exclusive and enclosed worldviews, beyond our truncated and limited levels of tolerance, beyond our comforting myths and tautological ideologies, so that cultures can truly encounter each other in a dialogue at the levels of life and experience, of action and articulation. It is precisely what is called a 'fusion of horizons', a breakthrough to higher more inclusive comprehension.

Moreover, here we see the critical importance of culture in all its many forms. For culture is creative and innovative, dynamic and transformative. It reveals and challenges in all its symbolic expressions, in whatever form these may take in a verbal, auditory, visual, or plastic medium. For culture as the social heritage of a society is a system of meanings and motivations that must be both preserved and transmitted as well as enriched and transformed. All communication with human beings must be in their cultural medium. Otherwise, it could turn out to be not just non-communication, but miscommunication and misunderstanding. Hence all cross-cultural communication must be inculturated, it must interpreted, indigenised and rooted. It cannot be translated, transported, or transplanted. That would be an evitable alienation. A true inculturation transcends cultural divides. It Universalises and it unites.

Cross-cultural communication is particularly problematic, especially with art and the humanities, less so in science and technology. Because science communicates in concepts, with precise symbols, which can be expressed in accurate formulae, it is more easily translated and transplanted. Science is univocal and more readily universalised. Technological gadgets themselves are little affected by changing cultural climes, though they may have unintended consequences. However, wherever communication has to be open-ended, symbolic, metaphoric, where it is multi-vocal, multivalent, as in fact life itself is, then we need the rich significance of symbol and metaphor, of art rather than science. Otherwise we do not really connect in a creative dialogue both within a culture and much more so across them.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

### ***An Equal Dialogue***

Any dialogue that starts with the assumptions of superiority on one side, or has a hidden agenda intending assimilation or absorption, propaganda or conversion of the other can never be an equal exchange. In the end all unequal exchange, whether between classes, castes, genders or even between communities, regions, etc., eventually becomes exploitative and oppressive. To be truly creative, dialogue must be open and free, beginning with mutual respect and continuing in reciprocal enrichment.

Dogmatic religious traditions find it problematic to concede that those outside their revelation and beliefs have an equal access to the truth. They feel themselves privileged in this regard, and compromise in this matter is tantamount to being disloyal to their faith. In such a perspective, a clash of religious traditions becomes unavoidable and peace and harmony is only possible in a secular space. This is precisely the argument of the rationalist, and history would seem to justify their stance.

Nevertheless, if inter-religious dialogue between such exclusive religious traditions is more difficult, it is also more necessary. The challenge is to move religious traditions from being exclusive to being inclusive, or at least to find some common ground for a dialogue. This demands a distinction between the perspectives of the insider and the outsider. This requires the partners to bracket, their insider perspective and to prescind from it to take an outsider one by positioning oneself on common, perhaps higher ground. Here all the partners to the dialogue can be equal.

### ***Emic/Etic Perspectives***

From an emic or insider's perspective, differing truths cannot lay claim to equal validity, unless they are relativised, or brought into harmony at a higher level of unity. This harmony may require an etic or outsider's perspective, if the insider's one is not inclusive enough. Without compromising itself, an emic perspective must grant the right to hold, and the duty to respect different opinions, even those incompatible with one's own. For in civil society the other's legitimate right to freedom and their claim to respect must not be compromised by imposing one's own dogmatic beliefs or prevailing practice. This

makes dialogue possible even between believers and atheists – an extra-religious dialogue.

For the believers of the creedal religions, claiming privilege for their truth, an equal dialogue may not be a matter of ‘equal truth’, yet it must always be one of ‘equal freedom’. No one standpoint must be privileged, but all critiqued and challenged. Given the diversity of our pluri-religious traditions today, the only common currency viable is our common humanity and a basic humanism derived from this. Any apparent controversy between truth and right, between tolerance and justice must be resolved at this level.

For given the multiple polarities delineated across sharp divides on contentious issues, any attempt to clear a common ground for an equal dialogue must begin with a reciprocity of perspectives, i.e., seeing ourselves as others see us, a necessary exercise for individuals and groups, for communities and other agents as well. This means positioning oneself outside one’s own perspective and situating oneself within that of the other’s. In turn, this will have its own problems but only on such a common ground can all engage as equal partners and set the conditions for a deeper religious dialogue.

To those outside the faith community, these creedal religions may well be perceived as unwilling or unable to face the challenge of an equal dialogue: ‘My truth is truer than yours’. Such religious traditions need a relevant intra-religious dialogue to be more open and inclusive. We are all conscience-bound to follow the truth wherever it leads. From an insider perspective, when a creedal religion holds its truth to be revealed, the objective possibility of one’s conscience leading one outside the fold, as it were, is extremely problematic. Is this always ‘apostasy’? At least the insider must grant the subjective possibility of this happening in good faith. Nevertheless, crucial questions remain. How inclusive is one’s perspective? How informed is one’s conscience?

The non-creedal religions are generally not constrained by exclusive beliefs. However, inclusiveness too must go with its own cautions. It must not fall into relativism or degenerate into permissiveness; neither must it become a process of appropriation and absorption into a higher unity, wherein the distinctiveness of each tradition is conflated, not just subsumed. The all-inclusiveness of some Universalists sometimes seems to imply just this: ‘My truth includes yours, but not vice versa’. A valid inclusiveness would demand the integration of diversities into an enriching and higher unity so that we have a ‘diversity-in-unity’, rather than a ‘unity-in-diversity’.

White light includes the wavelengths of all the seven colours, yet the rainbow has its own special beauty. So too, the polyphonic voices in dialogue make the symphony.

### ***Intra-Religious Dialogue***

All this will demand a relevant hermeneutic, a more liberal and humanist approach within each tradition, which is precisely what an equal dialogue challenges each one to do. But first an intra-religious dialogue is a necessary condition for an inter-religious one, otherwise we will have a debate not a dialogue, controversy not complementarity. For: 'if *interreligious* dialogue is to be real dialogue, an *intrareligious* dialogue must accompany it, i.e., in must begin with my questioning myself and the relativity of my beliefs (which does not mean *relativism*), accepting the challenge of a change, a conversation and the risk of upsetting my traditional patterns.'<sup>54</sup>

For unless the plurality within a religious tradition is encouraged, differences celebrated, tolerance sensitised, it is unlikely that any of these can be carried over to an inter-religious dialogue. For a religious tradition that is homogenising, insensitive and intolerant to its own diversity from within cannot be open to being enriched by the diversity and difference of others from without.

## **VII. Religious Disarmament**

### ***A Holistic Praxis***

The complexity of the issues involved in this whole discourse on tolerance and dialogue should now be apparent. It certainly calls for a fine-tuned critical analysis. All this makes for a greater complexity and challenge in our praxis, as an action-reflection-action process.

The constructive potential of such a dialectic between theory and practice can be fully realised only in a creative dialogue between myth and ideology. For it is only in the mutual encounter of myths that they are deepened and enriched, and, in the reciprocal exchange among

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<sup>54</sup> Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, p. 40.



ideologies that these become more open and refined. But a viable praxis must go beyond reflection to action, beyond interpretation to implementation. For this we will need a holistic approach that can transcend polarities in an integral whole.

Thus we must find ways in which faith and reason critique each other, so that premised on a genuine humanism, faith is always reasonable and meaningful, and reason always faithful to an authentic humanism. In our involvement in such religious controversies, we need to be both renouncers and sadhus, as well as activists and karmayogis. In our understanding of the complexities involved we need to be both contemplatives and mystics, as well as theologians and philosophers. And in our response to the issues we need to be both creative artists and poets as well as constructive critics and academicians.

Today more than ever before, for our threatened humanity, the only way of being human is to be in constructive and creative interrelationships with others, not in isolation from them, if indeed that were possible any more in our increasingly interdependent world. So also for our threatened religions in an unbelieving world, the only way of being religious is in solidarity with other believers not in confrontation with them. In other words, to be human and religious we must be tolerant and in dialogue. Only thus can we genuinely be our authentic selves, true believers and truly human.

In the final analysis, indifference and non-engagement are hardly adequate or constructive ways of coping with our ever-increasing interdependencies in our globalising world. This certainly cannot make us neighbours, partners in dialogue. It can at best lead to a co-existence, which can at best only be very precariously peaceful, and certainly not very creatively progressive. Most often it only brings alienation and chaos, in our situation of scarcity and competition.

### ***Metanoia and Paranoia***

In a globalising world, neighbours are no longer so much defined by geography, as by interaction and interdependence. Multicultural exchange and inter-religious sharing can bring about shared interests and common concerns that make good and lasting neighbours. Certainly is it a better place to begin than our political geography which divides and rules us all. Indeed, such neighbourliness may

make the difference between a 'clash of civilisations', which eventually becomes a clash of barbarisms, and a harmony of culture that opens into a 'dialogue of religions'! Moreover, as sparks of the one divinity, sharing in the one Ultimate Reality, we are all children of the same Utterly Other God; our common concern is faith, which makes us brothers and sisters and neighbours, sharing a common humanity.

This realisation can deepen our shared concerns. Thus both faith in the divine and concern for the human are the foundation of our neighbourliness. These are not opposed but complementary dimensions. For, while the immediate basis of our concerns is ourselves, the ultimate one for believers, for persons of faith, must be God. 'Man is the measure of all things' the ancient Greek philosophers taught us, but God as the creator of all things, visible and invisible, is the one who has given us our measure.

An adequate response in a pluralist world is not mere co-existence or mutual seclusion but a constructive dialogue engaging both the 'myths' we seem to live by, and the ideologies we chose to act from. For this we must dare beyond the constraints of dialectical reason, which no doubt has its uses - and limitations. This must be the basis of a dialogue in which my 'self' and the 'other' are both discovered and enriched, the cultural 'other' and especially the 'counter-cultural other', within my own culture and across cultures too. For, as we unveil our 'self' in the 'other', and the 'other' in our 'self', we will find that our deepest identity and bonding transcends all differences in an immanent I-thou communion.

At all the four levels of tolerance and the four dimensions of dialogue we have sketched earlier, Gandhiji is an example and an inspiration. It took a Martin Luther King Jr., and a Nelson Mandela to demonstrate his continuing relevance for the whole world today. Gandhi effectively based his praxis of ahimsa and satyagraha on an ethics of tolerance and dialogue: 'If we want to cultivate a true spirit of democracy, we cannot afford to be intolerant. Intolerance betrays want of faith in one's own cause.'<sup>55</sup>

In a multicultural society, and ours is more so than most, cultural conflict often reaches an impasse. With rapid social change and the insecurities it brings, with technologies of mass communication and mass mobilisation in which competing groups and conflicting interests implode, this impasse becomes a point of no return and no

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<sup>55</sup> *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Delhi: The Publications Division, Government of India, vol. XIX, 1966, p. 313.

advance. Each cultural community digs itself into a kind of cultural trench warfare. In such a war of attrition the only contemporary alternatives seem to be to retreat, which would be dangerous and even unviable, or to mobilise for total war and mass destruction, which would be an inhuman price to pay even for unlucky survivors. To anticipate such a painful dilemma the possibility of a 'cultural disarmament' needs to be explored. This involves stepping back from our cultural entrenchments to seek common ground for an inter-cultural dialogue as a way to deeper understanding of peace and harmony.

Similarly in a pluri-religious society already exploding in violence, we need to disarm religious fundamentalisms of all hues, and open ourselves to finding common ground in values and commitments we can all share so that an inter-religious dialogue can enrich us and the religious traditions to which we belong. Such a metanoia, a radical change of heart from a history of violence to a commitment to non-violence, from the pursuit of power to the quest for peace, from a pragmatic to a deeper level of tolerance, from a self-righteous monologue with ourselves to a truly open inter-religious dialogue. Religious disarmament is thus the metaphor for such tolerance and dialogue.

## VIII. Conclusion: Open and rooted

For Panikkar 'dialectics is the optimism of reason. Dialogue is the optimism of the heart.'<sup>56</sup> Pascal wisely counselled: the heart has reasons that reason knows not of. Indeed, a genuine dialogue pertains less to the dialectical mind than to the compassionate heart. Religion is fraught with a huge potential for explosive conflict. We are still coming to terms with the implications of religious freedom and cultural rights for different groups within a single society. We are beginning to realise that uniformity is not the only or the most creative response to difference. Nor is mere co-existence a viable answer in an ever-shrinking world.

We must be both rooted and open, as Gandhi was, to be able to say with Muhammad Ibn 'Arabi, the mystic, philosopher, poet, sage of Spain (1165-1240):

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<sup>56</sup> Pannikar, *Myth, Faith, and Hermeneutics*, p. 243.

My heart is open to all winds:

It is a pasture for gazelles  
And a home for Christian monks,  
A temple for idols  
The Black Stone of the Mecca pilgrim,  
The table of the Torah  
And the book of the Koran.

Wherever God's caravans turn,  
The religion of love shall be my religion  
And my faith.

# 14.

## ART AND EQUITY

A presentation at the Kala Ghoda Festival, Mumbai, 9 Feb 2016

### ***Abstract***

In society, art is in the domain of culture; equity is in that of structure. Any holistic transformation of a society must impact both these domains. One without the other will become tragedy or farce.

I understand art as the imaginative expression of an experience, of an artist's intuition expressed in a sensory medium. Authentic art reveals the deep unconscious, the fantasies and fears, the hopes and anxieties, of a people in their social situation. As such it is a critical, even an essential expression of a society. No society is without its art.

Equity is fairness beyond a justice of rights and duties, not merely a noblesse oblige, beyond formal equality. It is a nuanced consideration of extenuating circumstances, dependencies, vulnerabilities, etc. Thus to paraphrase Aristotle: treating equals as equals and not unequals as equals, so that there is no obfuscation or pretence of an equal justice. Justice for all, appeasement of none morphs unacknowledged into: less justice for the less than equal, more appeasement for the more powerful.

Moreover, too much of our formal justice eventually becomes a justice of retribution, a justice of revenge: I will not be satisfied till the guilty are punished. We seem to want the guilty to suffer rather than be reformed or ever forgiven. John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* (1971) as fairness attempts an equitable justice. Equity privileges a justice of restoration which eventually becomes a justice of reconciliation that opens to reform and forgiveness, where even the last and the lost, the most vulnerable and the least privileged have a special place.

In society, art is in the domain of culture; equity is in that of structure. Any holistic transformation of a society must impact both these domains. One without the other will become tragedy or farce.

Thus the urban-industrial revolution precipitated a collapse of traditional cultural values. The reactionary backlash to radical, rapid structural change, with its anxiety and fears, its anger and rage, must be read in this context, not just rubbished as 'irrational' or 'irrelevant'. The consequent alienation and anomie feeds into a nostalgic longing for a golden age of an earlier pastoral paradise and further exacerbates the reactionary blowback.

Peter Drucker, in explaining why successful CEOs in one multinational corporation fail when takeover to a new one, attributes it to a failure to come to terms with the corporate culture of the new company while trying to change its structure. He concludes: culture eats structure for breakfast! This is the story of liberal constitutional democracy running aground on the rocks of cultural resistance, in spite of constitutionally mandated statutory structures.

In a society under the stress and strain of rapid social change, art opens a window to the cultural transformation it is undergoing. The failure of the Left in India, ideologically a natural ally of the majority in a poor country, is best explained by its inability to impact traditional popular culture. It focused on economic-political structures like class and modes of production, but refused to take seriously the religio-cultural features of religion, caste and patriarchy. The marginalisation and oppression of religious minorities, of Dalits and women were addressed as economic-political issues and reduced to class-struggle. The CPI's treatment of its charismatic general secretary, P. C Joshi, is evidence of its rigid dogmatic stance. Removed of his post, suspended and finally expelled in 1949, he was rehabilitated at the margins of the party in 1951 and his contributions to the party airbrushed away. Thus from the small but still the main opposition in Parliament in the 1950s in early 1960s the Left is now marginalised to minor a representation from a few regional areas.

So too with the secular- rationalists. They rubbished people's religiosity as unscientific and retrogressive. But their rationalist materialism precipitated a popular reaction that religious traditionalists seized on when the promise of the secular nationalism began to flounder under the weight of its own contradictions. Religious fundamentalists from the traditional upper castes, outraged by their sense of exclusion and playing on the imagined victimisation of traditionally religious masses, powered a popular movement of

religious fundamentalism and politicised it into a dangerous ethno-centric chauvinism. Reactionary minority fundamentalisms too got locked into the same dangerous game. ‘Religion in danger’, ‘nation at risk’ become battle cries, resulting in brutal atrocities, while secular rationalists on the right or the left of the political spectrum are left out in the cold.

This is *The Paradox of Liberation: Secular Revolutions and Counterrevolutions*, (2015) that Michael Walzer illustrates with Israel, Algeria and India.

Authentic art provides a critical appreciation of a society’s past, an insight into its present and a window on its future. However, art has not been the domain of political party hacks. Tagore, the artist, does better for India than Nehru, the politician. Tagore’s prayer for ‘that heaven of freedom’ expresses the idea of India from the freedom struggle, far better than Nehru’s Fabian socialism. The idea of India of contemporary *senas* and the *dals* is a nightmare for subalterns, minorities and women in this country. The jihadist understanding of the state is hardly any better.

The modernist grand narratives had earlier sketched an overarching perspective for changing societies. The idealism of the young people was inspired by a counter-narrative to liberal capitalism. Many of them in the 1970s and 1980s joined political movements on left. They were further radicalised by the Emergency of 1975 -1977. Grand narratives have now fragmented with post-modernism. The emphasis on a value-free perspective, morphs a supposedly valueless understanding, the quest for personal freedom becomes individualist permissiveness in a mass society. Such a situation invites the ‘tyranny of the majority’ (Tocqueville: 1982)

The fragments leftover from the earlier grand narratives are no longer able to inspire a social radicalism in youth. Their political ideals seem to be neutered by a competitive and consumerist society, so preoccupied with self-interest and self-promotion so aptly expressed by the obsession with the ‘selfie’. Perhaps the new social movements that can transcend such self-centredness will come of the margins, from the subalterns and the eco-feminists. And it will be their art that will presage their advent.

Others have spoken for the subalterns, whether Gandhian idealists or Maoist radicals. Now they themselves are finding their voices and making their choices. However, a sensitivity to their art can help focus their voices and foreground their choices. Dalit Panther literature did this in exposing the dark deadly shadow side of our society. The upper-caste/class refuses to acknowledge and wants to repress it. All

uncomfortable evidence is dismissed as exceptions: we are not like that only.

The tragedy of some tribal artists driven to their doom by cruel commercial exploiters has not really changed their situation on the ground. Such self-destruction maybe exceptions, but they are too significant to dismiss. We need a genuine partnership to overcome such an impasse. But it must be an equal partnership, not a token co-optation, for then the art may increase, the artist will diminish.

This is what Navjot Altaf has attempted to do in her venture in Bastar, where *The Thirteenth Place* in the tribal council is an open-ended invitation to join the group and complete the circle. Nancy Adajania's book tells her story and it certainly does merit to reach a wider audience so that similar ventures multiply. Where will this lead to we can't quite say. We live in times when 'the future isn't what it used to be,' as the Nobel prize-winning economist, Paul Krugman says. (New York Book Reviews, 25 Jan 2016)

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# 15.

## CELEBRATING THE ORGANIC INTELLECTUAL

From *Ashis Nandy: A Life in Dissent*, eds., Ananya Vajpeyi, Ramin Jahanbegloo, Oxford University Press, 2018, pp. 98-110.

- I. DESCRIBING THE PROBLEMATIQUE
  - II. PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND PEOPLE'S VOICE
  - III. ENGAGED ACADEMICS AND ACTIVIST SCHOLARS
  - IV. PREDICTIVE AND INTERPRETIVE DISCIPLINES
  - V. PARTICIPATORY PRAXIS
  - VI. CELEBRATING THE ORGANIC INTELLECTUAL
- REFERENCES

### **Abstract**

For middle-class academics and activists, who are alienated from the grass-roots people in the field, the challenge to become organic intellectuals is a difficult and delicate task: for academics to ground their abstract theory in the field and for activists to articulate their learnings from the field.

This presentation is in three parts: the first takes up various aspects of the divide between professionals and people; the second looks at procedures of academy and spells out the implications; the third describes alternative programmes outside the academy. Finally, the conclusion celebrates the organic intellectual.

## Introduction

Of the many facets of Ashis Nandy, his creative fidelity in remaining outside the established status quo as a counter-intuitive, organic, public intellectual is the most consistent and fascinating: provocative but insightful, difficult to ignore even when one disagrees with him. In engaging with the social concerns of our time his sharp critical analysis opens alternative perspectives and new understandings. And though these were not always accepted they are challenging and demand respectful consideration. In his sage status now as an intellectual maverick, he cannot be accused of 'haute vulgarisation'. He was never a courtier to the establishment, academic, intellectual or otherwise, for he was not one to make an easy, cheap peace with the status quo.

He brought an intellectual rigour to his reflections as also a committed involvement across a wide spectrum on multiple social concerns, over the multiple fora he engaged with. This is a tribute to someone who was for a generation an exemplar for the intellectual-activist and an inspiration to the activist-intellectual.

### I. Describing the Problematique

The action-research divide affects research endeavours just as much as it does activist ventures. There is need to bridge this distance in a more integrated approach. 'The danger for the researcher is ungrounded theory, the temptation for the activist is ad hoc empiricism.' (Heredia 1988: 27) Thus the divide can develop into an irresolvable dilemma rather than a constructive dialectic, but theoretically, the divide is not unbridgeable though it must be carefully and critically thought through.

The understanding that began to emerge with Paulo Freire's call for a *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, (Freire 1972) and Srinivas's challenges to *The Fieldworker and the Field* (Srinivas 1979) in the late 1970s and through the 1980s seemed to have dissolved by the 1990s and then reversed in the early 2000s. Now it would seem that the distance between the increasingly uncritical dogmatic ideologues and morally self-righteous activists is sharpening, between the right and the left, among secular rationalist and religious extremists, free-market fundamentalists and democratic socialists, privileged *savaranas* and oppressed *avarnas*, tribals and *dikus*,.... not to

mention professional experts and common people, whichever way the mix of Indian society is cut, one finds such social divides. We are not just an unequal but a divided society as well. The academy cannot but reflect this. The issue of interrogating the prevailing terms of discourse is becoming quite compelling. It is an on-going project, still evolving new orientations and perspectives.

However, the difficulties of this integration are not just theoretical, they are practical as well. In fact this is the first barrier that must be crossed if the next constructive step is to be taken. For scholars and intellectuals when they are not involved in action in the field generally feel guilty before those who bear the heat and burden of the day and are at risk on the front in the line of fire as it were. Correspondingly, activists and workers feel browbeaten and cheated when these others articulate experiences they have had only vicariously. There is real need to find some common ground, or 'never the twain shall meet'.

The supposed polarity between academics and activists leaves out a crucial third party in this discourse, namely the people, who too often remain voiceless until they vote with their feet. The activists claim to speak for 'their people'. The focus of their concern is the concrete situation and the interventions it demands. But to be effective this requires a proper understanding of the people and the conditions and factors involved. Academics claim to speak for 'the people' in general; their primary interest is theory and how it can be generalised. Action is concrete; science is about Universals. Activists seek to impact change but when understanding is inadequate and confused, interventions will be ineffective and ambiguous, and the concerns remain unaddressed or worse become further compounded. Academics deal with data and conceptualise and theorise from it. But this does not always add up to 'wisdom'.

T. S. Eliot in an insightful lament in his Choruses from *'The Rock'* (2004) writes:

Where is the Life we have lost in living?  
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?  
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?

There is an obvious hierarchy here. Information is the data input that must be sifted, categorised and ordered. Knowledge implies understanding and insight that is obtained from reflection and analysis. Wisdom comes from experience and brings realisation and

transformation gained by deeper reflection and assimilation. All this adds up to the life not 'lost in living'!

## II. Professional Accountability and People's Voice

The perspective here begins with a distinction between the professionals' interests and peoples' concerns. The reference is not to narrow or chauvinistic interests nor to petty and self-centred concerns. The question is rather how far professionals are oriented to their peer groups or to a larger constituency of common people they as professions impact, and whether these people are to have some direct or at least at indirect involvement in their professional practice, or must they only to be passive recipients of it. This amounts to the alienation of the non-professional by the professional. Ivan Illich once inveighed against these *Disabling Professions*. (Illich 1977) If professional standards must be set and reviewed by professional peers, where does the legitimation for these very standards and criteria come from? Are professionals accountable only to their peers or do the people, on and for whom their profession is practised and whom it impacts, have some effective voice as well? How is such inclusion possible?

The same question can be posed to activists. Are they accountable only to the governing bodies of the NGOs they work for, or their politburo or high command or supremo? Do the people they impact have a voice in the organisation or at least the possibility of a critical feedback? Where are the credible fora for the professional and the activist to be held accountable by people? There must be a larger more people-friendly, more democratic spaces for this in civil society.

In the context of social research in the field, the people are readily involved with providing the data. The critical reflection, which the activists and academics claim to do, is meant to yield understanding and insight. But there is no certainty this will bring wisdom with it or a deeper realisation and an effective transformation. A more inclusive participation can bring a certain credibility and accountability.

Moreover, when professionals get themselves institutionalised in the academy or in an association, then a new dynamic is encountered, one less to do with knowledge than with power, less concerned with wisdom than politics. There are awkward similarities here with the medieval guild with its master craftsmen and journeymen. Professional associations are very much a modern version of the guild, with a homologous hierarchy that includes stars and lesser lights! The

next step to the charmed circle of the in-group is effected by peer review, which easily becomes an incestuous game that the whole family can play to the advantage of the patriarchs! These 'stars' move with their entourage of lesser lights, of spouses and students in a package deal from one appointment to the next, while lesser mortals wait to break into the circle of light, rather than to break it open!

What finally obtains is a dichotomy between form and substance, the classic Weberian contradiction between formal and substantive rationality (Weber 1968): the structure set up to achieve a goal becomes an alienating factor from that same goal, as when a bureau meant for great efficiency gets mired in red tape. It is supposedly premised on expertise, competence, performance and merit. This is mostly measured by an in-house metric that becomes an effective way of perpetuating privilege, based on connections, networking patronage, especially that of the hierarchs! It cannot but precipitate a skewed division of labour between active producing intellectuals and passive consuming ones, with some at the centre and others at the periphery – distinctions the distinguished academic Edward Shils once made. (Shils 1961) This is a division that eventually results in a monopoly! (Hall 1982) Professional groups can well claim legitimacy as interest groups, but when their profession is supposedly based on the contribution of their expertise to society, then surely accountability to their own peers is self-validation, which can well be self-serving as well. Parsonian (Parsons 1951) fiduciary institutions are often innocent of such a possibility.

What are the alternatives to prevent the academy from becoming such an inward-looking, self-serving, self-validating in-group? If peer review eliminates cronyism or partisan bias but lends itself to protective cartels that become monopolistic, can an academic marketplace play this role as is increasingly happening in society all over today? Markets do make producers take cognisance of their consumers, but this by itself is no guarantee that given the passive role consumers are not carolled into today, they will not be manipulated and exploited. The free-market is never free, and more especially so when taken over by monopolies and cartels. A neoliberal free-market has demonstrated this repeatedly and convincingly, more so when it is globalised beyond national, political or democratic control. Moreover, the creation and the transmission of knowledge as a fiduciary trust betrays its purpose when commoditised for a free market, and instrumentalised for profit.

These inevitable dysfunctions of academic professionalism must all the more be critiqued and reviewed and held accountable in a more

viable way. This is best done by the constituencies the professions impact. Even these of course will have their own complications but it does seem to be a very necessary and viable counter-balance to a more often than not notoriously partisan professionalism. Accountability demands a rigorous and continuing endeavour to be open, honest, critical and transparent, perhaps a tall order but a very necessary one, at least an ideal, a reference point from which to critique professional effectiveness.

### **III. Engaged Academics and Activist Scholars**

Many academics who stay locked in their ivory towers are hardly good scholars. All too often they are just institutional administrators, or worse, courtiers to the establishment; the recent events in our universities shows this up so dramatically. But there are some from the academy who stand outside it. These are academics, who have felt the need for a more active involvement and have stepped outside their ivory towers. Inevitably, there will be a certain confluence between their partners in the field and the academy. But the question then is this: in which direction is such a venture turned? Where is its reference group? Who legitimates and affirms it? There are of course many conversations possible, but which is the dominant one that becomes the axis of integration for the others? What is the commitment that subsumes both intellectual and activist? It is here that the centre of gravity of such endeavours will be found.

For not all academics are intellectuals or scholars; many are just institutional administrators, or worse, courtiers to the establishment; the recent events in our Universities shows this up so dramatically. And vice versa nor are all intellectuals are scholars in the academy. C. Wright Mills, (1959) M.N. Roy (1984) and many others are testimony to this. There are public spaces outside academia where intellectuals, academic or otherwise do engage with activists, social or otherwise. It is this discourse that must be foregrounded to interrogate the status quo of the establishment.

Public intellectuals do precisely this: Antonio Gramsci earlier, (1996) Noam Chomsky today, (2002) Ambedkar (2004) so relevant now, and many others, like Ashis Nandy (1999) and Ramchandra Guha. (1989) There is also a need to critique the ad hocism of the activists who run ever faster to stay in the same place, waiting for the revolution that never comes. Sensitising their activism to deeper reflection and larger contexts is critical if they are not to lose its way

in a mirage of ad hoc activity, but equally crucial is to interrogate the academy and set the terms of the discourse, and not allow it to be monopolised by a guild who keep it within their controlled space.

There are activists, who seek to engage with the academy though they are not a part of it. They have felt the urgency for deeper reflection on their experience in the field. However, they remain turned towards the field, to the people and the problems. But once again the question is this: where is their point of reference? Where is their source of legitimation and affirmation through which their axis of integration must run? Obviously there will be ambiguities and anomalies here, but their orientation and intent is clear.

#### **IV. Predictive and Interpretive Disciplines**

The academy prides itself on a rigorous methodology, precisely because it distinguishes a scientific discipline from mere common sense. This is almost a perverse dichotomy that seems to derive from the alienation of the professionals from ordinary people. Thus the talisman for a science is the objective positivist stance and the experimental method. Induction from hard data and quantitative analysis must yield accurate predictions. With the softer disciplines, like the social sciences that do not fall strictly within this approach, the attempt is to approximate this ideal as far as possible: with statistical analysis and data collection, with the comparative method and exhaustive observation. Moreover, disciplines must have well-defined boundaries and crossing them is not easily condoned and often dismissed as too fuzzy to be accurate, valid and reliable as an academic discipline ought to be. Inter-disciplinary studies are often stymied by the boundaries between specific departments. Ideally, the endeavour is to be 'objective' and 'unbiased', in a word 'rigorous' within the confines of the discipline. But all too often the madness in the method has developed into a whole domain of mores and conventions that could well bring rigour mortis rather than any enlightenment!

Thus the sacrosanct rules of scientific objectivity dismiss any involvement, committed or otherwise, as biased and therefore subjective. But M.N. Srinivas, whom no one will accuse of lacking methodological rigour, underscores how it is precisely the participative involvement of the researcher in the field effectively contributes to the research:

Involvement above all, may be essential for going ahead with the research itself. Participation may become sources of data and insight ....Purists in research methodology may be outraged at such contaminations of the field of social action, but the pragmatic fieldworker cannot shy away from involvement when it can lead to insights. Methodological purism can be sterile. (Srinivas 1979: 9)

In the positivist view for a genuine science, the 'subjective' is essentially arbitrary and must be eliminated by a rigorous *experimental* methodology, as is attempted with participant observation. The ideal is to be predictive. But there is another way of understanding the subjective as 'relevant', as meaningful, and bringing with it a 'surplus of meaning'. This will require an interpretative discipline not a predictive one. It is validated by a reflective, *experiential* methodology, which must further be critiqued and authenticated by an inter-subjective approach to screen out the arbitrary in the subjective. It is precisely such a hermeneutic 'fusion of horizons' that will bring a new and deeper insight and understanding. (Linge 1977: xiv-xxi)

From Dilthey's understanding of an interpretative discipline (1991) and Weber's 'verstehen' (1968) to more recent hermeneutics of Gadamer (1975) and Ricoeur (1976), this is a far more open-ended approach than a closed-in positivist one. In an interpretative discipline the emic insider perspective must be given due importance as also the etic outsider one. But an overly rigorous positivist methodology will be innocent of this as also of any hermeneutic suspicions, or for that matter, any hermeneutic faith in the subjective! Methodological fundamentalism?

## V. Participatory Praxis

The consonance of action and reflection is a difficult and arduous praxis, but not an impossible one. An insider's access to the field is often not available to an outsider, who might actually at times bring a more resourceful and insightful reflection, though the outsider may well not have the rich experience of the insider. Together they can bring a 'surplus of meaning', for this is not in itself an unbridgeable divide.

By way of illustration, such a praxis can be collaborative at *three levels*. Firstly, with an action *agency* as active collaborators in the field, who request the study and must undertake to act on its findings



and implement its recommendations. This provides an insider's access to the field with which the agency is directly involved and eschews an instrumental use of the data provider. Secondly, through this active agency—usually an NGO—the study reaches out to the *people* at the grassroots, who with the agency participate in the study and in its later implementation; and thirdly the research agency reports and publicises its work to other *constituencies*, professional and non-professional for a wider response and critique. The first is geared to real needs in the field, the second to people's participation in responding to these needs, the third to credible public accountability. Obviously legitimation and affirmation will be sought at all these three levels, but in so far as this is a grounded action-focused involvement and not abstract theory-centred reflection, the axis of integration for this praxis will be the people, though the professionals will not completely be excluded. There will be a reciprocity between those involved at various levels and in different ways.

What this adds up to is a participatory praxis, i.e., the active participation of the constituency concerned at three levels: investigation, analysis and action. At each of these the participatory approach sets out to overcome the dichotomies established by the conventional methods. At the first level, the dichotomy made between fact and value is transcended by an explicit commitment to moral imperatives from which the facts are seen to derive their significance. In analysis, the division between the researcher and the researched, the active subject and passive objects of the process, is overcome by a dialogic, a non-manipulative exchange but one in which both parties make their specific contributions enriching each other and the analytical process as well. And finally, given this commitment and dialogue the reflection-action divide is resolved through a dialectical praxis in which group reflection articulates and orients group action, even as this in turn makes explicit and refines the collective understanding. (Heredia, 1988: 27)

But of course, there are dangerous pitfalls along the way. For all this is more easily said than done. The commitment of participatory research (PRIA 1982) can readily become ideologically petrified, forcing the facts to fit one's dogma and losing one's sensitivity to more meaningful interpretations. A reciprocally balanced dialogue is a delicate task. Too often it becomes asymmetrically skewed into another dominant-dependent relationship. Dialectical praxis can conveniently mystify and obfuscate where it should clarify and refine.

But besides these difficulties intrinsic to the process of participation itself, there are extrinsic limitations such as motivating and organising the involvement of the concerned constituency. Often enough the direct participation of all remains the unattainable ideal. It must be realistically compromised for a participation mediated through articulate spokespersons and credible leaders, at the level that meets them where they are, and through a progressive development of the constituents' skills and resources to broaden and intensify the participatory base of the process. (Heredia 1988: 27- 28)

Experience in such ventures has underlined the critical need for a community of support, a *satsangh*, for this kind of counter-cultural, intellectual-activist endeavour. Indeed, there will be dissonance in such a process, but there we will also find consonance; the first more likely from the mainstream academy, the second from the interstices at the margins. But then paradigm shifts, which do eventually find acceptance, usually come from the periphery not from the centre! (Shils 1961)

It is easy and tempting to dismiss all this as banal and presumptuous. Often that is the typical professional's response. Yet it is precisely the charismatic and prophetic role of someone who is taking a counter-cultural stance to tell people what they always *knew* but never *realised*, to turn their information into knowledge and their knowledge into wisdom! This is what ivory tower academics and the ad hoc activists have lost in living. This is what Gandhi once did. But he was 'The Impossible Indian' (Devji 2011) we have isolated on statues and memorials, while we will continue living in an unreal world, whether in an ivory tower or of hyperactivism.

All of us have our own autobiographies, hidden or publicised, in which we make our *Apologia pro Vita Sua*, as Newman famously once did. (1956) We need to justify ourselves and not just to others. Indeed, we all need to examine honestly the many-sided legitimations we seek when we do this. In this presentation I am doing it implicitly, so let me explicate this a little. My endeavour through the Social Science Centre, at St Xavier's College, Mumbai in the 1980s to 2004, was to bring together action and research, i.e., the reflection and analysis of the intellectual and the action and involvement of grassroots workers, and also to facilitate the intellectual's action-involvement in the field and vice versa the activist's deeper understanding of the field. Such an integration does happen in some special individuals, though given today's specialisations it seems more feasible at the level of a group.

The Centre attempted to create the space for such a group, and I like to believe succeeded for a while.

## **VI. Celebrating the Organic Intellectual**

So when we do narrate our autobiography, what is the story we are telling, to whom and to what purpose? If we want to engage in the kind of praxis we are talking about we must address such questions with intellectual honesty and firm commitment. Otherwise we might just end up going with the flow in the assembly line of the academy, even as we become more and more productive, and less and less relevant; or engulfed in the ad hocism of action in the rush and tumble in the field, more and more involved and less and less reflective!

To put this differently, the challenge is to become organic intellectuals: for academics to ground their abstract theory in the field and for activists to articulate their learnings from the field. For middle-class academics and activists, who are alienated from the grassroots people in the field, this is a difficult and delicate task. But it is worth trying. Without going into the elaborations of the Gramscian discourse on this, (1996) we can sketch some characteristics of this organic intellectual, as someone who can catalyse and articulate the experience of the people, voice their knowledge, echo their wisdom, make them present in places where they are not heard or acknowledged. This would mean to sift their overabundant information for relevant data, to catalyse this into insightful knowledge, and finally to bring this to a wise realisation in their lives, and so learn from their wisdom to make such possibilities available to others.

Today the information overload is but another way of confusing people and obfuscating issues. The sound bite and the captivating image is an oversimplification that subverts any meaningful understanding. Commentators and analysts are focused on realising goals of profit and pelf for their principals, rather than the authentic aspirations of real people. The pathological obsession of some TV channels and their anchors, their principals and their owners with TRPs and market-share has morphed once intelligible conversations into shouting-barking performances. Surely, we must come back to people's knowledge and wisdom, not to naively romanticise these, but to understand from within, critique constructively, and then to celebrate as valuable and viable the wisdom of our people for our world.

As a shared endeavour we must begin with activists and intellectuals finding common ground in their involvements as intellectual-activists reaching out to the field and vice versa activist-intellectuals, articulating a discourse grounded in their experience. Thus depending on where one starts, becoming embedded among the people as organic intellectuals. Or the process could better begin at the other end, namely facilitating people to become reflective, and to articulate their experience and aspirations, their strengths and weaknesses, their fears and hopes, their dreams and nightmares, without ever losing their roots, but rather deepening them to return to them and giving all this a presence in the academic discourse.

In fine, the authentic organic intellectual does not just interrogate the terms of the discourse, set by the status quo, whether by the establishment in the academy or the prevailing ideologies in the social arenas, in which people play out their lives, but further seeks to renegotiate the discourse in order to empower these people as well. Thus organic intellectuals become 'public intellectuals' who impact the prevailing wisdom to open alternatives, to bring new orientations and creative initiatives for as the World Social Forum's shibboleth puts it: Another World is Possible'!

However, this is not an endeavour that is completed in one big leap, it necessarily implies many small steps, but the direction must be set at the very beginning of this journey or it will get lost in transit or reach the wrong destination. Staying the course, we will begin to discover that there is as much sense and sensibility in risking this journey as there is pride and prejudice in staying with the security of the status quo. Hopefully, we will also recover some valuable knowledge from our information overload, some real wisdom in our skewed knowledge, and find a life in our living.

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# 16.

## **OVERFLOWING DIALOGUE: A CHRISTIAN HUMANIST RESPONSE TO INDIA'S CULTURAL CHALLENGES**

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CHALLENGES IN INDIA: CONTRADICTIONS AND DILEMMAS:  
AN INTEGRATED PERSPECTIVE  
THE FREEDOM STRUGGLE AND THE SANGH PARIVAR  
HINDUISM AND HINDUTVA  
MAJORITY AND THE MINORITIES  
ELECTORAL AND SUBSTANTIVE DEMOCRACY  
THE RESPONSE  
THREEFOLD PEDAGOGY  
DISARMING IDENTITIES  
TRIPLE DIALECTIC TO TRIPLE DIALOGUE  
A COSMOTHEANDRIC SOLIDARITY  
REFERENCES

### **Abstract**

The contradictions and dilemmas sketched here are the challenging context of any effective evangelisation in India today. They must be contextualised in the concrete political, cultural and religious dynamics of a region.

## Challenges in India: Contradictions and Dilemmas

The contradictions and dilemmas sketched here are the challenging contexts of any effective evangelisation in India today, and in all likelihood for a long time to come. Here they are presented in terms of polarities as a heuristic device to highlight the real issues involved as starkly as possible lest they are dismissed with easy and superficial responses. They must be contextualised in the concrete political, cultural and religious dynamics of a region, so as to take into account particular local variations as required, given our diversity and differences. Obviously, reality is not black and white, but full of shades of grey. It is rarely starkly binary, but rather a fluid continuum. However, presenting opposites does help conceptually clarity.

### An Integrated Perspective

*Sutra 1: Dialectics resolves thesis and antithesis into a synthesis. Dialogue reconciles differences into a symbiosis. Dilemmas are critical tensions to be creatively lived.*

The alternative responses to our present predicament are not found in polar opposites which are dialectical contraries, but rather in promising possibilities, and sometimes even in compromising inevitabilities which make for dialogical complementarities. In our globalising world, dialectics at best may yield a *synthesis* but as we have all too often experienced, this is usually in terms of the dominant thesis, not the subaltern antithesis. Dialogue makes for a personal and collective conversion, an inversion of roles that can bring a new *symbiosis*, but only if we can honestly and courageously confront our narcissisms of grandiosity and of victimhood; our inadequacies of collective political will; and lack of social consensus.

There are contradictions that often cannot be resolved, except by eliminating one side of the opposed alternatives. These are either/or choices that sometimes must be made. Compromise is perceived as betrayal and such a truce is inevitably temporary before the contradictions surface again. Other contradictions are contraries. They often represent a dilemma rather than a contradiction. Some dilemmas cannot be resolved, they must be lived. But not in passive resignation, rather we must discern new possibilities between the horns of the dilemma, and build them into viable alternatives: another world is possible, another India, another ecclesial context. At times

such game-changing alternatives seem to emerge from the very contradictions that present themselves. For better or worse this is a long-term generational change, a paradigm shift. But it can be facilitated by an active and constructive engagement with the scenario, rather than passive and unproductive waiting.

### ***The Freedom Struggle and the Sangh Parivar***

*Sutra 2: In the difference between the idea of India, from the freedom struggle and as enshrined in the Constitution, and the Hindu Rashtra, constructed by Hindutva and Hindu nationalism, there persists an unresolvable contradiction.*

The contradiction between the critical history of the national freedom struggle and non-participation of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, and the self-serving reconstruction of this, projecting itself into the nationalist movement is a contradiction between a critically constructed historical narrative and a self-serving re-constructed post-truth version based on alt-facts. So far the first has been mainstream in our history, now the second is being officially sponsored and gaining ground. Unless reversed it can only end in new colonisation of India by saffron sahibs, replacing brown ones, who displaced white ones! As the pre-Independence Indian renaissance evolved into the freedom movement, the idea of India was contested by opposing constituencies with their antagonistic ideologies, seeking to co-opt the movement to their own partisan purposes.

The first perspective projected an ethnocentric nationalism that was more Hindu than Indian, with a definite inclination to religious revivalism, though somewhat moderated by new organisations like the Brahmo Samaj; others were more decidedly aggressive, like the Arya Samaj. Though such revivalism was somewhat subdued in the mainstream freedom struggle dominated by the Indian National Congress, (INC) it found an echo in the Hindu Mahasabha and the Hindu Right.

The second perspective found expression in the freedom movement, dominated by the Indian National Congress, founded in 1885, which led the freedom struggle and evolved a liberal secularism and democratic socialism, now enshrined in the Constitution. Many strands were interwoven into the texture of the Indian National Congress itself, though the Gandhian one prevailed, until after Gandhi the Nehruvian consensus became dominant in Republican India. Different trends came to prominence at different times in the national



freedom struggle's ideology and culture, e.g., Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, and Subash Chandra Bose.

However, there is an unresolvable contradiction between the freedom struggle and the RSS: Hindu Rashtra as proposed by Hindutva, versus a sovereign, democratic, secular, socialist republic of the Constitution. These are really incompatible polar opposites. Any compromise can only be transitional. This is the irony today: on the one hand, those once inspired by Gandhiji's commitment to the last and least Indian lost their way in corruption and cronyism, in patronage politics and political dynasties; and on the other, an organisation which in effect represents upper caste-class interests and corporate lobbies, claims to represent all Hindus. Moreover, the RSS never participated in the national freedom struggle but rather distanced itself from it. Ironically now, these Sanghis claim to be the real and true nationalists, all other dissenters from their vision for India are but pseudo- and/or anti-nationalists.

This contradiction needs to be addressed by foregrounding once again the vision and mission of the India of the freedom struggle, when we made our tryst with destiny, which we now have lost to an arrogant saffron neoliberalism. In 1947 India won freedom from colonial Raj, Swatantrata; in 1950 the Constitution we proclaimed announced a social revolution (Austin 1966) of justice as liberty, equality solidarity for all. We have failed our Constitution, not vice versa. We now need a second freedom struggle to liberate our sovereign, democratic, secular, socialist Republic from this saffron wave for Hindu Rashtra with its hierarchies and taboos, intolerance and exclusions.

### ***Hinduism and Hindutva***

*Sutra 3: Hinduism as a faith tradition and Hindutva as a political ideology are incompatible.*

The contradiction between Hinduism and Hindutva is between an inclusive and open religious tradition of faith and an exclusivist and narrow ideological agenda for dominance, between religious belief and politicised religion, between popular religiosity and its tolerant heterogeneity, and an extremist religious ideology and its enforced homogeneity. These contradictions are such that only a transitional and unstable compromise is possible between them if at all: Hinduism as a religious faith will have to exorcise Hindutva as a political

ideology, or Hindutva will politicise Hinduism and destroy it as a religious tradition from within. Eventually, one or the other must prevail. This has been the tragic trajectory of other politicised religious traditions: a church that marries itself to one political establishment becomes a widow when that regime collapses.

What is happening today is a most shame-faced mobilisation of religion as an ideology; not just a social and cultural affirmation of a group's identity, but an orchestrated political campaign to capture and manipulate its collective consciousness for partisan purposes. This alienates religion from the wellsprings of its religious experience and empties it of all genuine 'faith'. Here religion is no longer just 'the opium of the people'; it becomes a tool of dehumanisation and oppression. Whereas, if it is true to its foundational faith, and the experience that grounds this, it could very well be a blessing, even a mystical grace, and an instrument of peace and liberation. The choice is a collective one, but it still is ours to make. It is the difference between 'good faith and 'bad faith'.

Savarkar's *Hindutva* is beyond the pale of religious faith. It is a political ideology of ethno-religious nationalism premised on culture and race. (Savarkar 1989, 1<sup>st</sup>) Its pretention is to unify and mobilise the inequalitarian classes and hierarchical castes among Hindus under an exclusivist Hindu banner. In 1941, Savarkar coined the slogan: 'Hinduise all politics and militarise all Hindudom' (cited McKean 1996: 71). Such ethno-religious nationalism has an affinity to the traditional Hinduism of upper caste-classes, going back to the Hindu revivalism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Bal Gangadhar Tilak is located here. However, Hinduism as a religious faith is more common among the lower classes and castes, as in the sant-kavi traditions. Tagore belongs here.

Hindutva originates in a paranoia of grandiosity: 'Say with pride we are Hindus' (*Garva se kaho, hum Hindu hain*) and is complemented by the opposite, a paranoia of victimhood: a sense of historical hurt and continuing woundedness. It is a 'cultural narcissism' that has nothing in common with the 'critical/ dialogical Hinduism' which Gandhi symbolised, (Pathak, 1994: 15) so very different from the extremist nationalism Hindutva Savarkar epitomised. There is an unresolvable contradiction here between Hinduism as a religious faith and Hindutva as a political ideology, and further even between Hinduism as ancient civilisational tradition with its worldview embraced by the popular religiosity of the Sanatana Dharmi Hindus on the one hand, and on the other, Hindutva as a contemporary political ideology with its agenda

focused on mobilising Hindus with its religious fundamentalism and ethno-nationalism.

### ***Majority and the Minorities***

*Sutra 4: The tyranny of the majority violates the rights of the minorities.*

The contradiction here is between a larger demographic community and a smaller vulnerable one, between the 'tyranny of the majority' (Tocqueville 1982: 330) and the rights of a minority, between a bland uniformity and an enriching diversity. The dilemma here is to integrate the multiple cultures of a society in an overarching civilisational unity-in-diversity or rather into a diversity-in-unity. Structural pluralism would require a devolution of authority and power towards more local groups, and coordination and support from higher-level structures; while cultural pluralism would mean a deconstruction of exclusive, totalising identities and a reconstruction of non-exclusive, multi-layered ones, for both individuals and communities.

Constitutional democratic pluralism is a slow and painful process, and a rather cumbersome one too. It is not a quick-fix solution to the rising expectations of people, but it is the only feasible alternative if the reality of diversity and difference is to be accepted and not dismissed or suppressed. In a multicultural, pluri-religious society, there is no escape from this dilemma between unity and diversity. The dilemma must be lived, even if it cannot be resolved. Moreover, the transition from a given plural, to an aspiring pluralist society within a democratic framework and under the ideological inspiration of pluralism demands political equality and economic equity too. This is the foundation for a cultural transition.

The great threat to pluralist society in South Asia comes from an aggressive majority that precipitates defensive minorities. Such majoritarianism versus minorityism becomes a no-win, lose-lose game, in which both unity and diversity become casualties. However, majorities and minorities are constructed communities. Their rigid, closed boundaries promote closed and exclusive identities. Such boundaries are constructed and so can be deconstructed and then reconstructed with fluid, porous ones, which allow for open and inclusive multiple identities. Hostile communal divisions are all too easily polarised and politicised, and then readily spiral into conflict and violence. We need hospitable community relations which are the

basis of a tolerant pluralist society. We must draw on our rich composite Indic culture and the pluralist traditions to recapture the open spaces we have lost to communal polarisation and partisanship. This is the common ground we must recover to move together to higher ground together.

The downward spiral into this imbroglia began decades ago with a communalising politics, pragmatically with the Congress and regional parties, or programmatically, as with the Sangh Parivar and the Muslim League. But the spiral can be reversed if we recover the agenda enshrined in our Constitution. We need a Constitutional politics, not just populist politics; Constitutional patriotism, not jingoist nationalism.

For a successful transition from plural to pluralist society, three prerequisite conditions must obtain:

- 1) institutionalisation of civil and political equality,
- 2) equal educational, occupational and economic opportunities to all, providing for diverse and disadvantaged communities,
- 3) fundamental freedoms of worship and speech of movement, and association and work. These are points of departure to reverse the downward spiral into communal chaos. (Van den Berghe 1969: 67-80)

#### Growth and Equity

*Sutra 5: Capital intensive growth undermines social equality and just equity.*

In the contradiction between free-market led growth and social equity and equality the haves disproportionately benefited from the neoliberal free-market, the have-nots are left further and further behind. The dilemma is to integrate both growth and equity in a just and fair, ecologically sustainable social system. It is the dilemma of putting together contradictory interests in complementary ways giving voice and choice to all.

In a capitalist society where gross inequalities are embedded over generations, class antagonisms can build up beyond class struggle into class war, overt or covert. The welfare state had helped mitigate this, but a neoliberal capitalism is dismantling it and in its place institutionalising a global free market with disastrous consequences for the vulnerable poor. Thomas Piketty's monumental work on *Capitalism in the Twenty-first Century* (Piketty 2014) challenges the

conventional wisdom of neoliberal economists. He demonstrates how over three centuries the system reproduces itself and increases even as it embeds inequality in society. But Piketty is positive about remedial interventions in the system:

‘There are nevertheless ways in which democracy can gain control over capitalism and ensure that the general interest takes precedence over private interest while preserving economic openness and avoiding protectionist and nationalist reactions.’ (Piketty 2014: 1)

Yet liberal democracy can be and often is subverted by vested interest lobbies too.

In India, the transition from rural to urban, from agriculture to industry has been uneven and inequitable. Corporates and their supporters have been the chief beneficiaries of neoliberal free-market capitalism, while an unconscionably large and increasingly desperate poor and marginalised population remain trapped in deprivation and disenfranchised in the system. Moreover, consumerist individualism compounded by capital-intensive, jobless growth, breaks down social solidarity leaving an atomised mass-society, where populist leaders find a gullible following. Defensive communitarianism divides society into impervious and hostile compartments. The discontents of development are, then, visited on the weak and vulnerable, on low castes and minorities, particularly Dalits and Muslims, anti-nationals and dissenters.

Moreover, the tension in the growth-equity dichotomy-dilemma must be addressed and resolved within ecological constraints. For unsustainable growth can only multiply and magnify environmental pollution. And always the poor suffer the most from ecological degradation. Sustainable development may at most preserve the ecological status quo in the environmental, but it will not reverse the damage already done. This will demand a regenerative development which is not even talked about. Thus the inequalities of class compounded by the inequities of caste, precipitate collective hostilities on ethnic and religious minorities, negating the life-chances of the weaker sections; the violence of religious fundamentalism traumatises dissenting individuals and minority communities; political extremism hijacks civil liberties and democratic rights; the pursuit of profit displaces human concerns; invidious competition stymies group cooperation; overt success and public recognition are valued far more in this celebrity culture than the silent sacrifice and unacknowledged contributions of people.

What we are left with is: ‘a pincer movement: a form of global capitalism that can only enrich a small minority and a xenophobic nationalism that handily identifies fresh scapegoats for large-scale socio-economic failure and frustration.’ (Mishra 2014) This may consolidate the Hindu majoritarian vote bank but it does not address the underlying contradictions of growth without equity. As the crisis with development mounts, there is a further resort to polarising Hindutva and its consequent violence. However, in countries as culturally diverse and economically divided as India, growth without equity is a formula for disaster. We need a sustainable and participative development to liberate the poor and include the minorities. So too with the level of equity, it must embrace inclusive justice, and participative agency for all, especially for Gandhiji’s last and least Indian.

### ***Electoral and Substantive Democracy***

*Sutra 6: The dilemma of democracy lies between the deficit of electoral democracy and the dividend of substantive democracy.*

Constitutional democracy cannot be limited to the electoral politics with periodic elections alone. It must be substantive democracy as well: liberty, equality fraternity as elaborated in the Preamble to our Constitution so evocatively expressed in the Preamble to our Constitution. It must protect civil liberties and democratic rights; enable political participation and promote economic empowerment; guarantee cultural rights to communities and fundamental freedoms to all citizens. Electoral democracy is the means to this, and a crucial one. It must not displace ends. Thus there is an inevitable dilemma: between procedural and constitutional democracy. Both must be integrated in a functional democratic state, not lapse into a dysfunctional chaotic one.

However, without real substantive democracy, we could well have a democracy controlled not by the inclusion and participation of people, through their representatives, but by vested business interest through their hijacking lobbies. Vested corporate interests co-opt the populist politics of resentment, and trump any opposition, co-opting the electorate and its representatives to interests, alien to their real needs. Today the grab-all shibboleth of ‘nationalism’ targets all dissenters of whatever hue as ‘anti-nationals’, thus identifying the party with the government and the government with the nation. This

subverts any substantive democratic agenda with a corrosive identity politics of hate for short-term electoral returns. Surely, this is a gross perversion of our sovereign, socialist, secular and democratic Republic, and our quest for justice as liberty, equality, fraternity.

Such identity politics is the real democratic deficit that precipitates enormous contradictions and anomalies at the heart of our political enterprise. Highly stratified and divided societies are increasingly prone to such political stratagems. It is cause for serious concern, and not just in India. This is the long dark shadow side of Universal suffrage which undermines its democratic dividend, especially where social inequality and exclusion prevail. Bourgeois democracies are prone to such politics, leaving people, especially the poor and marginalised excluded and alienated. We see this happening in our own country and elsewhere today.

To be effective, however, democratic inclusion must necessarily be egalitarian and participative. Such egalitarian participation, requires not decentralisation but subsidiarity: a devolution of power to the lowest feasible level to facilitate autonomy by empowering local institutions; as well as not abrogating authority to higher levels for what can be done at lower ones of society. Thus subsidiarity necessarily implies its obverse, solidarity: not abdicating responsibility for lower levels for what must be done at higher ones. In sum, top-down devolution requires down-up solidarity.

Our democratic odyssey since the founding of our Republic has been a truly epic saga. Yet what we achieved with exemplary success is an electoral democracy; where we have fallen grossly short is on substantive one. To protect against this 'tyranny of the majority', both individual and minority rights are part of the basic structure of our Constitution. 'Directive Principles of State Policy' set out a contextualised agenda for substantive democracy in India. Unfortunately, these are not justiciable and consequently, have not been given the priority they deserve. This truly amounts to a constitutional betrayal. Little wonder, then, that populist authoritarianism is ever more attractive and eventually even irresistible to people, whether of the political right or of the left, the religious chauvinists or the secular rationalists.

And yet the only remedy for a failing democracy is more effective democracy, and for a multicultural, multilingual, pluri-religious civilisation like ours, there can be no other route to fulfilling our 'tryst with destiny' than in an egalitarian, pluralist, secular, democratic state. So far the democratic deficit has not overrun the democratic dividend. But with galloping populism, it could well happen.

Authoritarian leaders have been elected and majoritarianism empowers them. Rather we need a critical and alert citizenry as a best safeguard for our liberty, promote equality, facilitate fraternity’.

## **The Response**

### ***Threefold Pedagogy***

In the perspective of evangelization, all this necessitates a pedagogic dialogue in an action-reflection praxis, a bottom-up process that reaches out to and embraces the whole of society in the movement. It must not be a teaching engagement, but a learning experience, to discover the truth of the poor, of other cultures and religions. The FABC (Federation of Asian Bishops) specifies three domains for dialogue. In such a reflective process, structural injustices in society must be addressed by structural changes; just as cultural inequities must be by changes in culture, and religious ones by changes in tradition. This necessarily requires a pluralism in social structure, culture and religion, all three of which must be in sync or else one reverses the other.

Such a threefold dialogue will make for a liberating, enriching, transformational alternative – another renewed Indian Church. It is the only way to decolonise the churches from the neoliberal capitalism encircling our global village, and build a counter-cultural community, where economic status is not skewed, cultural identities inclusive and religious traditions harmonious.

A pedagogic dialogue with the poor must be premised on a commitment to the promotion of justice for all, or else it becomes just do-goodism, a certificate of conscience. This justice must be authenticated by an option for the poor, especially the least and the last among them. Indeed,

‘If we have the humility and the courage to walk with the poor, we will learn from what they have to teach us what we can do. ...to help the poor help themselves: to take charge of their personal and collective destiny.’ (GC 32 SJ, 1976 Dec 4, no. 50)

This is what we can learn from a pedagogic dialogue with the poor.



A pedagogic dialogue with cultures teaches us to find a deeper understanding and appreciation of my own culture and to enrich it with another in an inter-culturalism. In Asia, plurality is so deeply and intricately woven into the very fabric of society, any attempt at homogenisation is suicidal. Ways of coping range from indifference and non-engagement, to affirmation and celebration. Given the intricacies of our social interdependence, the first approach brings a segmentation of society, which under stress and tension may well collapse in collective violence; the second must open into ever deeper levels of tolerance and broader dimensions of engagement. Unfortunately, neoliberal globalisation has not made us more tolerant, rather just the opposite has happened in our global village.

The pedagogic dialogue of religions can then be premised on an intercultural comprehension that makes for a deeper understanding and appreciation of one's own religion and those of others as well enriching each other in a pluri-religious harmony. Indeed, 'to be religious is to be interreligious' as Thirty-second General Congregation the Documents of the Society of Jesus, affirmed (GC 32 , 1976).

Finally, a constructive engagement in a comprehensive dialogue will demand a radical change, a *metanoia* of our hearts, to free us from the *paranoia* of each other. The imperative for dialogue can now be summed up in a few pertinent sutras:

to be a person is to be inter-personal;  
to be cultured is to be inter-cultural;  
to develop is to participate and exchange;  
to be religious is to be inter-religious.

### ***Disarming Identities***

When cultural identities cease to be flexible and fluid and become solidary and exclusive, each cultural community digs itself into a kind of cultural trench warfare and once again a continuing war of attrition undermines our cultures. A pedagogic dialogue between cultures will help to get out of the trenches and engage with the cultural other. Raimon Panikkar calls for a cultural disarmament. (Panikkar 1995)

We can also disarmament of our class identities rather than allow them to mobilise class interests and careers into class conflict and even war.

Analogously we can extend this even further to a religious disarmament. For when a religious tradition is politicised it can

explode into violence. Precisely because religious identities can be so emotionally charged, and when politicised, religious violence becomes so embedded, then exorcising this demon may require a sustained effort over generations. Particularly in our religious traditions, we need to incisively critique fundamentalist extremes and inflexible dogmatisms of all hues, and bracket our differences to open ourselves to finding common ground in our beliefs and commitments, and so to move together to the higher ground of a transformed religious commitment, with a renewed spirituality and even a transcending mysticism. A pedagogic dialogue with religions can teach us to deepen our understanding of other religious traditions and our own as well. And thus disarm us of our religious prejudices and dogmatism. For 'to be religious today is to be inter-religious in the sense that a positive relationship with believers of other faiths is a requirement in a world of religious pluralism.' (GC 34<sup>th</sup> SJ, Dec 5, No. 130)

This threefold dialogue can bring a radical change of heart, a social metanoia from a self-righteous monologue with ourselves to a truly open and equal dialogue, with the poor, with cultures, with religions. Finally, all genuine dialogue must be oriented to reconciliation based on justice that is restorative, open to forgiveness, bringing peace and harmony. This is the Asian way, this is the kingdom, already now but not fully yet. For when I am firmly rooted in my own people, especially the poor and marginalised, like Gandhi I can invite all the cultures and religions of the world to blow freely about my house, without being blown off my feet. This is what a pedagogic dialogue must do for us: make us rooted and open.

The Church in India and Asia is a very small minority in a very large and enormously complex, and increasingly problematic social situation. However, it already has and it further can make a significant contribution with our witness to the joy of the Good News with our lives and actions.

### ***Triple Dialectic to Triple Dialogue***

Truth as *satya*, reality, is many-sided, (*anekantavada*) as Jaina philosophy rightly affirms. There can be many perspectives on something but no single one alone can be so comprehensive as to grasp all of it. As Thomas Aquinas writes, *omne ens ineffabile*. (every being is ineffable). However, it cannot be contradictory, and neither can science, religion and spirituality be in contradiction in so far as

these pursue and express truth. Their apparent differences arise from their different perspectives and methodologies. These are contraries -not contradictions - and result in a dialectical tension between the three and not a negation of one by another.

A more nuanced understanding of such contraries would resolve them into complementarities that can be the basis for resolving these tensions: science as reason-based and religion as faith-based and also a spirituality that could be premised on one or other pre-judgment. We need to find common ground between the three for a dialogue, and turn the trilemma into a triologue beyond a triple dialectic.

The pursuit of science always opens to new frontiers in its domain. When it exceeds the limitations of its own discourse, it betrays its pursuit. Beyond those frontiers are ever-receding horizons of other realities beyond the discourse of science, to which science can point but never really pursue. These are the ultimate human concerns and anomalies of human life. Religion ventures into this domain to unravel this reality and relate humans to it. Spirituality too engages with it more practically. Together, these can add purpose and value to the scientific endeavour.

Religious faith can be oppressive or liberating, extremist or moderate, but religion too can lose its way when bad faith displaces good faith, and transparency and trust are compromised for security and certainty.

The dilemma between charisma and institutionalisation demands a delicate balance to stay the course. Spirituality endeavours to appropriate and internalise the truth whether of science or religion. Rational scientific methods and spiritual practices can be a great help too.

If spirituality is not to lose its way, it must balance withdrawal and detachment with engagement and concern. Too much withdrawal tends to lead to esotericism and exclusiveness that makes it irrelevant; too much engagement tends to make it superficial and populist. Here science and religion can be of great help towards spiritual depth.

The necessity of this triple dialogue is well illustrated by our present ecological crisis precipitated by climate change. So far it has been debate but is yet to synthesise a working consensus. We need to turn the discussion into a dialogue.

Here science, religion and spirituality can come together in a lasting symbiosis. We need a new science with an alternative technology to replace the old one. For what caused the problem in the first place is unlikely to provide an appropriate solution to it. It will only be more of the same rehashed and disguised. Moreover, the crisis

is embedded in our consumerist culture, market economics and the politics that protect and sustain it. We need a radically new worldview and mind-set but one not coming from within the present status quo which is unlikely anyway.

Religion can provide the relevant meaning for a new worldview to reenchant our world, change our mind-set and inspire us with the necessary motivation to respect and reverence our planet. Science can provide the technology needed. Yet acceptance of a worldview would still be notional and not real unless it is internalised by persons and socialised in society in terms of meanings and motivations, values and norms in our behaviour and attitudes, our ideologies and faiths. For this, spirituality must appropriate the vision and express it in corresponding ways of life.

## **A Cosmotheandric Solidarity**

To address the multiple crises of our world we need the triple dialectic between science, religion, and spirituality, to yield to a triple dialogue; we need to envision a more holistic Universe in which the three are engaged in a mutually enriching interlocution. The domain of science with its reason and experimental method is the material cosmos. Humans are a *part of* this cosmos, not *apart from* it. The domain of religion is the transcendental beyond the material, the ultimate human concerns intrinsic to conscious human beings. Faith and experiential reflection stretch this domain beyond just the human to the divine, whether this is conceived as a personal ultimate 'Thou', a Saguna Brahman, (a God with qualities we can relate too, i.e. love, providence...the God of the devotees) or an impersonal reality beyond the material, the Real of the real, a Nirguna Brahman (the unmoved Mover of Aristotle, the God of the philosophers). Spirituality brings this all together with its vision and way of life.

Thus the cosmic, the human and the divine can come together in a cosmotheandric vision. (Panikkar 1977: 125) This is crucial to address the multiple crises overtaking our world today. The ecological crisis inflates them all and anticipates a disastrous catastrophe that could overtake our species and our planet. To address this effectively we must harmonise the material cosmos, human consciousness and integrate them all in a cosmic vision of beyond: a cosmostheandric solidarity. (Panikkar 1993, 2013)

Pope Francis has attempted to sketch such a vision in his encyclical *Laudato Si* ('Praise be' and the encyclical is subtitled: On Care for Our

Common Home). It echoes the plea of the UNEP's Earth Summit at Rio in 1992: *Only One Earth: Care and Share* (Dodds 1992) more emphatically and lyrically than the staid matter of fact UN Climate Change Agreement Conference, Paris 2015. The Pope refers to the patron saint of the environment: 'Francis helps us to see that an integral ecology calls for openness to categories which transcend the language of mathematics and biology, and take us to the heart of what it is to be human.' (Laudato Si No 11) Indeed, if we do not get our act together and bring science, religion and spirituality onto the same platform, we might sleepwalk through *The Great Derangement* overtaking us (Ghosh 2016: 201) and precipitate an already looming apocalypse, a *Pralaya* (the terrifying end of the world).

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## **1. Dialogue In Contemporary India: A Perspective From The Social Sciences**

Abstract: This essay is an exploration of the many facets of dialogue in the socio-cultural context of India, from a multidisciplinary perspective. The essay walks one through the complexities involved.

## **2. Subaltern Alternatives On Caste, Class And Ethnicity**

The challenges to the dominant hegemony in this land have focused on the key issues of equity and justice that underlie the quest for identity and dignity. Setting these in a more integrated and holistic context we focus on three crucial issues: caste and hierarchy, caste and class, and caste and ethnicity.

## **3. Subaltern Interrogations: Need For A New Subaltern Hermeneutic**

In sum, subaltern alternatives do represent a horizon of revolt and revolution, which can fuse with others to construct the identities and ideologies for a brave new world. We focus on three crucial issues: caste and hierarchy, caste and class, and caste and ethnicity. Some important leads which could be further pursued: a subaltern hermeneutic, a new understanding of the fragmentation and shift in our present electoral politics, and the dilemmas of intervention by the state, social movements and market mechanisms.

## **4. Globalisation, Culture And Religion: Contradictions And Dilemmas**

Abstract: Contemporary globalisation is the rapid and radical interconnectivity that impacts transnational and domestic structures of society at various levels, creating new challenges, demanding new responses, a 'second modernity'. This article has focused on two dimensions of this process: the cultural and the religious. Ultimately globalisation and localisation are complementary processes, and their interaction can be seen in the Universalising of the particular and vice versa, the particularising of the Universal.

## **5. Art And Its Prophetic Role: Counter-Culture Illustrated In Fonseca**

Abstract: This is an attempt to locate art as the prophetic in culture and religion with reference to Angelo da Fonseca.

## **6. Sinking Old Horizons, Imagining New Ones: Debunking Exceptionalism**

Abstract: A book review of 'Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny' by Amartya Sen

## **7. Towards A Dialogue Of Cultures**

Abstract: Dialogue is a most fundamental condition of existence, the very language of our being, the essential hermeneutic of all our experience. We need to reverse cycles of communal clashes and spiralling violence, to heal old wounds, to create a new future; with tolerance and dialogue, creativity and critique.

## **8. Development For Modernity: Whose Development, What Modernity?**

Abstract: The development policies have not effectively reached the vast masses of our people, leaving the vulnerable more defenceless and desperate. A million mutinies at the grassroots, hopefully presaging a more sustainable paradigm for an inclusive development.

## **9. Search For Identity, Quest For Dignity: The Dalits' Long March**

Abstract: Development too has been a very real threat to the cultural identity and human dignity of marginalised peoples. We need to restructure our economic development and political participation. An accompanying cultural hegemony subverts their identity, and undermines the cultural resources, which they could have mobilised to resist this dominance.

## **10. Goa 50 Years After Liberation: Light And Shadow**

Abstract: Goa is the smallest state in the Union of India. After 50 years of liberation from five centuries of colonial rule, its challenge now is to be a beacon of light for the rest of the Union rather than a replication of its shadow side.

## **11. Modernisation And New Avatars Of Caste**

Abstract: Modernisation in India is significant but will the modernizing elites be able to carry the tradition-bound masses or will caste transmute into new avatars?

## **12. Diversity And Difference: Constructing Identity And Affirming Dignity In A Pluralist World**

Abstract: Indic civilisation has served as a common meeting ground for diverse historical or religious traditions. However, in an imploding globalising world, a multicultural, pluri-religious society becomes problematic, and hegemonic dominance or exclusivist posturing by the protagonists does not make for social integration or communal harmony.

### **13. Religious Disarmament: Metaphor For Tolerance And Dialogue**

Abstract: Against the background of the historical trajectory of violence in religious traditions, we will first clarify an understanding of violence and the relationship of power and peace. This will be the basis for an elaboration of the ideal of tolerance, which in turn becomes the sine qua non for a multidimensional dialogue.

In the context of violent religious conflict, religious disarmament becomes the metaphor for a radical reorientation to deeper tolerance of the 'other' and more open inter-religious dialogue.

### **14. Art And Equity**

Abstract: In society, art is in the domain of culture; equity is in that of structure. Any holistic transformation of a society must impact both these domains. One without the other will become tragedy or farce.

### **15. Celebrating The Organic Intellectual**

Abstract: For middle-class academics and activists, who are alienated from the grass-roots people in the field, the challenge to become organic intellectuals is a difficult and delicate task: for academics to ground their abstract theory in the field and for activists to articulate their learnings from the field. This presentation is in three parts: the first takes up various aspects of the divide between professionals and people; the second looks at procedures of academy and spells out the implications; the third describes alternative programmes outside the academy. Finally, the conclusion celebrates the organic intellectual.

### **16. Overflowing Dialogue: A Christian Humanist Response To India's Cultural Challenges**

Abstract: The contradictions and dilemmas sketched here are the challenging context of any effective evangelisation in India today. They must be contextualised in the concrete political, cultural and religious dynamics of a region.



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