



# Counter-Culture Perspectives







SELECTED KAPPEN MEMORIAL LECTURES

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*COUNTER-CULTURE PERSPECTIVES*  
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# Introduction







# *The Lectures*





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## Towards an Alternative Paradigm

M.M. Thomas

### I

It is in the fitness of things that the various Christian and other voluntary organizations in Bangalore have jointly convened this seminar on the 70th birthday of the late Fr. Sebastian Kappen, to reflect on the theme, An Alternative Paradigm. This theme was very much a central concern of Kappen's thinking and teaching over the years. The Seminar is an expression of our deep gratitude and appreciation of the life and thought of one who was friend, philosopher and guide to a lot of young people as well as social activists in their search for a holistic pattern of social renewal injustice and of cultural creativity in support of it, in our time.

I express my thanks to David Selvaraj and his colleagues for their kind invitation to me to participate in the seminar. I consider myself, along with many others of my generation, as a "friend and intellectual companion" of Kappen. I remember the many private and public occasions in Bangalore, Trivandrum and Thiruvalla, of our relaxed conversations on the theme and its related theological issues. Many years ago, probably in the late fifties or the early sixties, I remember him taking me to a Bangalore slum to meet a group of AICUF students



including a much younger Rajen Chandy, who were in the search of a new paradigm of socially-relevant higher education as an alternative to the existing university structure. Kappen was with them inspiring their search. It was last October that I met him last. He came to see me in the United Theological College Annexe where I was staying for a few days, some time before he was going to lecture to the theological college students on an alternative cultural paradigm and we talked about it and other matters. Many of us gathered here have similar, perhaps more intimate personal remembrances. We seek today to celebrate the spiritual and intellectual inspiration Kappen gave us and others through his life and teachings, and to resolve together to continue the work of the renewal of religion, culture and society in India to which cause he was committed.

In this presentation my aim is to outline the thought of Kappen on the theme as I understand it. I have not done any systematic study of Kappen's writings, but I have kept touch with them in a general way. So I hope I have not totally misunderstood him, but I apologize for the inadequacy of my attempt.

## II

Kappen wrote a great deal on the development of a counter-culture as a necessary path towards the transformation of society with justice to the people. By culture I suppose he meant the structure of meaning and sacredness, of values and world-view expressed in symbols, myths, metaphors and artistic images and legendary stories and rituals and liturgies within which a people creates and utilizes technology to earn their living from nature and organizes their social institutions relating men and women to one another within the community and builds communication with other peoples. What he wanted was the development of a counter-culture which would subvert the existing culture of modernization, because the latter is too lopsided to understand what he called the Total Man, that is, the pluralistic dimensions of the being and becoming of the humans. Because of this lopsidedness, it produces a one-dimensional technocratic approach which increasingly becomes depersonalizing to all humans

involved, oppressive to the people at the bottom and destructive of the ecological basis of life itself on earth. Its ultimate inhuman character is symbolized by the “technology of genocide” characteristic of fascism, communal riots and modern war. The culture and the social process it gives support, have to be totally negated. The quarterly which he edited for some years was called *The Negations*. The present has to be negated in the name of the future in such a way that the negation has in it the presence of the future now.

Of course the basic central elements in the making of the counter-culture and the germ of the future society are the forces released by the self-awakening and the struggle for self-identity and justice of the traditionally oppressed peoples of India. He has stated categorically, “The forces that can recreate Indian society can emerge from the repressed cultures of the lower castes, outcastes and the tribals” (*Jesus and Cultural Revolution*, p. 51). But there are traditional elements in the history of the Indian peoples which have the potential to strengthen the counter-forces. He specially notes the great significance of three movements expressing the Indian tradition of dissent: “first, voiced by the Buddha, later taken over by the social radicals of the medieval bhakti movement and, finally, re-echoing the messianic movements of the low castes, outcastes and tribals in colonial and post-colonial times.” And, he adds, “Any future cultural revolution will have to maintain continuity with this tradition of contestation. This forms the basis for a counter-cultural movement and a subversive creative practice” (*Religion, Ideology and Counter-culture*, p. 31).

At the same time he points out that these movements have to be saved from the forces which have smothered them. For instance, the Buddhist protest tradition was “sucked into the whirlpool of cosmic religiosity of the Tantric-Saivite version” and needs to be liberated from that whirlpool to regain its prophetic ethical character. Perhaps the same is true for the protest character of bhakti. As for the dalit-tribal messianic movements of colonial and post-colonial times they emerged within the framework of Indian nationalism which has three strands, namely the Communitarian, the Secular and the Hegemonic, of which the Hegemonic, i.e., Communalism, Hindu Nationalism in particular,

seeks to suppress them or co-opt them and make them toothless. Communitarian and secular ideologies of Indian nationalism provide the only framework within which religious and cultural pluralism and movements of weaker sections within the nation are permitted to contribute to radical counter-culture and social change: therefore they need strengthening so that the messianism and the project of hope inherent in the search for self-identity of India's oppressed groups may be saved from Hegemonic communalism.

Kappen has given a good deal of thought to the contribution of the Marxist tradition and what he calls the 'Jesus Tradition' to the emergence of counter-culture and alternative society in India. For he was spiritually committed to the essence of both, severally and in their synthesis as sources of his prophetic faith, ultimate hope, ethical social humanism and aid in his faith's search to understand religious cultural and social realities and the revolutionary responsibility in relation to them. But here, too, Kappen maintained that they had to be redeemed from the Communist and Christian Fundamentalisms, respectively, if they are to serve the project of the liberation of peoples.

Regarding the Marxist tradition, Kappen says, "it must be borne in mind that over a century has elapsed since Marx gave us the classical formulations of the socialist idea. It, therefore, needs to be rethought in the contemporary world context" (*Future of Socialism*, p. 10). He acknowledges the prophetic ethical spirit and the scientific rationality which led Marx to his critique of Capitalism as "exploitive, tendentially imperialist and dehumanizing;" and adds, "his criticism remains by and large valid even today. For, the exploitive neo-imperialist and alienating nature of capitalism is very much part of our contemporary experiences" (p. 13).

It is the attitude of Marx to science and technology that needs radical correction, in the light of modern developments. Says Kappen, "Marx was a child of the Scientism of the 19th century when it was widely believed that modern science would solve all human problems and herald a new age of plenty" (p. 14). This "soteriological view of science and technology" has become problematic in the light of the

ecological disequilibrium it has brought about and the mechanization of life technocracy has produced. Modern science and technology have revealed their “instinctively violative nature” in that they have, by refusing to recognize the organic relation between humanity and nature, have tended to “reduce everything - beauty, art, interpersonal relations, psychism, etc - to the measurable and the calculable; their end-result is a one-dimensional technocratic society from which all mystery dimension will have fled” (p. 15). In such a cultural framework, technocracy without humanism takes over the State marginalizing the people and their participation; and nationalization of means of economic production instead of socializing economic power tends to achieve the opposite.

Further, universal suffrage and increasing participation of organized labour in the political process have made the modern State more than the executive of the bourgeois class, which Marx opposed. Also, many problems of human estrangement like ecological destruction, technocracy and absence of democratic checks to power have turned out to be the concern of all classes and can be tackled only through “trans-class struggle.” The emergence of such trans-class realities limits the role of proletarian struggle which now has to be subordinated to “broad-based peoples’ struggles” in the construction of an alternative to the present society (pp. 26-27).

Stalinism has deviations from original Marxism, but it cannot be said that its anti-human trends are totally discontinuous with Marxism, for the reasons stated above. But Marxism redeemed and redefined in terms of social democracy, is a very important contribution to the peoples for the transformation of culture and society.

In his approach to the Jesus-tradition and its relevance for the search for an alternative paradigm, Kappen sees Jesus of History as “the revelation par excellence of ethical prophetic religiosity.” Jesus has introduced a new humanism into the mainstream of Indian history affirming equality of persons, a religious value and changing the cyclic view of history inherent in Gnostic and cosmic religiosities which were traditionally dominant bringing an orientation to the

new and the future. He says, “Cross becomes the most telling symbol of man’s refusal to be enslaved and his resolve to march forward to fuller life. The dialectic of negativity governing universal history finds its concreted concentrated expression in the personal life and death of Jesus of Nazareth” (p. 56).

But Kappen sees that the picture of Jesus of the Church dogma is one which is distorted and “recast in the cosmic mould of magic myth and cyclic time” with his spirit of ethical prophecy lost (*Religion Ideology and Counter-culture*, p. 26). By the end of the third century, Jesus’ message of the Kingdom was spiritualized and Christianity was reduced to “subserve and legitimize Roman power” (p. 32); and Christian Mission since then aimed merely at extending the boundary and communal power of the Church (p. 130). The social message and historical and eschatological hope of the Kingdom were preserved by dissenting and/or heretical Christian communities. In fact, Kappen interprets Hindutva and its theocratic and hegemonic communalism as Semiticisation, even a sort of Christianization, of brahminic Hinduism under the impact of medieval theocratic Christianity (*Understanding Communalism*, p. 90).

The Jesus-tradition must be saved from this distorting complex and be made alive by letting it enter into dialogue, not so much with the Hindu deities in their present form or with the Brahminic-Sanskritic tradition of Hinduism but with what he calls “the primordial matrix of the collective unconscious” whence they emerged. I suppose he means the religiosity of the village communities of the dalits, the tribals and other weaker sections now struggling for justice. He adds, “The waters of the unconscious need to be churned with the tree of the Cross in order to separate out the poison and distil the new age. This can be achieved only through a revolutionary praxis. Only from a total revolution will be born an ethical prophetic Hinduism and a cosmic Jesus movement” (p. 28).

If the church is to take the Jesus-tradition seriously and become Jesus-communities, its mission should be to build religiously pluralistic communities for concerted action for a better world in the common hope of the Kingdom of God to come. Kappen tells the churches,

“The primary mission of the ecclesial community is to create basic (Kingdom) communities” (p.25). “Jesus’ blood must mingle with the blood of the sudras, the outcastes, the tribals and the dissenters of today” (p. 27).

In this process, we shall build a composite culture “characterized by the tensional unity of the different religious-cultural traditions” within the framework of the struggle for a new society. He envisages that, eventually a time would come when every religious tradition itself would “become composite incorporating elements from other religious traditions.” This might become true of individual religious experience as well. And, he adds, “I for one am weary of being called a Christian. I see myself as a disciple of Jesus who has been profoundly influenced by the teachings of the Buddha and in theology at least by the Siva-Sakti concept of the Divine going back to the pre-Aryan culture” (*Understanding Communalism*, p. 96).

Kappen has this word regarding the evolution of religions in the struggle for an alternative culture and society. According to him, Jesus stands for “the supersession of all religions including Christianity and heralds a future when human beings will worship God not in man-made temples but in spirit and truth. That future is also the future of India.” But it is far off. Meanwhile, says Kappen, “what I claim is not the superiority of Christianity over the Indian religious tradition but the superiority of the religiosity of the Buddha, the radical bhaktas and Jesus over the magico-ritualistic religiosity of orthodox Hinduism and deprophetized religiosity of tradition-bound Christianity. Jesuan prophecy must appropriate Indian religiosity’s sense of oneness of the cosmic, the human and the divine while India makes her own the Galilean dream of the Total Man” (*Jesus and Cultural Revolution*, p. 71).

I think on this day of celebrating Kappen’s thought on India’s march towards an alternative paradigm, it is appropriate that we seek to understand and appreciate his teaching. Certainly critical evaluation of it is necessary to appropriate its truths by us in our life and action in the future. But I must say that I find Kappen’s line of thinking on religion, culture and society in India most challenging. I leave it at that.



## Rethinking Development

Shobha Raghuram

It is an honour for me to have been asked to deliver a lecture on the second death anniversary of Father Kappen. My last communication with Father Kappen was during his illness. I sent him a copy of Odysseus Elytis's poem "With what stones, what blood, and what iron..." written in 1943. He replied that he liked it greatly and that he was immediately setting himself the task of translating it into Malayalam for the press. Time was not to be on his side, but that was Father Kappen – always inspired by great instances in history and always taking many with him on his journeys. He discovered hope where no one else saw possibilities. During three years of successive crippling illness and between surgeries, it was Father Kappen who urged me to write and insisted that I participate in NGO meetings. I remain indebted to him for the hope and guidance he gave me when it mattered most.

In this paper I have brought together what I said in my talk at the Kappen memorial meeting. It consists of two parts. The first, which begins with introductory remarks, explores briefly what globalization has meant for Third World countries. The second examines in somewhat greater detail the problem of migration, both international and internal. These two parts illustrate why conventional development

strategies have failed, perhaps unintentionally. This brings me to why we must rethink development and how this can be done only if development stops being a rationalistic, techno-instrumentalist enterprise and policymakers start to value the need for philosophical self-reflexivity, a point which Father Kappen would have endorsed fully.

### **Introduction: Looking back**

We are close to completing a half century of our existence as an independent nation, yet new forms of bondage are rising, phoenix-like, from unresolved colonial histories. Meanwhile, the passing of the fifth centennial of Columbus's voyage has thrown into relief 500 years of the history of the Europeanization of the world. As noted by Alvares in *Decolonizing History*, this voyage set in motion a deadly chain of events which radically transformed the planet. A consequence of this fateful journey and others which followed soon after was that the destinies of Europe, South America, Africa and Asia were soon intermeshed. The balance sheet of this 500-year encounter between the West and our part of the world is yet to be drawn up. Meanwhile, strong opinions are being expressed by cultural auditors on either side. For the Europeans, the fifth centennial was an occasion for pomp and celebration. For the people inhabiting the worlds allegedly "discovered" by Columbus, da Gama and Albuquerque, the memory of the last five centuries, largely years of trauma and violence, cannot be erased. The Africans are, in fact, demanding reparations, while the South Americans are insisting that what occurred during 1492 and thereafter cannot be glossed over as an 'encounter' between two worlds. It was an invasion coupled with a violent conquest and takeover.

Kappen, Alvares, Nandy, and the Subaltern Studies group have all looked at the resulting politics of knowledge, the cultural geographies that have marked the North-South divide, including the continued progression of economic inequalities. In *How the Other Half Dies*, Susan George carries the discussion on the politics of this divide forward to show that new forms of intellectual and economic

colonization have dominated the development debate. One set of values and norms for northern countries and another for southern countries revealed, for example, structural-reform conditions, the role of the state in welfare, the issues of consumption and population, migration and the crucial area of cultural identity and power relations. Though this domination has led to the making of modern institutions in the colonies, it has been accompanied by the dismantling of local institutions.

Vietnam, Cambodia, Angola and Rwanda have become icons of the latter half of our century. Their histories were, in many ways, sites of nation-state aggression and, therefore, not viewed as 'hard development' concerns. Between 1945 and 1989, 138 wars have been fought, resulting in some 23 million deaths. The Korean War caused three million deaths, the Vietnam War two million. All these 138 wars were fought in the Third World. Between 1970 and 1989 the Soviet Union and the United States accounted for 70 percent of the \$388 billion worth of weapons sold to the Middle East (\$168 billion), Africa (\$65 billion) and South Asia (\$50 billion). Philosophically, 'development and growth' have been perceived as a progressive, altruistic and peaceful amelioration of the conditions of people's lives. However, in concrete history they have suffered from increasingly violent contestations for power. The development of a few has always been secured at the cost of losses to others. It has also been accompanied by the victory of the dominant perception that economic growth is a more worthy goal than moral norms of self-worth, of identity and its recognition. Anyone involved in issues close to the survival of those pushed to the fringes of social life will agree that there is little in the social history of development to convince us that our theories and strategies have been right.

Just as the Gulf War continues to be a reminder of the success and growth of the Pentagon Complex, Bhopal and Bhagalpur are reminders, for us in the Indian sub-continent, that we have become excellent at carrying on with the 'business-as-usual' approach of social development. Indeed, international and national development

institutions, in which large human and financial investments have been made, have either given up exercising the bargaining space and the teeth they once had or, by passive acceptance, not acted as public-interest institutions which safeguard, at all cost, human dignity. The poverty of commitment of those in power reminds us that the paths to social development begin with ground realities and are not merely the rhetoric of aspirations which evaporate quickly, leaving the world to run out its course, titled largely in favour of the dominant forces. Ethnic conflicts, racial genocides, child labour, large populations without even minimal gains in security (e.g., minimum wages, compulsory education, non-discriminatory access to resources), raise serious questions about the role of development institutions in the twentieth century.

### **Globalization: Reforms, Debt, Development Aid and Competing Inequalities**

These severe economic and power inequalities that dog North-South relations call for drastic redefinitions in cultural, political, economic and social arenas. The structural-adjustment reforms initiated by multilateral lending institutions and national governments in many developing countries have further exacerbated the issues of social equity both within and between these countries. Take India, for example. With 16 percent of the world's population, one-third of the world's poor, a per capita income of one-thirteenth of the advanced countries and one-third of the developing countries, and ranking 135th in the Human Development Index, it almost defaulted in 1991 on its external debt, a legacy of the massive fiscal deficits of the late 1980s. The government opted for an immediate devaluation of the rupee, liberalized direct foreign investment, and loosened bureaucratic controls on industry. The stabilization measures included the rebuilding of critically-low foreign-exchange reserves, a thrust on resource mobilization by way of cutting the non-plan expenditure, and a hike in the prices of petroleum products. The public sector cuts, it was hoped, would reduce inefficiency. The sizeable support of multilateral lending institutions was viewed by many as an important watershed in India, putting an

end to the Nehruvian model of self-reliance, a planned and regulated market, and a public sector-oriented economy with strong social welfare priorities. The Reform Policies that were initiated aligned India more closely with global prescriptions principally in the areas of migration or real economic opportunities for the very poor, those left outside of the 'development' machinery. It is not surprising then, that India today stands as the world's third most indebted nation.

The reform processes have created severe imbalances in other developing countries as well. Consider the African example: Debt repayments account for an annual transfer of \$10 billion from Africa to the North. Every Zambian citizen owes his country's external creditors \$1000 - three times of what he or she can expect to earn in a year. Reform in Zambia led to a 200 percent increase in the price of maize, so World Bank economists argued that the lot of the poor farmer had improved. But in reality, the rural poor, with no transport or marketing facilities, could not reach the big markets. Too marginalized to enter the process of the much-touted globalization, in real terms they were further impoverished. Africa is the only continent where nutrition levels did not improve over the 1980s, where primary school enrolment ratios declined by five percent during this decade, and where the World Bank predicts a major increase in poverty levels in the 1990s. A UNICEF report says that, for every dollar of aid from industrialized nations, Third World nations have paid back three dollars. And, of the total exchequer in Africa, 3.9 percent is spent on health, whereas 15.8 percent is used to repay the interest on their debt. These statistics reveal little about the real anguish, in existential terms, of the people of Africa, of the violence to their ways of being and of the desecration of their communities.

The South American experience is hardly different. The Institute of Alternative Policies for the Southern Cone of Latin America, based in Brazil, Chile, Uruguay and Argentina, has built up chilling evidence to show thirteen years of restructuring the economy and diverting savings to investments in exports has all been done at the expense of the internal economy. They followed the IMF-World Bank recipe for the development of the entire South, only to find, as in the case of

Brazil that their debt increased from \$64 billion in 1980 to \$121 billion in 1989, even though \$148 billion had been paid for debt servicing in the interim period.

Let me end the story of this debt burden with a specific example. In the late 1970s, 18 out of 21 Latin American nations were under military dictatorships. In Brazil they used their loans to invest in huge energy projects that were useful to the private sector. One such project involved the construction of the Tucurni dam. A Brazilian state company, along with ALCOA and ALCAN (both transnational companies), invested billions of dollars in this project. Native forests were destroyed and native peoples displaced. To meet pressing deadlines, the government used Agent Orange to defoliate the region and then submerged the leafless tree trunks under water. Now, 14 years later, the trees are rotting and citizens are paying millions of dollars to clean up the excessive amount of organic matter that is decomposing under water. The energy from the hydroelectric plant is sold at \$13–20 per megawatt when the production cost is \$48. Thus, Brazilian taxpayers are subsidizing the transnational corporations.

Many refer to the 1980s as a 'lost decade' for development. Will the 1990s be different? The prospects look bleak. Take the large number of severely indebted, low-income countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa and the many severely indebted lower middle income countries like Jamaica and the Philippines, whose economic recovery seems elusive despite a decade of adjustment efforts. Consider also the independent republics of the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia whose political structures are fissured, incomplete, and whose economic disruption could constitute a threat to global stability. Lastly, consider Asian countries like India and Vietnam, whose economic problems threaten to convert a once-manageable external debt burden into a full-blown external payments crisis. As I said earlier, the prospects for the 1990s do look bleak.

If we take development aid, it too suffers from all the contradictions of the system. This is illustrated by the Overseas

Development Assistance (ODA) figures. Less than 7 percent of bilateral ODA is directed towards human priority concerns (e.g., health, education, and safe drinking water). El Salvador, five times richer than Bangladesh, gets 16 times more ODA from the US than does Bangladesh. Development aid has been, by and large, insensitive to the crisis facing global security. It has often reflected the same equations of power and coercion as foreign trade flows. It is no secret that a majority of development aid returns to the country of origin in the form of payment for know-how, consultancies, hardware, etc. As Mehbub Al Haq has noted, "Aid carries all the scars of the cold-war era." He argues that it is given more often to strategic allies than to poor nations. Only one-third of ODA is given to the ten countries containing two-thirds of the world's absolute poor. Haq estimates that Egypt gets \$280 per poor person whereas India gets only \$7 per poor person. He shows further that the rich nations route an average of 15 percent of their GNP to their own 100 million people below the poverty line and " earmark only 0.3 percent of their GNP for poor nations which contain 1.3 billion of the world's poor."

I fear it is unrealistic for us to assume that northern countries will act upon the various resolutions passed at several UN meetings, notably the Social Summit, and alter drastically the reality of development aid, which is merely a cosmetic, moral crutch. International diplomacy cannot affect a major restructuring of the world economy, consumption patterns and the hard self-interests that motivate 90 percent of development aid flows. Aid is, after all, only a small variable in the larger issue of global inequalities. One-fifth of humankind, mostly in the industrial countries, has well over four-fifths of global income. This perpetuates over-production and over-consumption in the North and among the elites of the South. If you take the modern history of development and look for the world's poorest 41 countries, 27 of these belong to Africa and the rest to Asia.

The success of the reform policies in South Korea, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia in the 1980s cannot be ignored; neither can

the devastating violence unleashed by the reform policies in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa. During the colonial period, the South Asian countries experienced a subservient integration with the world economy. Free market options were operational even then. Today, the much-touted global village supposedly represents integration with the world economy, a two-way flow of capital, services, goods, and trade, with a crucial role being played by modern technological revolutions. However, because of the inequitable distribution of wealth across the world, globalization always takes place in an asymmetrical condition. For example, the extension of patent rights to plant varieties will have serious implications for small farmers, for subsistence economies, and for consumption patterns of the poor, who will have little say in formulating patent laws. These patent regulations, which favour Trans-National Corporations (TNCs), may cause whole varieties of biological resources to disappear for both economic and patent reasons. For developing countries and for their poor, the full ramifications of the Uruguay Round of negotiations, where the measures subscribed to have gone into wider areas than trade alone, are yet to be understood.

There is no level playing field for the poor as economic agents and players. TNCs control five-eighths of world investments, three-fourths of world trade and one-third of all GNP. Most southern countries will be mortgaging their production to TNCs, for their national governments allow TNCs to build up their assets as they take over bigger and more docile labour markets to survive. Large labour markets like India, unable to gain more than a 0.5 percent participation in world trade, have little bargaining strength. Most southern countries, despite several pacts devoted to neo-regionalism, cannot prevent richer and bigger nations from reaping the benefits of economies of scale.

The reform measures have been supportive of the entry of TNCs so their business practices cannot be questioned easily by national laws when they impede the access to dual-purpose technologies. The stabilization measures aid the regressive redistribution of world capital,

worsening the sad state of affairs in which the net flows of capital are from the Third World to the First World. Ever-mounting debt (India's annual payment on borrowings, on interest, and debt servicing outstrip the total annual budget harnessed from revenue collections), increasing rate of interests, and heavily import-led policies have forced Third World countries to export increasing volumes of a narrow range of goods. The G-7 countries, with their long history of recession, ensure that dwindling crumbs may be all that the poor can bargain for. As Rao points out, "The problem of failure of investment rates in the G-7 countries now have tempting opportunities for grabbing Third World assets offered by the various debt settlement schemes."

The growing privatization of natural resources in fragile rural economies has serious consequences for the poor, particularly tribals. "Globalization forces economic growth to become a virtue and the internal collective self reliance of smaller south nations to become a devalued political goal." Defence purchases, technology transfers, drug processing and bio-diversity are all major components in the global income ladder. Unskilled and illiterate workers, who service the export of capital from their national economies, may very well be the new class of the displaced, along with unorganized labour. In countries with fragile rural economies and severe systemic problems of governance, the criminalization of politics and the growing acceptance of market solutions to existential issues, integration with command economies can have grave consequences. The market mechanism gains competitive advantage when poverty exists at the systemic level. Many measures from pricing reforms, direct taxation, increased efficiency, strategic industrial policy, etc., have been advocated, but to deaf ears. The issue of growth with social justice that was the cornerstone of development theory and work is becoming untenable because of the rise of trade investment bodies and the decline of global institutions. International courts of justice are too remote to be accessed and their articles of agreements remain highly territorial so that there is no international body one can appeal to easily for economic justice.

In my view, rethinking development should include the political practice of redress, of struggle, of respecting the human condition. Here lies the enormous task of building solutions for the human condition and the plight in which it finds itself today. The massive and unprecedented projects of social engineering in Third World countries, variously termed industrialization or modernization, the uneven record of development, the interlocking regimes of plenty and of famine, disease and hunger, the loss of subsistence lands, and the threats of modern technologies have all brought about a crisis in the theory of modernization. Seeking resolutions in alternatives and working at them in hard survival terms is the difficulty. Can violence, displacement and starvation be undone existentially? This is the problem of theory and its limits. And the philosophical search for solutions to the negations present today is painful and bereft of all comfort. Can we return to those, who have been constantly victimized, all that they have lost, including their lost dignity, not to speak of their lost identity?

The rupture of human life and our relations in the social polity cannot be made whole again; but existence helps us to affirm that there are limits to exploitation and the exercise of power. Dominant knowledge systems are powerful tools of legitimization as Kappen saw clearly years ago. He outlined the social costs of dominant knowledges and called for a relentless critique of the instrumentalist view of progress. He argued that culture is ultimately resistance and that the modern nation-state must also include the denominator of communities. These communities have contested dominant theories and became sites of survival for traditional knowledge systems. Development institutions and those who frame policy for them would benefit by dwelling on these perspicacious observations.

**The Human Predicament of Migration:  
A Challenge to Development Efforts**

“Between 1844 and 1910, some 250,000 indentured Indian labourers entered Malaya. The late nineteenth century Tamil peasant, when he undertook his sojourn to the archipelago, though he may have

genuinely looked upon emigration as a way out of poverty and destitution, he/she was definitely not aspiring to 'freedom'. If at all, he/she was looking for substitute mechanisms of bonded security and patronage as the customary ones disintegrated. The crucial question is whether emigration to Malaya provided them security. Certainly the bulk of evidence for the indentured phase suggests that it failed. The heavy mortality rate among migrant Indian labourers and the high figures for desertions are two clear indices of their disillusionment. The death rate among the newcomers in some areas appears to have been as high as 80 to 90 percent."

In November 1990, a historic joint declaration was drawn up, officially affirming that the cold war was over, ending a division and conflict that had lasted for four decades. Equally important was its affirmation that the East and West were no longer adversaries. Many legacies of the dominant, opposing economic systems of categories that marked and divided the world seemed apparently submerged as a new global order struggled to find its feet. A host of questions arose for South countries: Along what trajectories would these countries evolve, as highly differentiated as they were? What were the implications for their societies and their local cultures, as they were increasingly drawn into international, institutional cultures with their global solutions and options for development? The severe economic and power inequalities that have dogged North-South relations were up for redefinitions. Was the end of the Cold War spelling out a new, freer order for the northern countries alone or were global inequalities to find fresh platforms for redress?

How would the new global order affect the migration of people from and within southern countries? Would South Asian nations, like their European counterparts, open up their borders to the populations of other countries? I would like to concentrate on the issues of globalization and migration in the post-cold war era, with special reference to India. Both these issues represent serious challenges to traditional developmental thinking. The 1994 UNDP Report claims that 35 million people from the South have moved to northern countries and another million on job contracts. The number

of illegal international migrants is estimated to be around 15 to 30 million. Worldwide there are around 19 million refugees. The South cannot overcome a long-standing history of being dominated. Within their own societies, the dominant social groups continue to not only marginalize migrants, but the issue of migration repeatedly becomes the site of severe confrontations. It is in this confrontation with the migrant, the archetypal 'other', be it over resources, ethnic questions or economic spin-offs that the problems lie.

I will concentrate principally on the problem of migration during the present reform era to illustrate my point. I will use the term migration as it is commonly understood, both as witnessed in international and local flows of people. However, I will also look at overall pictures of the possibilities being held out to the poor within this era. It is generally agreed that hard economic reasons often drive the very poor to other regions. However, the potential impact of the Structural Adjustment Policies on migration is not well understood. Will they alter the character of the nation-state and restrict its own role in keeping control on the choices of those who wish to cross borders? Will globalization be a process that is far larger than the presently interpreted and operational term which is synonymous with trade liberalization? Philosophically, when viewing the human condition, one wonders whether globalization in a more humane form could signify profound changes and possibilities for people at the lowest rung of social indicators. Will globalization allow these people to avail themselves of resources and build communities in images of their own desires?

*International Migration (North-South Imbalances)*

The 1994 UNDP Report places the number of refugees at 19 million, with the rate of southern migrants moving to northern countries growing by one million per year. They suggest that "if one-fifth of humankind, mostly in the industrial countries, has well over four-fifths of global income, it perpetuates over-production and over-consumption in the North ... and encourages migration from poor countries to rich." International migrants include refugees, highly-

skilled professionals and contract labourers. I will deal only with some issues on overseas contract labour.

All the major labour-exporting countries in Asia, that is, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand (with the exception of Korea and People's Republic of China) have been trying to set up systems for quantifying labour flows, so that policy may be better informed than it is. For most researchers, the databases continue to be the information system of the Overseas Labour Administrations, records maintained by the immigration and emigration authorities on the movements of people across international borders, and census and national sample surveys. In addition, there are secondary surveys providing fairly coherent, broad overviews with data on outflow of overseas contract workers from sample countries over a 20-year span. These detail the country-specific labour outflows and the quanta of remittances by overseas contract workers. The problem of a fairly large presence of undocumented external labour emigration remains, of course. Of the 75,406 emigrant workers who left Sri Lanka during March-August 1990, 60 percent came under the category of undocumented migration. After the Philippines, Thailand was the second largest supplier of overseas contract labour at 6,38,000 in 1991. In the same year, Indonesia supplied 1,26,200 and India 1,17,500 (Overseas Labour Administration).

There has been a decline of labour outflow from India (2,05,922 in 1984 and 1,43,565 in 1990). Unskilled labourers form 44 percent of the total number of migrants on average (means over 1984-1990) and the highly-skilled (e.g., engineers) a mere 0.2 percent. Governments, including the Indian government, have had scant regard for the protection of their migrant workers. The economy of foreign remittances and foreign currency account balances seem to outweigh the losses of dignity, of mounting physical violence against 'foreigners' as a whole and 'workers' in particular. Recent data provided to the Indian Parliament highlight the increasing numbers of deaths of our workers in Gulf countries and the escalating sexual

violence against women migrant workers.

Non-governmental organisations are at present underscoring the life situations of the migrant workers, who begin as economic migrants but are later reduced oppressively to refugee status. Ethnic 'cleansing' or 'recognition', assimilation or rejection, inform this diaspora in almost cyclical fashion. With the growing accent on the building up of foreign exchange reserves, it is quite likely that there will be a further liberalization of procedures for foreign remittances and for foreign companies to 'import' Indian labour at low rates. Some joint ventures of Indian companies with foreign multinationals are already in operation. Like their Chinese and Korean counterparts, Indian companies negotiate labour emigration by selling contract services instead of exploiting individual workers, as in the electronics industry.

Despite all the reservations suggested here, international labour migration in the case of India has not held out the threat of labour displacement or of inciting population movements on a large scale or ethnic confrontations. The violence that India and Pakistan saw during the partition days when millions were displaced and, on artificially constructed terms, had to be relocated under the new nation-states has been the bedrock that comparative scales for looking into the life conditions of the migrant and the refugee stand on.

### **Internal Migration: The India Case**

#### *Development Exodus and the NEP*

The other major kind of migration is internal migration, one of the most painful legacies of the twentieth century. In developing countries there are nearly 20 million internally displaced people. The Indian polity today stands with a population of well over 900 million people; 39.3 percent of them have been declared to be below the poverty line. For the state of Orissa the percentage of people below the poverty line is 55.6, for Bihar it is 53.3 and for Madhya Pradesh, 43.318 (1991 figures). These states account for one-third of the total tribal population of the country. Permanent and seasonal migration among

the tribals accounts for major internal migration flows. Five lakh tribals belonging to the Santhal, Munda, Oroan and Kol tribes have migrated permanently to tea gardens in Assam over the past three decades, largely because of forest encroachment, land alienation and starvation. Similar exoduses have occurred in the tribal areas of northwest Maharashtra, eastern Gujarat, western Madhya Pradesh and southern Rajasthan, with the impoverished tribals joining the bulk of urban slum dwellers as construction labourers, usually on large development projects. These migrants are becoming the subjects of one of the gravest neglected off-shoots of the New Economic Policies – the growing casualisation of labour and of the informal sector from which the maximum can be extorted. Here they can be hired, fired, abused and moved with bulldozers in every city's beautification programme.

In the mid-1970s in Delhi in predominantly Muslim neighbourhoods, seven lakh people were evicted by force. Internal migration in India has essentially been poverty-induced. When migration has been from rural to urban areas, it has been spurred most often because of a decline in holdings, yield and income. K.N. Raj and others have drawn attention to the widening difference in the levels of per capita income in the rural and urban sectors of the economy, a relationship “essentially exploitative in nature, having extremely serious economic (apart from social and political) consequences.” He shows that, in the early 1950s, India's rural sector accounted for 80 percent of the population and nearly 70 percent of the national income. In the late 1980s, the rural sector accounted for only one-half of the national income. K.N. Raj points to the short-sightedness of governments, their investments being far more in industry and services, thus causing a progressive decline in the rural per capita income. Even before the June 1991 economic measures, there was much evidence of the tendency to adopt policies that stimulated consumerism among the upper income groups. Apart from draining foreign exchange reserves, it created highly polarised growth – as in Latin America. With agriculture getting a declining share of the total investment in the present era and, as little is being done to

increase this share (e.g., extend irrigated areas or diversify agriculture with a scope for the expansion of rural industries), there is every likelihood that the 1990s will see far more migration to urban areas, especially to the industrial belts.

The new liberalised industrial policy being pursued will push the urban population up to 217.2 million (about 25.72 percent of the country's population). In states like Kerala, Bihar and Maharashtra, because of certain special circumstances (i.e., three good monsoon years in a row, the closure of the textile mills in Bombay, and slower processes in town formation in Kerala), there was a deceleration of migration outflow. It is common knowledge that, by and large, the urban poor shed the shackles of community when they leave behind their "rural poor" identity. The anomie of the docile labour force becomes their new identity.

In addition to the irresponsible and uneven development strategies of the 1980s, there is also the crucial issue of employment. The structure of employment has been less than impressive in India. The organised sector accounts for only 10 percent of the labour force. Labour force distribution figures show that in agriculture, trade, construction and manufacturing (in that order), labour is predominantly unorganised (99 percent in agriculture and 80 percent in manufacturing). The Structural Adjustment Policies require the shouldering of large burdens in the short run. Plant closures, retrenchment and unemployment will mean the loss of four million jobs by the year 2000, subsidy cuts and mounting debts. Migrants form the bulk of the unorganised sector in India. The growing 'casualisation' and feminisation of labour and an increasing differential between regular and casual wage rates will aggravate the conditions of distress migrations.

Take a sample slum, Jahangirpuri, in a large metropolis like Delhi. It had 4,800 inhabitants in 1991 and is only 12 years old. All of its inhabitants are rural migrants - 70 percent from UP, 20 percent from Bengal and 7 percent from Bihar. All hail from scheduled caste backgrounds. There is child labour, wife battery, and alcoholism.

Seventy-five households buy vernacular newspapers. Despite the grim disarray of the slum as it “doubles up daily to be a toilet,” the inhabitants vow that the village was worse. They cite the lack of local, small-scale industries in rural areas and the lack of developed market opportunities in their villages as their reasons for migration. Thirty-four percent of Delhi’s population lives in slums and all predictions indicate a steady increase of this figure. An enduring lesson for the spectator, the outsider, is the strong, unshaken conviction of these dwellers in the margins of our cities in their freedom to renegotiate their existence and their survival. Under the most unimaginable conditions of physical hardship, they exercise their rights to belong to civil society and to economically regulate their lives. The problems lie in a state that may succumb to short-term political gains, use coercion on or manipulate those already immiserised.

*The growth of the informal sector and communalism*

On the one hand, in keeping with Structural Adjustment Policies, the state will pursue its exit policy and cause greater pauperization with few safeguards for the labouring poor. On the other hand, as shown by the events following the demolition of the Babri Masjid in December 1992, the Indian nation-state has revealed the internal instability it had ignored in its numerous relations with civil society. In many cities where violent communal clashes occurred, the most oppressed sections of the population became the instruments of untold violence, ethnic hatred and barbaric acts against those of other communities. Muslim doctors who had saved countless lives in public hospitals located in working class areas were targeted overnight by marauding groups. Some were killed while others went into hiding. In a moving paper titled “Anti-Muslim Pogrom in Surat,” Jan Breman describes what happened in Surat. It is an industrial city with a population of 17 lakh in 1993 (five lakh in 1971), a vast petrochemical complex, power looms, diamond workshops and other industrial ateliers. Because of the influx of national and international capital, it is the focal point of informal sector activity. Surat is itself “one big transit camp of labour coming in and going off.”

Breman describes the lawlessness of the migrants, “Temporary and underpaid hands, constantly rotating among the enterprises in their sector of employment, the majority of the people dwelling or floating somewhere ... once production falls they are driven out.” Most of the migrants are male and unmarried. The gender distortion in the demographic profile was an added reason for the members of this constituency to participate in the post-Ayodhya violence and to “sacrifice” themselves to “martyrdom” (185 died, almost one-half of the total number killed in Gujarat). “To my understanding, the city became fertile soil for such a disaster because the political climate has accepted no restrictions to the informalisation of the rapidly expanding economy.” Breman recounts in vivid detail how, at the Surat railway station, 85,000 tickets were sold at the counters. Two lakh labour migrants fled because of the pillage and massacre.

I remember an exodus of a smaller magnitude, but similar in its intensity, in Bangalore in 1991 during the infamous Cauvery riots: A struggle for water resources between Tamil Nadu and Karnataka led to mayhem and illegal pillaging of the homes of Tamil migrants in Karnataka. The government silently backed the communal tension and the destructive forces thus unleashed by doing little to implement law and order. Migrant Tamil labourers fled in the thousands and I recollect that all construction work in urban areas in this state subsequently came to a halt for several months. Be it the organised violence of communal campaigns or the political struggle for resources, the most vulnerable, unstable and rootless communities form the classical ‘weakest’ link.

The destitute, pavement dwellers, child labourers and men and women labourers who make up the growing populations of migrant labourers will continue to contribute to India’s economic growth, but on terms set by markets and employers. These terms include a negation of all the inalienable rights guaranteed under the Indian Constitution. The gravest tragedy in internal migration in India is that the 19th century reality of the ‘coolie’ continues to dog the footsteps of the migrant. Adrift from the once familiar moorings of the forests or the

local block development office in the village, with its feudal structures, the migrant has even less to negotiate with, whether it is with the state or his employer. They are perpetually bonded to being “contestants for spaces, for survivals, for entry into statehood.”

*Limits to policy*

Independent India’s planning exercise, though strongly devoted to the eradication of poverty in spirit, did not think sufficiently about how to achieve its much-touted objective of “growth with social justice.” Budgets continued to reflect cuts in social sector spending, while military spending displayed an upward trend. Mounting non-plan expenditures, coupled with a flabby bureaucratic presence, snowballed spending, cuts in which could have been used to step up employment, agriculture production, decentralized rural marketing facilities, and agro-processing, etc. Vast regions remained neglected or fell victim to disastrous development projects, spearheaded intellectually by Western development donors and India’s academic elite. They had scant respect for people of primitive/older cultures, for whom bonds to the land and to its economies were not those of secular, modern, Western-educated India.

The world’s largest-ever exercise in human resettlement was the transmigration programme in Indonesia. Six million peasant farmers and their families were transferred from overcrowded Java to the more thinly populated, outlying islands of the vast archipelago, Irian Jaya, Kalimantan, etc. The land rights enjoyed under traditional law by the tribal people in these islands were also outlawed by a Basic Forestry Act, Clarification Act No. 2823 of 1967. Former Minister of Transmigration said, “The different ethnic groups of Indonesia will in the long run disappear ... and there will be one kind of man.” Hancock comments, “Transmigration’s only ‘success’ has been to export poverty from Java where it is visible to the other remote islands where it is hidden from view.” In India, major energy projects, especially hydel, have displaced whole communities and submerged entire villages. Many export-oriented agro-industries (marine fisheries, timber, etc.) have had

severe repercussions for those relying on sustenance from traditional operations and for the environment as a whole. Many of the much-needed prescriptions have been advocated with the Structural Adjustments Policies (e.g., de-bureaucratization, cuts in non-plan expenditures, deregulation and de-licensing). However, there is a lacuna in development concerns touching issues of human security. The safety nets in place at present can only be short-term.<sup>33</sup> The more serious issues that inform the fabric of internal migration land reforms, employment, social-sector provisions, and services, urbanization, the growing informal sector, and human-rights violations have not been embedded properly in the planning exercise. This is why I referred above to the marginalisation of the issue itself.

In initiating the reform policies India has clearly been invited for membership in a global order, much more market-driven than it was in the past. However, it is also time to re-examine earlier socialist enterprises not with market prescriptions, but with a view to finding alternatives to top-heavy, highly centralised models of governance. Will the periphery ever be at the centre to suggest what humane governance and policy prescriptions should be all about? The poor and the dispossessed, existing on the fringes of want, consumption, desire and ownership, receive neither the privileges of a nation-state nor the advantages of freedom. They are the forgotten ones. They remain highly docile, highly elastic, vulnerable to political conflicts, and condemned to selling a lifetime for wages that would equal a year's salary in a Northern country.

And yet, to the urban poor, this life seems better than the one they had. If there must be scales to human consumption and freedom, surely the migrant understands the lowest denominators and rationalises his own existence with a fine tuning of a magnitude so small that anyone would have trouble understanding that difference.

All the Prime Minister's men – all the economists, demographers, social scientists and development policymakers – will have difficulty in finally coming close to the macro-histories and the micro-pictures of internal migrants in India, or the refugee anywhere for that matter.

When countless flee terror, flee starvation, or just walk away because here or there nothing is left, this history may require a different understanding and writing. The anonymous tribals, peasants, refugees or victims of ethnic conflicts may have none to mourn their demise and none to rejoice that they continue to fight relentlessly for their survival despite so many negating systems. It is the latter that must be the grounds on which efforts to consolidate and build human securities have to be made by all of us. The problem with policy prescriptions is that they are made, inevitably, post-facto. Being alert and insisting on normatives that carry universal human values to provide us with political wisdom is what is required urgently; this must be done *a priori* so that large-scale human reversals and tragedies will not be the history of the closing decade of the twentieth century. The anonymous migrant today represents one of the most singular tragedies of development.

I have shown the contradictions inherent in most development efforts. The conditions that accompany aid often exacerbate North-South inequalities; globalisation saps the strength of local cultures. The history of modern development is a chronicle of the reshuffling or competing inequalities while maintaining the superiority of the elite nations. The human predicament of migration with its chimerical rewards reveals one more face of insensitive development strategies. Though there are limits to planning, there are no limits to hope, creative resistance, and the sensitising of history. Father Kappen lived such a life and by such practice.

*Post Script:*

I remain indebted to all the thinkers who have refused to be shaped by markets. I would like to thank Hivos, the Max Mueller Bhavan, Bangalore, and Visthar for having encouraged me to write the 'beginnings' of a paper from the transcripts of my talk. A substantial part of this paper is work in progress. It is dedicated to Father Kappen who represented that rare school of development practitioners for whom reflection and critical thinking were integral to development work.

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## Historical Interpretations and the Secularizing of Indian Society

Romila Thapar

I would like to express my deep appreciation to Visthar for inviting me to give the Kappen Memorial Lecture. It is indeed a privilege to honour Father Kappen for, although I had never met him, I have read with considerable interest his insightful and impressive writings. I am also delighted to have been invited to join the group of distinguished persons who have honoured him in the past by giving these lectures.

I have chosen as my theme a subject which I think would have interested him and is of much concern these days – namely, the secularizing of Indian society. I shall be placing the discussion in a perspective which draws on history. This is not because I think that the Indian past was secular, but because the Indian past, if read with sensitivity, can be seen to be conducive to creating a secular society.

In the discussion on secularism in India, there is generally a reliance on the state taking a secular position as and when necessary. This leads to a certain dependence on state initiative and action. It seems to me that the secularization of Indian society is equally important. I see this as complementary to a secular state. The

secularism of the state should preferably interface with the secularization of society.

I would like to discuss three aspects involved in the process of secularizing Indian society. The first is the strengthening of civil society by insisting on defending the rights of citizens. The second concerns the state which has to activate these rights and the third, touches on the role of religion and religious institutions in civil society and the state. All three draw on the historical past, but some aspects of these are more embedded in the past.

### **What is Secularism?**

Let me begin by defining what I mean by secularism. In order to understand this concept we do not have to go through its history in Europe - from Roman times to Christendom. In the conflict between Church and State in Europe from the late medieval period, secularism was used in a specific sense arising out of the contestation of European elites through the confrontation between Catholicism and Protestantism. But from the nineteenth century it has had a different and much wider meaning as a concept. This change is often overlooked by those who continue to relate the concept only to the confrontation between Church and State. The new meaning assumes the existence of religious pluralities, of their equal status and of the eventual emergence of a society in which the rights of the individual as citizens take precedence over religious identities.

The nineteenth century definition sees a secular society as one in which social ethics are based on a current and continuing regard for the well-being of fellow humans. It does not require social ethics to be derived from a belief in God or in a future life. It is not opposed to such beliefs but does not regard them as essential preconditions to the concerns of social ethics. Secularization, therefore, is a cognate of a process of historical change and this process is closely tied to the modernization of a society. The point that I would like to underline is that it is historically specific and relates to a particular historical situation. This historical situation is linked to the process of modernization. To judge pre-modern societies as being secular or

non-secular is somewhat anachronistic.

The modernization of a society assumes the existence of a nation-state, of democracy, of industrialization and investment (private or public) and of the emergence of a middle-class, professionally involved in this change. I am not endorsing this change as necessarily an ideal situation. I am assuming its historical existence in contemporary times, given our historical experience of colonialism and nationalism, and in the present day, the overpowering presence of globalization. There are those who disapprove of the nation-state and of industrialization, but have so far been unable to suggest workable alternatives. That we have arrived at these forms makes it necessary for us to build into them a just and ethical society. Such a society can only be built on a secular orientation. Modernization is a package and secularism is a part of it. If we do not object to the industrialization, arguing that they are part of the modernizing process, then we have little ground to object to the secularization of society.

Secularism therefore does not assume a binary opposition between that state and religion. It is more a graduated but conscious movement towards changing society. This is of central significance to both our concept and working of civil society. Secularizing society would strengthen civil society and allow it to effectively monitor the state, ensuring that the state maintains the required impartiality towards religious groups. Basically, these processes are inter-meshed with democracy. If there is a snuffing out of secularism, there is to the same extent a snuffing out of democracy.

The creation of a civil society is a relatively new experience for India and the secularizing of such a society is equally an innovation. It comes in a post-colonial period which, in some ways, should make it easier for us to recognize its usefulness. But these are not alien ideas for modern Indians. The debate on these matters goes back to the writings of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and others. Therefore, we have had two centuries of discussion on them. It would be salutary for us if we could revive some of these earlier debates which were often far more liberal than what we hear today.

Critics of secularism in India have raised various objections. One view states that because secularism is tied to modernity (and modernity is projected in this view as a kind of sickness), we should not want it, in spite of our having been part of a modernizing process since the beginning of the century. However, these same critics do not object to the other changes brought about by modernization such as the upholding of democracy in its contemporary forms or economic liberalization accompanied by industrialization invested in by multinationals. As weighty members of the middle-class, they accept the facilities of modernization for themselves but hesitate to extend them to those at or below the poverty line. But can modernization be stemmed in a world of globalization (which is what we have now opted to join)? The changes are inter-linked and come in tandem.

Another objection relates to the historical past. Secularism is said to be essentially a response to Christianity in Europe and is, therefore, alien to India. This, as I have tried to point out earlier, is an erroneous view of the history of the concept of secularism, which at one stage was concerned with confronting the Church but has since developed other dimensions which relate to issues of modernization.

A further objection states that India has never been secular and never will be because its essential identities were, and continue to be, those of religious communities – each of which is uniform and monolithic. It is argued that community representation is now called for in the process of modernization. Apart from being historically inaccurate as secularism is not associated with pre-modern societies, this view strengthens the notion of majority and minority communities as the constituents of Indian society. It denies the historical fact that the identities of communities are not permanent. They change with historical change. Therefore, monolithic religious communities have not been the constituents of Indian society over the centuries. This kind of communitarianism breeds its own problems and more so for a society such as ours.

Tied to this is also the theory that the nation-state is not only irrelevant but is the source of many ills. Therefore, the state should

give way to the community, defined by religion. History is ignored, there is a denial of nation and no concern with the need for economic development in whatever form. That there are some problems, particularly of economic development which can only be handled through the intervention of the state, would also be unacceptable to this argument.

At the popular level, current views of secularism are, broadly, of two kinds. One is the view that secularism is opposed to religion. The second and more prevalent view is that secularism means the co-existence of different religions and is encapsulated in the phrase, *sarva dharma sambhava*. This is an Indian interpretation of the concept and arises again from the perspective of projecting Indian society as consisting of religious communities. This, of course, has not been the case because caste, region, language and sect were often more important than a presumed uniform, religious identity.

It needs to be emphasized that secularism does not question the validity of religion *per se* and is therefore not opposed to religion. Secularism should not be confused with atheism. What secularism does question is the authority of religious institutions or institutions with religious identities over civic life. In other words, the concerns of civil society should not be under the jurisdiction of a religious identity.

### **Secularism and History**

Let me turn now to the relationship of secularism in the past. This is of considerable importance not because the past was secular (it obviously was not if secularism is a part of the modernizing process) but because, in some societies, the historical links between the state, social organizations and religions were such that they are conducive in the present day to secularizing these societies. In other words, it is easier for some societies to be secularized in view of what they nurtured in the past. I would like to argue that this is so for Indian society.

In speaking of secularism and history I shall discuss three broad aspects. One is the multi-religious culture of the Indian past and what this implied for the viability of the concept of a religious

community as we define it today, given that sometimes there was a convergence and sometimes a conflict among groups. Another is the perception which the Hindus and Muslims had of each other in the past. Associated with this is whether this perception changed with conversion to Islam. And finally, state patronage to religious groups needs to be considered as it is pivotal to the concept of secularism.

I would like to suggest that we need to investigate more fully the links between caste, clan, community, region, language and religious articulation. We have treated concepts such as community and religion in too limited and static a fashion. The word 'community' is immediately linked to religion and religion in turn is seen as an ecclesiastical structure dominating all activities. But communities in the past were identified by a range of factors, which frequently and partially overlapped. The present-day impregnable boundaries of communities would have been alien to the past. Similarly, religion was much more inter-twined with the social dimension than we allow for today. Since the present-day choice seems to be moving towards either the secularization or the communalization of society, we need to examine the links between religion and society, particularly from the period of the eighth century CE onwards, which saw the arrival of Christianity and Islam in India. An awareness of the socio-religious landscape of even earlier times would also be helpful.

Religious articulation in the Indian past was much more nuanced than in Europe. This was in part because the pattern of religion was different. The history of religion in Europe and in West Asia is a linear history, starting with a historical founder and consequential sectarian movements, supporting orthodoxy or heterodoxy in relation to the initial religious teaching of the founder. In India, the initial religious articulation was a mosaic built on a multi-religious culture and it has continued to be that, although the project of Hindutva is now seeking to destroy the mosaic. Even in pre-Islamic times there were many indigenous religions and the concept of a single, linear religion was not prevalent. There was a network of castes and sects, some sharing boundaries and ideologies and some, discrete and

diverse, creating a range of belief systems and practices. There was a consciousness of identification with varying religious forms among the differing social strata. This persisted into later periods. The relationship between religion and society which resulted was a different kind of experience from that of Europe. But in the eighteenth century when Orientalism began to interpret the religions of India, the model was that of Europe, and we seem not to have questioned the resulting reconstruction, analytically.

The distinction between religious sects was generally categorized as what have been called Brahmanism and Shramanism, and these remained constant through a major part of Indian history. The religion espoused by the *brahmanas* was derived from the vedic corpus; whereas that preached and practised by the *shramanas* focused on Buddhism, Jainism and other similar sects. The practice of Vedic Brahmanism was largely confined to the upper castes as many rituals were forbidden to the *shudras*. The 'heterodox' sects – as the Buddhists, Jains and others have been labeled – were open to members of any caste.

The division into *brahmana* and *shramana* is reported by Megasthenes visiting India in the Mauryan period. The grammarian Patanjali writes of the innate opposition between the two, which he compares to the opposition between the snake and the mongoose or the cat and the mouse. Perhaps this was why the Mauryan king Ashoka repeatedly calls for the need to respect both *brahmanas* and *shramanas*. There are Jaina texts (e.g. the *Paumachariyam* of Vimalasuri) that speak of the *brahmanas* as heretics and liars. Some *brahmana* authors, such as Krishna Mishra to whom the play *Prabodha Chandrodaya* is attributed, caricature Jaina monks as profligates and drunks. Alberuni, writing in the eleventh century, refers to many religious sects and the Shamaniyya are mentioned separately.

This duality is easily visible at the elite levels and is evident in the literature. At the more intermediate levels there prevailed what we call today Puranic Hinduism, a category which covers even contradictory sects of various kinds, some supporting Vedic

Brahmanism and others opposed to it. This was a truly creative expression in terms of the interface between religious articulation and social identity. The openness which it supported was one of the reasons why sects with variant religious doctrines or differing social norms were all accommodated. It grew out of the need, often social and political, to assimilate and to incorporate, even if this meant new deities, rituals and beliefs. Or else existing deities were re-oriented, as it were, with additional mythologies and rituals.

To build a uniform, monolithic religious community out of this kind of religious articulation is virtually impossible. Each segment was dominated by a relationship to either one caste or a cluster of castes. Where a sect cut across a range of castes, it usually ended up as an independent and separate caste. The social status of the various sects was dependent on who their patrons were and it was not unusual for a relatively humble cult to be transmuted over a few generations into one of importance, especially if supported by royalty. The many aniconic deities which emerge as the focus of royal worship are part of this process, a case in point being the worship of Maniyadeo by the Chandella rulers of Bundelkhand. The social mobility of Tantrism and the Shakta cult make a fascinating study on the interface between belief, ritual and a changing social identity. It moves from relatively confined fertility worship to presence in some of the richest temples, as at Khajuraho. Obscure families acquiring the status of royal dynasties took their cults with them and amalgamated them with the worship of the more status-bestowing deities of Brahmanism. These social processes of family and caste mobility frequently gave direction to much that we recognize as 'Hindu sects'.

Further down the social scale and initially more distant from these sects were the belief systems and rituals of what we have called the tribal people and those outside caste. These were the *atavikas* or forest-dwellers—the Nishada, Shabara, Bhilla, Pulinda—and the many hundreds of others, and at another extreme, the Chandala, Dom and such, mentioned in the literature. Theirs were frequently animistic religions with their own deities and rituals. Some contradicted

Brahmanical ritual. Thus, in spite of the earlier Vedic sacrificial ritual involving the slaughter of animals, in later times, animal sacrifice and the libations of alcohol common to the animistic cults were anathema to many *brahmana* sects. For upper caste Hindus these groups have been *mleccha* or impure and have not been a part of their own religious identity for many centuries.

This variance may partially explain why the concept of *dharma* became central to an understanding of religion. It referred to the social obligations and ritual duties which had to be performed in accordance with one's *varna* and *jati* and the sect to which one belonged. The duties differed in accordance with caste status. Conforming to *dharma* demarcated the upper castes from the lower since it was expected to be more strictly observed among the former. The lower castes were presumed to be more lax. This raises problems for present-day attempts to project a universal and uniform Hinduism in the past and in maintaining that upper caste belief and practice define Hinduism.

We have to recognize that there was a distinction between the religion of the elites and that of those low on the social scale. The hierarchy among sects often follows caste hierarchy. And, most important of all, the religion of the actual majority of the population is rarely recorded in early historical sources. It usually has to be inferred from indirect evidence, for what has survived is largely the literature and visual evidence of the elite. We tend to extend this evidence to all social levels, which is historically an inaccurate procedure. But a faithful reconstruction of the religion of the majority would lead to some surprises. The beliefs and rituals of those at the lower end of the social scale are frequently part of what I have described elsewhere as perhaps constituting a kind of counter-culture. Religious boundaries are blurred, religious practices overlap and mythologies are intertwined. This is not because the indigenous religions of India were necessarily tolerant as we like to believe, but because the religious articulation of the majority emerged from negotiating differences. Such negotiations can be potentially seminal to a secularizing process.

### **Secularization of Indian Society Easier**

I had stated earlier that the secularization of Indian society would be easier than that of many other societies. Let me expand on this. Frequently in the past and even sometimes today, religious sectarian identity is subordinated to the identity of caste. The identity of caste takes into consideration marriage rules and personal law, inheritance laws, occupation, location and forms of worship. Therefore, that which goes into the making of what we today would call matters pertaining to civil society remains central. Religious rituals among Hindus were according to caste. Caste determined who could enter which temple and where a person could offer worship.

The other side of this was that religious belief was often a personal matter. As long as caste regulations were observed, personal belief was of individual concern. Rituals presupposed certain belief patterns. Nevertheless, religious dogma was seldom over-arching across an immense social span. This encouraged a certain openness in these religions different from the model familiar to us from the Semitic religions. This openness is now declining through the imposition of a uniform, monolithic view of religion and by the communalization of society. Many religious sects (e.g., those which are included in the Shramanic and Bhakti traditions and others of a more esoteric kind) focused on the liberation of the individual soul, and worshippers could observe a variety of forms of worship. The projected relationship between worshipper and deity was not constricted by the requirements of ritual and belief. The argument that religious belief is a personal matter would not be altogether alien to the Indian tradition.

In this connection let me add that, for almost a thousand years, Buddhism was a major Indian religion and has left its imprint in various ways, even if the imprint is not immediately recognizable. The Buddha did not insist on a belief in deity arguing that this was something which could not be proven. The Buddha also maintained that social ethics were man-made. This element of rationality was not unusual in Indian thought. But we have tended to ignore it or even deny it. Alternative belief systems endorsed renouncers who

could sometimes be dissenters as they were bound neither by caste nor by ritual. Whether as *sannyasi* or *bhikhshu* or *sufi* or whether as *pir*, *faqir*, *guru* or *sant*, they were widely respected, allowed their space and on occasion even supported as players in local politics.

Given the analogy of the mosaic, the question arises as to how conflicts and convergences were handled among sects. The convergences are evident in Puranic Hinduism, in the Bhakti sects and in many religious movements of an even more popular kind. Convergences led to break-away castes or the amalgamation of castes into new *jatis*. But there were also conflicts, as it is to be expected from a complex society. In the *Rjataranini*, Kalhana mentions attacks on the Buddhists in Kashmir. Shashanka in Eastern India is accused of the same according to Banabhatta, the author of the *Harshacharita*. The rivalry between the Jainas and Shaivas resulted in each accusing the other of intent to harm. Scuffles of a violent kind over precedence at the Kumbha Mela between the Dashanamis and the Bairagis are depicted in miniature paintings.

These conflicts often had elements of the play of power, involving competition for royal patronage and tensions of an economic and professional kind. But the conflict was limited to specific areas and groups, and was not pan-Indian. There was no sense of holy war—a *jihad* or a crusade. Religious intolerance was less severe when compared to Europe or West Asia, but acute intolerance took a social form with untouchability constituting the worst form of degradation known to human society. Such groups were excluded from the religion and rituals of caste Hindus. Therefore, we need to investigate the reasons for either hostilities or assimilations and to locate the social tensions involved. It does not help us to pretend that confrontations did not exist or to try and explain all hostilities as coming about only with the arrival of Islam in India.

A major issue in observations on secularism in India is that of the relations in the past between what are referred to in recent times as the Hindu and Muslim communities. I would like to suggest that this is the wrong premise on which to start looking at the history of

this relationship. There was a consciousness of different beliefs, of identities with different sects of Islam or Hinduism, but there was no consciousness of a uniform, monolithic Hindu community or a similar Muslim community until the last few centuries. Prior to that, alliances or confrontations were between smaller, localized groups, among whom the process of negotiation continued, albeit in some case with new religious tones.

How then did these groups perceive each other? The use of 'Hindu' as an identity by those whom we today call Hindus did not gain currency until about the fifteenth century. Prior to that, religious identity was based on sect and caste and an all-inclusive term was not thought necessary. 'Hindu' as it is now known was an invention of those who viewed the sub-continent from beyond the Indus. The name derives from the river—Sindhu. This goes back to ancient Iranian times. In the eighth century EC the Arabs referred to the area as al-Hind. It was initially a geographical term and Hindu was an ethnic identity. It was later used by extension to mean all those inhabitants of the sub-continent who practised religions other than Islam and Christianity.

Equally interesting is the fact that the Hindus did not initially refer to those who arrived in India as followers of Islam or Muslims. There were diverse forms of identity which each had their own historical interest. The Arabs conquered Sind, but came more frequently as traders from West Asia. They were employed in high administrative positions in the territory of the Rashtrakuta rulers, and were frequently referred to as Tajikas. The Turks who came from Central Asia and Afghanistan were described by the ethnic term, Turushka. Some were also referred to as Shakas and Yavanas, the former being the old name for the Scythians of Central Asia and the latter, for the Greeks. The use of the term *mleccha* is a marker of social distance, used for those viewed as being outside caste society. Since a variety of people, from tribals to local kings, are variously called *mleccha*, it cannot be assumed that it always carried a sense of contempt.

There is, in the use of these terms, a historical continuity because

they mark the people as coming from West Asia and Central Asia with which areas there had earlier been centuries of coming and going. The labels used are similar to those of pre-Islamic times. There is also a suggestion of a certain familiarity, for, if people are given a name used earlier in history it does indicate that they are not perceived as entirely alien. What is also interesting is that even the Turks and the Arabs do not seem to see themselves as part of a single Islamic expedition. In the Turko-Persian chronicles, conquests in India and the establishing of Islamic rule through the Delhi Sultanate are attributed entirely to Mahmud of Ghazni. The Arabs are generally ignored, even though their contacts and conquests preceded those of Mahmud.

Among Muslims in India, the majority were Indian converts to Islam. The process of conversion in the past requires an intensive study, as there are a number of popular misconceptions about conversion to Islam.

The Turko-Persian chronicles seem to mention normative figures. They sometimes refer to fifty thousand infidels being either killed or converted, and an equal number of Muslim heretics being killed by zealous Sunni Muslim conquerors such as Mahmud of Ghazni. The figure is evidently fantasy, to be used readily in any situation and is unlikely to tell us much. What is interesting about the conversions to Islam is that they were of two main kinds. One was of the individual who may have converted out of conviction or, if he was socially well-placed such as some Rajputs, he may have converted for reasons of political expediency. The others were conversions by caste (when an entire *jati* would convert). These were by far the larger in number and more common.

Conversion by caste means that the stories of having to choose between conversion or death are, to say the least, exaggerated. In some cases there may well have been threats but this was clearly not the norm. The question of why, in the same village or town, some *jatis* convert and others do not, is significant. Further, conversion by *jati* meant that many of the practices, especially those relating to

marriage and kinship relations, inheritance and customary law of the *jati*, were not discontinued. This is clear from social practices maintaining the regulations of the *zat*, the equivalent of a *jati*. The Meos of Rajasthan, for example, even as Muslims, continue to observe particular social norms prevalent among non-Muslims of their social status but not observed by Muslim rajputs of the same region. The upper caste convert would be more inclined to observe the *shariat*. In any case his caste practices would be different from those of the lower status Meos. Such a situation finds endless repetition in other parts of the sub-continent.

Caste identities frequently determined both custom and religious practices. There are a number of communities along the west coast which trace themselves back to settlements of Arab traders who, over the centuries, appear to have picked up wives and observances locally. The Khojas, Bohras, Navayats, Mapillahs—to mention just a few—observed a type of Islam which may not have been recognizable to the Momin weavers in Uttar Pradesh. The Gazetteer of Bijapur, dating 1881, describes the largest Muslim population as being those of the lower castes. They not only retained their original caste names, but also stated that they worshipped Hindu deities, celebrated Hindu festivals, prohibited the eating of beef and only rarely went to pray in the mosque. Have we prematurely rushed to identify these groups as either Hindu or Muslim, for they are better described as either Hinduised Muslims or Islamicised Hindus? They, and others like them, some now listed as either Muslim or Hindu, are in effect the actual majority whose religion was part of what I have elsewhere referred to as a counter-culture. They neither conformed to the orthodoxies of elite religions, nor did they constitute a uniform, monolithic community.\*

\* A parallel and useful study could be made with Indonesian history of the pre-modern period, which until recently also had multiple religions – some of Indic origin and some Islamic – in juxtaposition and in co-relation. Unfortunately we always tend to compare Indian Islam with west Asian and Persian Islam. Yet the preconditions and the evolution of Islam in the south-east Asian islands would probably provide closer and more significant parallels.

What seems to become evident is that Indian social organization takes precedence even over religious practices, which claim to be uniformly observed. But the actual practices conform more to caste rules than to the rules of the religion even among non-Hindus. This is of course changing in recent times. The fear of being a vulnerable minority encourages a move towards homogenizing religious practices and politicizing religious identities. That the fears are justified is being amply demonstrated in the wanton attacks, particularly in the last few months, on the persons and properties of those identified as non-Hindus.

The coming of Islam, therefore, did not create two monolithic communities – the Hindu and the Muslim – hostile to each other, as is the belief of those who support a communal interpretation of the Indian past. Readings of the history of the last thousand years are based largely on court chronicles which had many axes to grind, not least of which the exaggeration of accounts of Islamic conquests and conversions. These are now ceasing to be taken at face value and are beginning to be examined more analytically—a process which historians have to adopt for every kind of evidence, whatever its religious or other identity. There are other data as well such as varieties of texts of regional and local history, of compositions associated with popular religious sects, of the oral tradition of folk literature and even pictorial representations of world-views. These are beginning to sensitize us to a different perspective of the societies of earlier times.

The picture that emerges is one of a constant process of cultural translation and social negotiation. This was a process that can be recognized from much earlier times and which continued, although the units of the transaction underwent change. Hostility or friendliness differed from situation to situation. Those that sought to be converted aspired to a different society or to different advantages and these in turn required negotiating. The choice of the degree to which the new observances were to be followed varied from group to group depending on its interests and is reflected in the studies of regional communities and lower caste groups. It is these populations,

marginalized in our studies of the past, which were and are the real majority if numbers are to be counted, not the brahmanised Hindu or the Muslim as defined by the mullah.

### State Patronage

I will now turn to the third broad aspect, that of state patronage. This has been treated the world over largely as a matter of political expediency, although efforts are frequently made to disguise it as goodwill. The ruling dynasties of India have maintained a transparency about the need to privilege a variety of religious sects. The edicts of the Mauryan emperor Ashoka insist on both *brahmanas* and *shramanas* being shown respect in spite of the king's own preference for Buddhism. The Ikshvaku dynasty seems to have decided on a gender division: the men patronized the Vedic sacrificial rituals and the women made donations to the Buddhist *sangha*. There is an on-going controversy as to whether the seventh century king, Harsha of Kannauj, was a patron of the Buddhists or the shaivas, so meticulously did he give to each. The Solankis encouraged the building of Jaina temples in Gujarat and also built a mosque for the Arabs with whom they traded. The Mughals (this included Aurangazeb) made grants to Sufis and to Brahmanas and contributed towards the building of temples and mosques and towards the maintenance of the *mathas* of the *jogis*. Akbar even invented a new religion, combining elements from the prevailing religions, which predictably did not survive.

When families of obscure origin rose to be rulers as was often the case from the eighth century CE onwards, they elevated their traditional cults and merged them into the practice of the more established religions. The reverse process was also known. Royal families became the patrons of the cults of groups which were seemingly marginalized but whose loyalty was important to political stability. This provided a support of popular religious sects channeled through royal patronage. Thus the Yadavas of deogiri became patrons of the cult of Vitthoba, which was a cult of the pastoralists of the

region. It has been argued that the cult of Jagganatha in Orissa has similar folk and tribal origins.

If many of these activities were assimilative, some were also exclusive. The destruction of temples was among these. Temples were symbols of religious sectarian devotion, but they were also cultural idioms. They were financial treasuries and also political statements when they were built by royalty. Attacks on temples began before the coming of Islam. Some were due to religious rivalries as between the Shaivas and the Jainas, some were raided by kings facing a fiscal crisis as in Kashmir, some were subjected to desecration as a sign of victory in a campaign as by the victorious Rashtrakutas against the Paramaras.

The temple was not just a place of worship. Like the church and the mosque it was also an institution. The destruction of temples therefore cannot be explained away simplistically as invariably an expression of religious bigotry. The other facets of this activity have also to be understood. This understanding has often to do with matters such as political and economic expediency, the demonstration of power and a punishment for disloyalty. Those Turkish conquerors who destroyed temples were doing so to cash in on iconoclasm, on the looting of wealth and to project this destruction as a symbol of triumph.

Characteristic of royal patronage in India, it could change from ruler to ruler within the same dynasty. The choice of the recipient depended on the personal inclinations of the ruler and also on state policies. The tradition, therefore, was of multiple, although not impartial, patronage to various religious sects, irrespective of the religion of the ruler. But this policy of patronage to multiple religious sects is not secularism. It merely permits some religious sects to be comfortable. However, such a history of multiple patronage does make the secularizing of society today more acceptable. By this I do not mean that the state should continue to follow a policy of multiple patronage. Such patronage to religious sects is a marker of a pre-modern society and is therefore not required now in changed historical situations. But its historical legacy underlines the political acceptance

of a multi-religious society and facilitates the transition from a multi-religious society to a secular society.

Let me conclude by returning to the issue with which I started, the secularizing of Indian society. There has been some hostility to secularism, in part because it is projected as a denial of religion. I have tried to show that this is not the meaning of secularism. The more fierce hostility has risen not from the fear of weakening religion but from the fear that if the politics of religious communities are replaced by the attempt to empower civil society, it will encourage a system that gives primacy to the rights and equality of all citizens. This is essential to the secularizing of society. As long as some citizens are regarded as more Indian than others and this differentiation draws from the notion of exclusive religious communities, concern with matters of social and economic change will be set aside and attention diverted to a pretense of safeguarding religion and the nation.

The intensification of Hindutva has acted, as intended by its followers, to divert attention from the fact that almost half the population of India is at or below the poverty line and is denied even the most basic rights and amenities. Instead of working towards providing these rights and amenities to the tribals and the dalits, the focus has been shifted to the irrelevant question of the right to convert. The hype surrounding the issue of which Indians are indigenous and which are foreign (basing this identity on the false premise of whether they follow a religion which is indigenous to the sub-continent or is West Asian in origin) has led to the most inhuman and unethical behaviour on the part of groups claiming to defend Hinduism and is directed towards those labelled as Muslims and Christians.

The insistence on identifying Indians by religious communities now determines which is the majority community and which the minorities. This kind of majoritarianism makes a mockery of democracy because it is a predetermined majority. Indian society as defined by religious communities is the product of a colonial perspective on Indian society. By insisting on this identity we are

reinforcing the politics of colonialism rather than moving in an independent, democratic direction.

### **Conclusion**

The secularizing of Indian society is necessary to both improving the condition of those below the poverty line and those who are victims of majoritarian communalism. This requires the empowering of civil society, which would have to be based on the centrality of social ethics—the creating and nurturing of values focusing on a concern and respect for fellow citizens. This is a necessary precondition for secularizing society and would in turn strengthen the secular policies of the state. Social ethics would involve legal order, political freedom, individual autonomy and material well-being. And these in effect mean not only the equality of every citizen before the law but, more than that, the access of every citizen to the law. Democratic rights of representation assume unhindered adult franchise and would oppose ideologies which endorse social hierarchies. Material well-being would involve a minimum economic security in the form of social welfare. Social welfare subsumes the right to elementary education and the availability of basic health facilities—the least a modern state is expected to provide. Education is pivotal to this change. The right to personal religious expression would be safeguarded in a consciousness of individual autonomy.

The failure so far to implement these requirements in any appreciable measure makes it evident that they cannot be left to the will of a government or to the whims of the state. It is now necessary for civil society to act towards the establishing of the kind of freedom implicit in these demands and conducive to endorsing social ethics. Let me remind you that almost two hundred years ago, in 1810, Ram Mohun Roy had stated that, “The freedom of the political community is a prerequisite to the freedom of the individual.” We have yet to achieve the fullness of this freedom.



## Enigmas of Time – Reflections on Culture, History and Politics

Rustom Bharucha

I would like to thank Visthar for giving me this opportunity to reflect on time. Time, I thought, would be a timely subject because we have assembled here in the memory of one of the most radical religious thinkers in post-independence India, Fr. Kappen, and the relationship between time and memory is always worth pondering. We also share a historical moment – the millennium – that has been assumed to mark the passage of time in a specific way. Though, this could be an exaggeration, if not a delusion. Barely two months into the much-hyped millennium – indeed, if it was the millennium – the world information order seems to have survived that manufactured terror of the Y2K bug. No significant change has taken place in our world. The political crises continue, global warming intensifies, and the poor remain poor. The millennium, I suspect, was just another day.

And yet, at a strategic level, it can be put to use in so far as it demands nothing less than a reckoning of our selves in relation to the accumulations of the past; the immediacies of the present and the possibility of new beginnings. Not interested in a stock-taking of the last century, I am more concerned with figuring out where we are now



at this point in time. We think we know where we are, but before we can grasp that moment, it has already passed, alerting us to the travelling of time that can only take place in time within the fragilities of the present moment. What I say, therefore, has already passed.

On a less enigmatic note, let us begin with an exercise. Indeed, if this was a workshop, I would have you all on your feet, and I would ask you to improvise this exercise with your bodies and voices. But, since this is a lecture, I will ask you to imagine this exercise for yourselves in your mind's eye while listening to my running commentary. There are four distinct beats in this exercise that you are free to punctuate in your own way within a larger narrative of time that is at one level scripted and yet left open for your mental meanderings:

Someone is calling your name.

You respond to the call.

You travel in your mind to the source of the call.

You react to something in that space.

Stripped of embellishment, this four-part narrative does not seem to be particularly enigmatic; it follows a sequence, a causality, a passage of time. But if someone is calling your name – and you as an actor are compelled to voice your own name while listening to it – then who are you at that point in time? You are not that someone. You are in another place. The voice is from somewhere else. There could be a time-lag in the transference and picking up of the voice depending on the distance – a time-lag which could be amplified and distended through echoes. Do these echoes exist in the past or in the future? Do they resonate in relation what has already been named, or do they anticipate the name that has yet to be uttered in a different cadence?

In all probability, you would want to free yourself from the uncertainties of this moment. So you suspend the voicing of your name. Now you have all the freedom to respond to the call by recognizing its otherness. You voice the other's name, not your own.

A duality is comfortably established. But this freedom is likely to produce a different kind of restlessness. Now you want to go to the source of the call. This is the point when it would seem that you are going back to a point in time, to something that has already existed and passed but is not yet a memory. It is still there hanging in the air, waiting to be encountered in the future continuous. In responding to the call, therefore, you do not go back to the past; if anything you are going back to the future that has yet to be fully articulated.

Following the impulse of this moment, you enter a drift of time as you travel in your mind to the source of the call. A pre-expressive state of being, this passage is best left silent and entrusted to the spectres of your own dreams. You arrive. Are you there yet? Only an unconscious act of will, an inner heightening of breath can break the aporia of that moment. You break your waking dream, your somnambulistic sleep. You disrupt the silence of the future continuous by grounding it abruptly within the ordinariness of the present moment. This jolt has all the jarring familiarity of the alarm clock in the morning, which is the most insistently timely reminder of the relentlessness of everyday life. “We are not free, and it begins with coffee in the morning,” as Bertolt Brecht put it with deadly wit.

This four-part mental journey that I have described can be read as a somewhat impressionistic *rite de passage* improvising on the larger metaphysics of time, particularly its shifting locations and search for the future in the past, and the past in the future, as bound within the contingencies of the present. Clearly, the past, present, and future are interchangeable and fluid. The point is neither to valorize this state of flow nor to reduce it to an illusion, but to call attention to the unprecedented blending and separations of differentiated times.

There is more than one time. This truism is often lost in the dogmas surrounding monolithic conceptions of time where a pure Past is invariably fundamentalist, a pure Future the emptiest of utopias. In the plurality of times, there are some that lose their bearings and enter different energy-fields, while others return compulsively to their own orbits. It is not just the flights of time that matter, therefore, but

their points of return. No point of return is ever the same: even though one may be returning to the same place, one can never fully anticipate the imminence of irregularities, bumps, forced landings, and near accidents along the way. Like a note in a raga that careens and sweeps through a vista of sounds, picking up all the deviations and varied textures of a particular melodic structure, the return of the note is invariably marked by an element of surprise. The note is there, and yet, it is not quite the same. It is somewhere else in time.

Perhaps, the greatest enigma to time lies in the blurring, if not invisibility, of those intersections in the points of departure and return so that it is no longer clear whether one is coming or going or, indeed, whether one has left at all if one has just arrived. Such enigmas cannot be easily explained in the language of the social sciences. Historians, the chroniclers of time, are generally out of their depth in dealing with temporal ambiguities. Physicists probably come closest to mapping the whirligigs of time. However, in order to see the trajectories of time moving back and forth, there can be no site, to my mind, more concrete than theatre for our critical scrutiny. For a visualization of time, where the past, the present, and the future are interwoven into the very structure of the performance, a glimpse of *Nirvahana* would be illuminating.

### **Nirvahana**

*Nirvahana* (not to be mistaken for *nirvana*) literally means 'to accomplish' or 'to carry out'. It is an actor's improvisation that forms part of one of the most ancient Sanskrit performance traditions called Kutiyattam, still performed in Kerala. After over a thousand years, this living tradition continues to provoke audiences with its sheer audacity in dealing with epic time. The tradition of Kutiyattam is not interested in telling stories. Kutiyattam insists on taking an entire performance (lasting up to eight hours) to introduce a single character in all his resplendent solitude – an epic figure that appears at a particular point in the narrative, in *mediasres*. The story is not the issue. It is that moment in a story, that particular juncture in a narrative, which initiates a journey in time within the consciousness

of a particular character that could extend into several nights of performance.

Imagine a performer playing a god. I offer no description of make-up, costume, head-gear, eye-movements, the temple-setting... What matters is 'Time' in all its omnipresent, labyrinthine monotony. After gesticulating a particular verse in a narrative, with each adjective, conjunction, and participle being given due weight and elaboration (such an elaboration of a few verses could take up the entire performance) the actor stops for that particular night. The next night, after an entire day has passed, he begins again. While you might expect him to take a step forwards ('get on with the show'), he goes backwards with a totally centred serenity. Step-by-step, he retraces his character's journey, like an antique tape-recorder slowly rewinding in the cosmos. At some point, which is not necessarily an impasse, he stops again. And this time, when you would expect him at long last to come forwards, he takes a leap beyond the past in which he is already positioned into primordial time. From here, he begins 'before the beginning' as it were, reincarnating the ancestry and genealogy of his character in a condensed version of his biography.

Later, the actor (or is it the character?) jump-cuts to that exact point in the narrative where he had initially begun his journey. This entire reverie is improvised over three nights, eighteen nights, even forty nights, depending on the specific circumstances of the performance. The question is: When the actor/character eventually comes forward in time, is he returning to the future, or is he pushing forward into the past? When he is already in the past and then takes a leap into primordial time, can he be said to have inhabited a provisional present in relation to a more distanced past? At what point does the past become a present for him?

These questions are further complicated when one considers that, regardless of the fluctuating times within the narrative, the performance itself is bound by the historical present. While this present is suspended within the imaginary of a performance, it is nonetheless there, punctuating both the flight of fictional time and

its point of return to the real world. The history of time does not disappear so easily, even though it may not be readily perceived.

### History, Tradition and Time

Moving out of the fiction of performance into the realities of history, there are some concepts of time in the Indian context that would seem to be fictions in their own right. More often than not, they are subsumed in a notion of 'Indian time', which has been essentialized, mythologized, orientalised in terms of an 'ancient' past, an 'eternal' present, and less generously, a 'non-existent' future. Our time has been conceived in terms of cyclicity, sacredness and myth, which in turn have contributed to a dominant prejudice originating in India's colonial past that Indians are incapable of thinking in linear time. Predictably, our alleged 'refusal of history' has been equated with a rejection of, or even indifference to, the sequential, chronological, material, secular demands of history, as exemplified in Judaeo-Christian philosophies of time. So deeply entrenched is this prejudice that, for a long time, it was assumed that Indians lack a sense of history. We could aspire to the state of gods, but we could never be recognized as conscious agents and subjects in the articulation and making of our own history.

This is, of course, an intensely myopic and Euro-centric reading of history, which the distinguished Indian historian (and my worthy predecessor in this lecture series) Romila Thapar has no difficulty in debunking in her pertinent reflections on *Time as a Metaphor of History* (1996). "Not only does cyclic time have a genesis and a predicted termination," as Thapar emphasizes, "it can also encompass segments of time consisting of historical chronologies."<sup>1</sup> Cyclic and linear times can co-exist; there are 'grey areas' in which they can overlap. Cosmological time can incorporate other forms of 'time reckoning' with shorter, more fragmented time spans. Above all, profane time is not necessarily abandoned in the narration of myths. Through these

<sup>1</sup> Thapar, Romila, *Time as a Metaphor of History: Early India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996, p .8.

critical truisms, Thapar calls attention to the differentiations of time and the simultaneous use of contradictory categories of time, which indicate a far more reflexive and textured awareness of history in early India than is often assumed, particularly in recent communal and fundamentalist affirmations of the Indian past.

Such fundamentalist affirmations, which I will discuss later, are not the only means of congealing the liberating possibilities of time. In what would seem like a more harmless regimentation of time (and here, like the performer of *Nirvahana*, I move back from history to cultural discourse and practice), traditionalists fossilize time in their own right through endless calculations, codifications, formulae and nit-picking. Everything about time would seem to be fixed in a traditional eschatology, so much so that even the duration of a *kalpa*, the longest span of time which would seem to be immeasurable, is nonetheless confined to 4,320 million years. What one misses in the derivative discourses on traditional concepts of time is the poetry of numbers, the fantasy woven by the ancients into their conception of figures and forms. From Thapar's tract on time, we imbibe not just the facts, but the aura of facts: "If there is a mountain in the shape of a cube, measuring one yojana (roughly extending from two-and-a-half to nine miles), and if every hundred years the mountain is brushed with a silk scarf, then the time that is taken for the mountain to be eroded by the scarf is the equivalent of a *kalpa*."<sup>2</sup> How much more evocative is this description of the *kalpa* than its reduction to 4,320 million years – a mere statistic; knowledge reduced to anachronistic information.

Such is the pedantry surrounding traditional performance as well, where one would expect the power of the imagination (*kalpana shakti*) to breathe life into the meticulous and multitudinous codes of the *Natyasastra*. In calling attention to the shifting dynamics of time and imagination recorded in this ancient compendium of acting, one notes that almost every movement of the eye and psychic symptom

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

have been precisely codified 'for all time' in this encyclopedic text. Not surprisingly, it becomes easy to forget that the *hastas* (hand gestures), for instance, only begin to register their auras when they are imbued with breath (*hasta-prana*). Their significance begins to resonate only when they are animated in the immediate 'now' of performance and not merely illustrated with technical virtuosity.

If this 'now' is intrinsically held by the inner movement of one's breath, it is also linked to a perception of the ecology that is embedded in traditional forms. Indeed, time in traditional contexts of performance has an ecological base. Apart from the passing of seasons and the agricultural rhythms embedded in the gestures of labour and everyday life, there are the stylized walks of peacocks and elephants that embody the most acute observations of animal kinetics in relation to the forces of nature. Remember also the more humble forms of insect life that are embodied within the *asanas* of Yoga. The scorpion and the locust have a place in this pantheon of energies because in their absence our ecology would suffer. Take away the ecology from the movement and what is left are alphabets without language, outer shells drained of the inner processes of life, time without breath.

It could be argued that the inner resources of tradition have already been killed in the present world, in so far as the ecology that has sustained the poetic cosmos of the past is in the process of being decimated. Indeed, if Kalidasa were alive today and he could traverse the skies from the Vindhya to the Himalayas, what would his aerial vision of the contemporary Indian landscape reveal but the most devastating deforestation among other monstrosities of so-called development, such as the flooding of entire villages for the construction of dams? The fragrance, texture, and colour constituting the biodiversity of his imagination would be neutered by the realities of an increasingly perceptible ecocide. It is cruel, yet necessary in this regard, to acknowledge that the only rewrite of *Meghadutam* that would seem viable today would be one that acknowledges the loss, the pain, and the rupture of a hopelessly beautiful universe that was once a poem in its own right. Tellingly, this rupture is precisely what

traditionalists refuse to acknowledge in India today. They continue to seek comfort in illusory continuities that have all the efficacy of a band-aid stuck over a gaping wound.

There is another kind of rupture, however, that needs to be acknowledged here, which has less to do with the relationship between the past and the present than with the interruptive dynamics within traditional practices themselves. Only by absorbing the inner principles of this rupture in actual practice does it become possible to renew tradition.

Let us dwell briefly on one of the most banal examples of such creative renewal: the *kolam* or floor-drawing. Traced in infinity of patterns outside the threshold of one's dwelling, the old *kolam* is invariably erased each morning and a new one sprinkled in its place. In more elaborate floor-drawings in the ritual ceremonies of Kerala, in which an awesome figure like the goddess Bhadrakali emerges from the earth, after hours of a meticulous application of turmeric, lime, and charcoal with intricate filigree and strokes of colour, the culmination of this artistry is systematically followed by an erasure of the entire drawing. The figure is either brushed away with tender coconut leaves or destroyed in a ritual dance, the performer in a state of possession. Only after the goddess has been erased is the ground fully consecrated, facilitating the ritual performance and celebration that follows.

From these erasures, we learn a profound lesson in humility. The most magnificent floor-drawings are anonymous. They are not meant to be displayed or exhibited, still less claimed as intellectual property. In their resolute impermanence, they challenge the most basic norms of commodification. We also realize that the ingredients of worship embedded in such ritual practices are biodegradable in so far as they are returned to the earth as natural resources. It would seem, therefore, that if we want to hold on to tradition, we have to be fully prepared to let go of it. Not just once, but many times, repeatedly. This is how tradition develops continuity. If we try to preserve it, we can only succeed in fossilizing the past.

Along with the erasure of the past, there is also the immersion of its most treasured icons. Our deities are not for preserving. In this regard, the ritual immersion of the goddess in her varied manifestations such as Durga, Kali and Lakshmi during the pujas ensures her eternal life and ceaseless return every year to millions of surrogate homes on earth. This commemoration of the goddess is different from the cults of memory that surround contemporary deities, like rock stars, beauty queens, Princess Diana and politicians, whose seeming immortality is incarcerated within the demands of the market. The marketing of their memories has a fundamentally different *telos* from the renewal of cultural memory available to traditional communities, and it is with this incursion of the market that I would like to shift the discussion now to the materialist constructions of time in the contemporary world.

### Death of Utopia

If the marketing of memory has become a viable proposition, this is because we live in an age of globalization where the unknown of the future is constantly being short-circuited and introduced to the priorities of the present. Indeed, the future is in the process of being patented. What does not exist even at the level of genes is already being predicted, marked, and claimed as intellectual property. Even the outer space – *akasha* – has become subject to the speculations of galactic real estate. In such acquisitive times, when the earlier romance associated with the moon and other distant planets has become an increasingly anachronistic dalliance, it would seem as if the ‘unknown’ of the future is eminently within our reach. Either that or it has been ‘virtualized’ through video games and other postmodern fictions that have trivialized our dreams and capacities to envision brave new worlds.

Most critically, the ethos of the market economy has called into question the significance of utopias, which are no longer considered necessary or desirable in order to catalyze the possibilities of change. The alleged ‘death of utopia’ has been hailed by a wide range of theorists and thinkers as the soundest way to avoid the tyrannies of

ostensibly achieved utopias. And yet, how reductive is the anti-utopian argument in its relentless equation of failed utopias with a failed socialism, as if there were no other political or cultural alternatives, and as if the utopian strains within socialism have been exhausted forever.

Not surprisingly, the flip side of the 'death of utopia' is the 'end of history', Fukuyama's glib thesis affirming the benefits of the liberal democratic and global capitalist system that has culminated in the 'Maya of the Market', the grand illusion of our times. This unequivocally neo-liberal utopia of our times is different from the critical and oppositional utopias of the past. It is more emphatic in its positing of solutions, and therefore resistant to irony, ambiguity, self-criticism or a sense of play. This market of a utopia is so permeated with the hubris of the present and the euphoria of a unilateral world order that it actually presumes that the future does not need to be liberated from the present. Indeed, the future is already under the corporate control of an eminently civilized First World global order.

If this 'end of history' has ended sooner than even its critics might have anticipated, its demise (which has yet to be fully acknowledged) needs to be linked to its gross underestimation of the unpredictability of the present, which it would seem to control. Countering Fukuyama's triumphalist discourse, the seemingly omnipotent gods of the global economy would seem to be grinding their teeth impatiently as nations prove to be unwilling to dissolve their national boundaries and economies into a nebulous, borderless world. Indeed, within and across nations, borders have solidified as ethnic cleansing, genocide, nuclear tests, and racism have proliferated while new forms of poverty have emerged specifically in those parts of the developed world in which poverty would appear to have been liquidated forever. It would seem, therefore, that the 'death of utopia' needs to be extended beyond its socialist *avatars* to its capitalist manifestations within the global system.

Where does India stand in relation to the seeming disappearance of utopia in the world? Technically, if we accept the eschatologies of

time contained in the *shastras*, we would be compelled to acknowledge that today in India we live outside of Utopia. This is the age of *Kaliyuga* after all, the worst of times, when all the utopian possibilities of earlier, more paradisaical time-cycles (*yugas*) would seem to be denied to us. Within the violence and bloodshed that we are destined to suffer in these times, resulting in the shortening of our life-spans and the systematic destruction of our *dharma*, it would seem as if we are doomed to labour in order to survive. And yet, it is possible and indeed necessary to think of *Kaliyuga* in a somewhat less alarmist context than its unequivocally dystopic predicament would suggest.

As Romila Thapar indicates in *Time as a Metaphor of History*, the creators of earlier utopias were representatives of an ideal brahminical society who did not have to labour for their intrinsic well-being. Within the futurist projections of this society where a utopia is a projection, a mental construction, not an essential state of being, *Kaliyuga* represents the dismantling of brahminic privilege embedded in the caste hierarchy. Apart from the lower castes, women are among those minorities who defy the decorum of this hierarchy by asserting their sexual freedom in the age of *Kaliyuga*, thereby challenging earlier norms of procreation, which apparently did not require sexual activity. Surely this alleged 'loss' could also be read as an undeniable heightening of the pleasure principle by contemporary standards. Likewise, it is eminently possible to argue that the diminution of brahminic supremacy in the age of *Kaliyuga* has also been accompanied by the historic rise of Dalit communities as active participants in and interrogators of the democratic process of India. One community's dystopia could be another's utopia within the mutations of history and time. It all depends on whose utopia we are considering in the first place.

Is it surprising, therefore, that the oppressed communities' struggles for liberation in the age of *Kaliyuga* should coincide with the most-consolidated efforts by the Hindu Right to hold on to its threatened hegemony? While utopia may fortuitously be denied to the votaries of Hindutva in this lifetime, it continues to be projected

through increasingly emphatic fabrications of *Ramarajya*. Not only has this utopian state been evoked within the synthetic trappings of a national television serial on the *Ramayana* and in a number of pamphlets, icons, and images, it has more ominously been envisioned in the form of a Rama Mandir that will be built on the devastated site of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. While this temple can be regarded as a substitute, compensation, and a wish-fulfillment for a *Ramarajya* that does not and indeed, cannot exist; it has already assumed the power of an awesome fetish even in its non-existence. A future is being constructed here to counter the imagined evils of the more recent past (typified in the demonization of the 'Muslim invader'), in order to liberate the Vedic past of Hindu supremacy.

In all such delusions of a manufactured, fundamentalist history, there is a systematic annihilation of enigma. The consistent strategy is to literalize metaphors, images, and symbols in the form of concrete edifices, agendas, programmes, and more menacingly, pogroms. Within these manipulations of the *realpolitik*, there is no place for cosmic geography – temples in the sky, castles in the air. Poets cannot presume to be the true legislators of the world; it is politicians who lay down the law and determine the imagination for others. In this predicament, the very attempt to re-envision utopia in a political culture that either denies its existence or reduces it to a violent subterfuge assumes an unprecedented significance. The question is: How does one re-invent utopia for our times without submitting to the tyrannies of the past and the vacuity of the future? Tellingly, it is in the writings and practice of Mahatma Gandhi that one can find an extraordinary alertness to the political ambivalences of this predicament.

### **Gandhi and Time**

No politician to my mind has revealed a sharper critical sensibility in discriminating between metaphors and realities than Gandhi. A phenomenal communicator, he recognized the emotional resonance of religious metaphors in relation to the cultural memories of specific communities. If Gandhi used the word '*Ramarajya*', for instance, in

a particular discourse, he was aware that it was a 'convenient and expressive phrase' that would resonate for the Hindus in his audience, not unlike '*Khudai Raj*' and the 'Kingdom of God on earth' which he used in order to reach Muslim and Christian constituencies respectively.<sup>3</sup> These switches in vocabulary were not merely politically expedient. They coincided with Gandhi's own experiments in inter-faith worship, which he practised every day in his ashram, thereby nurturing his insight into 'the religion underlying all religions' – a genuinely pluralist (and not merely ecumenical) faith. This trans-cultural faith that seemed to cross all boundaries of space and time co-existed in turn with Gandhi's own ceaseless mantra of *Ramanama* (the name of Rama) which had sustained him through childhood and the darkest days of the Partition, lingering on his lips even at the moment of death.

"More potent than Rama is the Name," as he once put it, emphasizing the spirit embedded in language. And yet, Gandhi had no difficulty in extending this spirit to the battleground of politics by punctuating—and qualifying—his religiosity with self-consciously secular references. At critical moments, he could define Ramarajya, for instance, as 'independence – political, economic and moral'. "My conception of Ramarajya excludes replacement of the British army by a national army of occupation. A country that is governed by even its national army can never be morally free."<sup>4</sup> It goes without saying that this Ramarajya would certainly condemn the testing of nuclear missiles in the most forthright terms that one associates with Gandhi's lament for Hiroshima and his withering dismissal that it could be regarded as initiating a new era for *ahimsa* (non-violence). Indeed, Gandhi can be regarded as one of the first Indian critics who were able to see through the dubious logic of nuclear deterrence, which is built on the perverse assumption that a nuclear-free future can be sustained only through the accumulation of nuclear weapons in the

<sup>3</sup> Gandhi, Mahatma, *The Essence of Hinduism*, Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1987, p. 212.

<sup>4</sup> Gandhi, Mahatma, *Collected Works*, Vol. 85, pp. 266-7.

present. In other words, a manufacture of fear would seem to be mandatory for world peace.

Countering the cynicism of such assumptions, where the negative elements of the present are imagined to circumvent the potentially disastrous course of the future, Gandhi invariably posited a more positive future that has the conceptual and moral energy to transform the imperfections of the present. At times this future was envisioned unabashedly in utopian terms: “We must have a proper picture of what we want before we can have something approaching it.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, utopia precipitates the very direction and sustenance of any struggle. It may lie in the future, but it has the retroactive force to catalyze those elements within the present which have the potential to move in its direction.

Thus, in Gandhi’s most memorable passage on utopia, we are given a ‘picture’ of what lies ahead in our search for independence:

In this structure composed of innumerable villages, there will be an ever-widening, never-ascending circle. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom, but it will be an oceanic circle... [T]he outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle but will give strength to all within and derive its own strength from it.<sup>6</sup>

While Gandhi draws extensively on a vocabulary of geometry (‘circle’, ‘circumference’, ‘apex’, ‘pyramid’) to visualize his abstraction of utopia, he also alludes specifically to ‘innumerable villages’, which are more conceptually enigmatic than they would appear to be in reality.

Tellingly, towards the end of his life, in 1945, when Gandhi had returned compulsively to his tract on *Hind Swaraj* in order to persuade Nehru to rethink the modernist priorities of independent India, he

<sup>5</sup> *Gandhi, Mahatma. Essential Writings*, selected and edited by V.V. Ramamurti. New Delhi: Gandhi Peace Foundation, 1970, p. 237.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 236.

had qualified: “My villages today exist in my imagination ... You will not understand me if you think that I am talking about the villages of today.”<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, Nehru, for all his sophistication or perhaps because of it, never picked up on these candid clarifications, and proceeded to demean the Indian village in the exclusivist, rationalist terms for which modernism in India is unavoidably maligned: “A village, normally speaking, is backward intellectually and culturally and no progress can be made from a backward environment.”<sup>8</sup>

But, what about ‘imaginary villages’? Are they to be dismissed as ‘completely unreal’ in the way that Nehru had dismissed the radical thrust of *Hind Swaraj*, the seminal text that dares to articulate a concept (*swaraj* or self-rule) that does not, by the very admission of its author, exist in our world? How do we deal with the realities of *what does not yet exist*? I believe that if Nehru — and indeed, our own neo-Gandhian communitarian thinkers of today — could find time for a real dialogue with Gandhi and challenge him precisely on his own grounds that he lays open for our debate and scrutiny, our much-maligned modernity could have been inflected instead of being rashly demonized or valorized for our times.

In the absence of a culture of dialogue, it has become only too easy to either reject Gandhi outright on modernist grounds, or to rhapsodize his memory with growing anti-secularist communitarian fervour that opposes the developmental agenda of the Nehruvian legacy. Within this polemic the categories of reason, progress, modernity, westernization, secularism, and inevitably, the nation-state, have been rashly conflated and denied their very real, if incomplete, disparate and occasionally aberrant contributions to contemporary Indian life. Apart from implicitly feeding the anti-secularist agenda of the Hindu Right, the more strident anti-modernist dimensions of

<sup>7</sup> A detailed of this correspondence between Gandhi and Nehru in October – November 1945 is provided by Sudhir Chandra in ‘The Language of Modern Ideas: Reflections on an Ethno logical Prable’, *Thesis Eleven*, no.39, edited by Martin Fuchs, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1994, p. 45.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

the communitarian discourse have literalized Gandhi, reducing the 'imaginary' potential of his universal philosophy to the instrumentalities of the real.

It is too easy in this regard to tokenize Gandhi in the interests of an anti-modernist, anti-developmental polemic, and thereby relegate his wisdom entirely to the uncontaminated ecology of an essentially beneficent past. Conversely, one can idealize his vision in such hagiographic terms that it can be conveniently jettisoned into the future, because the world after all is not yet ready for him. The more discerning critics, however, would acknowledge that Gandhi is harder to place in time, and that his alleged resistance to the modernity of 'our times' needs to be qualified on the basis of his own highly reflexive 'inconsistencies' and occasional flaunting of his own political incorrectness and deviation from seemingly purist norms.

Thus, in his 1945 correspondence with Nehru in which he had reasserted the validity of *Hind Swaraj*, we find Gandhi acknowledging the necessity of 'scale' (the railways, telecommunications, etc.) in relation to the 'essence' of ethical principles (truth, non-violence, self-sufficiency) that he was not prepared to abandon. Note that, for this aging anarchist who had earlier made an exception of the Singer Sewing Machine as an example of technological validity, the acceptance of the 'railways' (earlier associated with 'evil') is a radical shift in paradigms. It is also worth noting that while Gandhi re-asserts the 'essence' of certain principles, he does not do so on absolutist grounds, independently of considerations of 'scale'. Nor is he saying that 'scale' is intrinsically dangerous or that small is necessarily beautiful.

Gandhi's subtly insistent dialectics, I would emphasize, which are more often than not reduced to homilies, provoke us into asking more difficult questions where the equations of wisdom with the past, and new technologies with the future are reversed both at the levels of concept and practice. What would happen, for example, if we could shift our mental horizons and link the possible wisdom of the future to the principles embedded in the technologies of the past? In addressing this question concretely, one has to get beyond

mere experiments in energy conservation and the recycling of resources for the greening of the world. The ecological bases of time itself will need to be re-activated. Indeed, if the hope for the future today lies in the beginnings of a new global ethic where resources can be shared on the basis of 'need' and not 'greed', the world will have to reverse the patterns of time to which existing modes of consumption are linked.

In this regard, it is not just the consumption of water, energy, and other natural resources that need to be addressed, but the consumption of other cultures in the new marketing of life-styles and behavioural patterns in our globalizing world. At a time when even in the remotest parts of the world primitive cultures can become 'ex-primitive' overnight through the incursions of tourism, for instance, is there any hope of postmodern societies cutting down on their consumption of 'cultures of choice'? Which cultures have the power to 'choose' in the first place? Perhaps a restraint in consuming other cultures could also lead to a slowing down of our increasingly peripatetic lifestyles and a rediscovery of new processes of living in time, countering the false touristic lure of 'experiencing' random times—the past tomorrow, the future yesterday. The question is: Can we actually live in time today?

### Ending of Time

The Vietnamese monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, who has been 'walking in the footsteps of the Buddha' for some time now, calling attention to his 'middle path' even during the genocide of the Vietnam war, would say that it is possible to live in time in a state of mindfulness. At the level of a direct contact with life, mindfulness can be related to an intensely self-sufficient awareness of "what is going on in the present moment, within one's own body, feelings, mind, and objects of mind" – a state of being that is crystallized in the inner movement of one's breath.<sup>9</sup> This mindfulness is not to be equated with a mere

<sup>9</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *Old Path White Clouds: Walking in the Footsteps of the Buddha*, New Delhi: Full Circle Publications, 1991, p. 332.

absorption of the present itself, but with each moment in the present which has its own fullness. In this state of active solitude, the mind is liberated from the desires and anxieties of the past and the future. If a seeker “does not pursue the past nor lose himself in the future” this is because (the answer astonishes by the simplicity of its *koan*-like utterance) “the past no longer is” and “the future has not yet come.”<sup>10</sup>

If there is equanimity in this realization of ‘living in the present’, there are other more radical propositions put forward by contemporary seers of time like Jiddu Krishnamurti, who would advocate nothing less than the ‘ending of time’ altogether. Consciously setting aside the ‘fantastic and romantic probabilities’ of ‘fictitious time’ and the banalities of clock time that determine the duration of journeys and the professional demands of learning a language or doing a particular job, Krishnamurti poses a harder question: “[Can] time, really, actually, in the field of the psyche, ever come to an end?”<sup>11</sup>

It is in the quagmire of ‘psychological time’ that we encounter our nemesis. Krishnamurti defines psychological time as “the time of becoming something” (“I am this, I will be that”). Psychological time is the interval, the division, the gap between ‘this’ and ‘that’; between ‘one action and another’; between ‘one understanding and another’; between ‘seeing something, thinking about it and acting’.<sup>12</sup> Krishnamurti’s intervention focuses specifically on the movement that is embodied in time which carries the conceptual baggage of our thoughts, memories, desires, and motives. He dares to ask a seemingly impossible question that a physicist is more likely to understand than an artist or writer: “Is there a time which doesn’t belong to this category [of movement] at all?” In other words, is there a ‘time of non-movement’?<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 333

<sup>11</sup> Krishnamurti, Jiddu. *Krishnamurti to himself: His last Journey*. London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1987, p. 55.

<sup>12</sup> Jaakar, Pupul. ‘Is there a Time of Non-Movement?’ in *Fire in the Mind: Dialogues with J. Krishnamurti*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1995, p. 250.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pp. 250-251.

The enigma of this question is not free of contradiction, as Krishnamurti himself is only too keen to indicate in his unfailing capacity to engage the listener in dialogue, rather than to proselytize an already worked-out position. As I indicated at the start of this essay, any reflection on time and, more crucially, any speculation of non-time can only take place in time. So there is an obvious clash of perspectives in attempting to “understand the timeless with a mind which is the outcome of time.”<sup>14</sup> As the master indicates wryly, “We are using words to measure the immeasurable, and our words have become time.”<sup>15</sup> This observation would extend to any word, such as ‘violence’, for instance. In a barely veiled critique of Gandhi’s concept of ‘non-violence’, Krishnamurti emphasizes that the evolution from ‘violence’ to ‘non-violence’ implies that you need time to become non-violent.<sup>16</sup> In working towards this ‘ideal’, which Krishnamurti equates with an ‘escaping process’, all that emerges is a ‘division’ in the mind, which can only perpetuate ‘conflict’.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the very resistance to conflict is itself a form of conflict.

If time, therefore, is not necessary for any radical change (indeed, it could be the very source of resistance to any real state of transformation) then how does one ‘end’ the violence of our times to which no ideology, religion, government, party or institution would seem to have an adequate answer? Responding to the question not with a direct answer but through even more questions that are rhetorical, yet probing, Krishnamurti asks: “Is it possible to end violence or greed, anger or whatever you will immediately?”<sup>18</sup> Here, we are given a clue in the primacy given to ‘immediacy’, which would seem to conjure a time so quick, sudden, and complete that it cannot be linked to ‘speed’. The immediacy of non-movement is without

<sup>14</sup> Krishnamurti, Jiddu, ‘On Time’ in *The First and Last Freedom*. London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1986, p. 238.

<sup>15</sup> Jayakar, Pupul, ‘Is there a Time of Non-Movement?’ in *Ibid.*, p. 254.

<sup>16</sup> Krishnamurti, Jiddu, ‘On Time’, in *Mind without Measure*. Madras: Krishnamurti Foundation India, 1983, p. 87.

<sup>17</sup> Krishnamurti, Jiddu, ‘Time and transformation’ in *The First and Last Freedom*, *ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>18</sup> Krishnamurti, Jiddu. ‘On Time’ in *Mind without Measure*, *ibid.*, p.88.

momentum, direction and continuity. Calling attention to the state of passive awareness in which the dissolution of psychological time becomes possible, Krishnamurti once again elides the availability of forthright solutions by compelling us to listen to his question: “Is there a comprehension, an insight, an immediate perception without the word, without analysis, without bringing all your knowledge into it?” “Oh yes, sir,” he responds affirmatively, but “You can’t discuss it. The word is the end of inquiry.”<sup>19</sup>

At this point it would seem that the enigma of time conceals an ultimatum in terms of our preparation to understand it: it is now or never. The ‘insight’ that could facilitate an understanding of this ‘now’ which encapsulates ‘all time’ can materialize only through “the absence – the total absence – of the whole movement of thought as time and remembrance so there is direct perception.”<sup>20</sup> While it is possible at this point in the argument to unravel the enigmas of a perception without time, I would rather shift the ground of this reflection to somewhat less rarefied territory by re-inflecting the political within a different reading of ‘immediacy’ as inspired by Ram Manohar Lohia’s reflections on time in his memorable *Interval During Politics* (1965). It is worth keeping in mind that Krishnamurti himself does not, at any point, deny the co-existence of historical time with the psychological time that he is attempting to end, even if he remains almost scrupulously indifferent to the physical demands of time. The possibilities of bridging the gap between the ‘historical’ and the ‘psychological’ is what I would like to turn to now.

### In Between Times

Undeniably, Lohia comes to the rescue of this tricky, if not non-negotiable juncture in this particular reflection on time, even if his ideological differences as a socialist clash with the non-political tenor of Krishnamurti’s philosophy. And yet, there is something almost

<sup>19</sup> Jayakar, Pupul. ‘Is there a Time of Non-Movement?’ *ibid.*, p. 263.

<sup>20</sup> Jayakar, Pupul, ‘What is Culture?’ in *Fire in the Mind: Dialogues with J. Krishnamurti*. *Ibid.*, p. 227.

uncanny by which Lohia's reflections on 'non-time' in his masterly essay "An Episode in Yoga" seem to be unconsciously in dialogue with Krishnamurti's more rigorous propositions. Of course, there are significant points of departure as well in Lohia's more tentative speculations on 'ending time' because he does not free himself from the political. Eschewing any possibility of transcendence or deliverance, his reading of time inhabits an interstitial space of the real and the unreal, the active and the inactive, the inner life of the mind and the realities of the world.

Situated very consciously in an '*interval during politics*', the very location of Lohia's reflection on time is the Lahore Fort prison where he was incarcerated as a political prisoner during the freedom struggle of India. This space challenges the enigmas of time within the immediacies of survival and struggle. Indeed, it is chastening to be reminded that time could be more oppressive for political prisoners than for seers and thinkers who are free to agonize about the 'tyranny of time' in more privileged circumstances. This is not Lohia's situation. Mentally and physically tortured, he is not allowed to sleep. If his eyelids rest for longer than an involuntary blink, his handcuffs are yanked and his head is shaken vigorously. In this state of enforced sleeplessness, there is no room for metaphor. *Kshana* – an instant of time – which has often been compared to the batting of an eye-lid, is under duress here. Lohia has to keep his eyes wide open. Nonetheless, what is admirable about his testimony at the Lahore prison is that he does not make a virtue out of being a prisoner; he takes his act of thinking in prison seriously. And indeed, it is thought that keeps him alive through all its imperfections of logic and speculation.

On the one hand, therefore, he reflects on time in relation to pain: "The bearable appeared to be unbearable because of an error in the comprehension of time, and the unbearable became the bearable because of [a] correction in the mistaken notion of time. The present was always bearable. It was the future which appeared unbearable."<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Lohia, Ram Manohar. 'An Episode in Yoga', in *Interval During Politics*, Hyderabad: Ram Manohar Lohia Samata Vidyalaya Trust, 1965, p. 83.

At another level, he gambles intellectually with the measurement of time in relation to his imprisonment and to what destiny has in store for him: "If the future was such that my destined stay in the torture house was considerably shorter than the duration of my life, it carried hope. In the other event of the destined stay being coterminous with the destined age, the future carried despair."<sup>22</sup>

It is to Lohia's credit that he does not luxuriate in these amateur philosophical speculations. Instead, he is critical of his self-referential thinking, and it is this alertness that enables him to move in the direction of positing the possibility and necessity of 'non-time'. Confronting the vacillations of his mind, Lohia unconsciously echoes the words of many seers in his search for a temporal alternative: "There was obviously something wrong with the mind and the will that was subject to both the trends of hope and despair. It struck me that the cessation of existence was not an unpleasant or undesirable experience."<sup>23</sup> Lohia is not contemplating suicide here, but a different state of being that is perhaps most accurately reflected in the mental discipline of Yoga, where the mind and body are yoked in stillness.

Time is the source of unrest. Lohia grasps this seemingly metaphysical axiom with an activist's pragmatism. He links this state of unrest to the different manifestations of time that haunt him like the 'chimeras of a fancy dress ball', metamorphosing in various guises as 'fear, hope, despair and ultimate deliverance'.<sup>24</sup> Can time be stripped naked of these unreal manifestations? Can it stand still? Without providing a description, Lohia acknowledges that on at least two occasions Time, indeed, did stand still for him, as "the everlasting present, pure and unsullied, without the past of regret and sorrow and the future of fear and greed to defy it."<sup>25</sup>

While the evidence of experience is at best shifty and mutable, it is significant that Lohia does not deny the validity of its existence

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

even as he is careful to qualify that what he experienced lasted ‘for a flash too short to remember’. And yet, ‘the memory of this experience lingers’, as Lohia acknowledges, and it ‘may’ have inspired his ‘theory of immediacy’ in political action. Already, we are on shaky ground especially if we recognize the seeds of conflict embedded in any source of memory. As articulated by Krishnamurti, the ‘ending of time’ can be sustained not through memory but through a profound alertness to what is. Lohia, however, is not interested in ending time to begin with. For him, “[life] is not a single disconnected act or event [but] an infinite series of events [that] follow one upon another. If they did not, life would cease to be and time would physically stand still.”<sup>26</sup> As for ‘revolution’, it is like ‘love’—yet another ‘series of numberless events’.<sup>27</sup>

In what would seem like a total refutation of Krishnamurti’s deepest assumptions, for whom ‘love is not of time’ and the ‘revolution is now, not tomorrow’, I would like to believe that these two dissimilar but equally passionate minds, locked in a seemingly Hegelian conflict of incontrovertible right, are nonetheless linked through their awareness of non-movement in time. While Krishnamurti would like to hold this moment, initiating a ‘new beginning which has its own momentum’, Lohia attempts to translate this moment back into the realm of political action. More pragmatic than Krishnamurti in so far as he believes that ‘the total eradication of desires’ is not humanly possible, Lohia has the grace to acknowledge: “*I will let pass the question whether that is desirable*” (my emphases).<sup>28</sup>

Where does that leave us in relation to our own explorations in time? How do we act without anticipating predetermined results? How do we free ourselves from the burden of our own agendas, the steady burn-out of our dreams? How do we renew ourselves? Lohia offers some home-truths in this regard specifically to those activists who have systematically denied any care of the self:

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp. 85-6.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

Whether I have been able to practice my experience [of time] in politics and in other spheres of life is wholly irrelevant to the advice that I now give to all those who would hear me, to attempt to control the trends of the mind or the will so that it lives in the present devoid of the fear and the greed that belong to the future.<sup>29</sup>

In order to 'control the mind', we could begin by giving time its due recognition, instead of using it for purely instrumentalist reasons. Time is not just grist for the mill, the lubricant of our thoughts and desires. It has its own dimensions and vulnerabilities which demand, in Krishnamurti's unfailingly resonant words, 'quick, watchful, attentive understanding'.<sup>30</sup> Time is not just there when we care to think about it, it is always there even we are least aware of it, shadowing us through the limited spans of our lives on this earth and beyond.

If this seems intimidating, a form of cosmic surveillance that we can do without, it could help to think of time not in primordial terms as *Mahakaal* or The Great Time, but as a plurality of differentiated times, which are at once interchangeable and mutable. We are responsible for these mutations through our own movements within the shifting contours of time. Indeed, we shift time even as we are shifted by its imperceptible energies and, perhaps in certain contexts and states of preparation, it may even be possible to 'end' time, though there is no guarantee that this will necessarily result in a transformation of the world. Therefore, in homage to the *Nirvahana*, let us begin our journeys in time wherever we may be situated by proceeding forward into the past only to return to the future with the renewed awareness that, while we may have left the world in our minds, our feet were always planted firmly on the ground.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>30</sup> Krishnamurti, Jiddu, *Krishnamurti to Himself: His Last Journal*, *ibid.*, p. 56.



## The New Millennium and the Anti-Millennial Projects

Ninan Koshy

I am deeply grateful to Visthar for inviting me to give this year's Kappen Memorial Lecture and thus providing me an opportunity to pay tribute to one of the most eminent thinkers of this country. I had the privilege of knowing Fr. Sebastian Kappen in my Bangalore days in the early seventies and have always been inspired by his stimulating writings.

Fr. Kappen has been rightly identified with the quest for counter-culture. His main preoccupation was the cultural challenge facing the people of India. He saw the process of social transformation as a transition "from inherited cultural bondages to freedom for fashioning a new humane and humanizing culture." He believed that a new social order could be brought about only by protesting against oppressive systems, by daring to dissent and ushering in a counter-culture.

Fr. Kappen wrote: "The subversive creative praxis takes concrete form in political as well as cultural action – action aimed at challenging the cultural hegemony of the ruling classes and restoring to the

common people the right to think their own thoughts and frame their own scale of values.”<sup>1</sup>

It is from this perspective that I have chosen the topic, “The New Millennium and the Anti-Millennial Projects.” Here I view millennium as a concept, a concept that combines ethics and justice, more than and distinct from the turn of a page in the calendar signifying the passage of a thousand years. The two projects I consider anti-millennial, because they militate against this concept, are globalization and communal fascism in India. More specifically I deal with the cultural imperialism in and through globalization and cultural nationalism in the project of Hindutva.

The new millennium has been celebrated twice, in the beginning of 2000 and in the beginning of 2001 much to the benefit of the ‘millennium industry’. Millennium has been a great commercial success. Churches around the world conveniently forgot the biblical import of millennium and the keynote of the celebration of the ‘Great Jubilee’ was triumphalism.

### **Is this the New Millennium?**

In an illuminating article in the *Folio* of January 2000, Romila Thapar asks, “Is this the New Millennium?” Despite the widespread use of the Gregorian calendar in today’s world there are many other calendars which continue to be used and their millennia have other points of time. If the date of the millennium varies for different people, Thapar points out, what does have a similarity in meaning is that which we associate with the concept, the millennium as the end of a major period of time and the beginning of another.<sup>2</sup>

The word, millennium, is drawn from Christian belief. It is referred to in the last book in the New Testament of the Bible, the Revelations of John, which is a book of prophecies. It is said that Jesus Christ will

<sup>1</sup> Sebastian Kappen, *Negations*, 1983, quoted in *Indian Culture: An End of the Century View*, Kappen Memorial Lecture by U.R. Ananthamurthy.

<sup>2</sup> Romila Thapar, “Is This the New Millennium?” in *Folio*, January 2000, p. 8.

return to rule the earth for a thousand years, a rule that will reinstate virtue and wipe away the tears of the oppressed. By extension the term millennium has come to be used for any period of a thousand years. “Thus historians have happily appropriated the decimal ordering for periodising long histories into millennia and centuries.”

“The Christian and Buddhist millenarian dreams are concerned with relieving the persecution of the poor and the oppressed and the rewarding of those who have been faithful in adversity. The Vaishnava dream relates to restoring the rights of those castes who have lost out in the change and those who have fled can return to utopian conditions. These millenarian dreams seem to have faded from the projection of the current millennium,” wrote Romila Thapar.<sup>3</sup> This projection remains unconcerned with the ethics and justice expected of the New World. We are here dealing with two projects that challenge such justice and ethics: cultural imperialism and cultural nationalism.

### **Cultural Imperialism**

The Human Development Report 1999, in its overview, shows how globalization affects culture. Cultures in poor countries are under siege from the forces of global economic integration according to the Report. “Globalization opens people’s lives to culture and all its creativity and the flow of ideas and knowledge,” says the Report. “But the new culture carried by expanding global markets is disquieting,” the Report cautions, “because today’s flow of culture is unbalanced, heavily weighted in one direction, from rich countries to poor.” The study points out that open markets are contributing to cultural insecurity in poorer nations which have removed barriers against import of arts and entertainment from the West. At the same time culture has become a commodity to be sold in the form of handicrafts, music, books, films and tourism.<sup>4</sup> This is a fairly good description of the present cultural crisis. But one has to go deeper

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> *Human Development Report, 1999*, UNDP.

into the issues to understand the nature of the cultural crisis created by globalization.

Globalization is both a process and a project. The 'process' is largely due to developments that are taking place as a result of advances in science and technology. This has brought about a veritable revolution in the field of communications through electronic waves. This is aptly called the information revolution. Today instant communication is possible around the world. This process is bound to gather even greater momentum. The 'project' of globalization is one of economic integration with a view to establish a new form of colonization and domination. This also marks the latest and the most brutal stage in capitalism. What is important to note is that the project makes use of the process to serve its purpose. Culture which is very much influenced by the information revolution is used to serve the purpose of colonization and domination.

In the academic social sciences, students are taught to think of culture as representing the customs and mores of a society including its language, art, laws and religion. Such a definition has a nice neutral sound to it, but culture is anything but neutral. Much of what is thought to be our common culture is the selective transmission of class-dominated values. Antonio Gramsci understood this when he spoke of class hegemony, noting that the state is only the "outer ditch behind which there stands a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks, a network of cultural values and institutions not normally thought of as political." What we call 'our culture' is largely reflective of existing hegemonic arrangements within the social order, strongly favouring some interests over others.

Dr. K.N. Panikkar points out, "The powerful cultural onslaught the Third World countries are experiencing today is an attempt to establish cultural imperialism - culture as imperialism - as a precursor to an all-embracing domination. Through the imposition of the culture of capitalism, Third World countries are trained to prepare the ground for, to use Theodor Adorno's phrase, an 'administered world', to which corporate capital would have easy access. Cultural

imperialism thus provides the groundwork for exploiting the market potential of Third World countries. Not that alone, the cultural products of advanced capitalist bloc are themselves a driving force behind the contemporary cultural invasion.”<sup>5</sup>

This, of course, is a critique from the perspective of the Third World. What is striking is that those who promote globalization and, therefore, imperialism have openly stated their understanding of culture precisely along these lines. David Rothkopf, managing director of Kissinger Associates wrote in “In Praise of Cultural Imperialism” (*Foreign Policy*, June 22, 1997), “Globalization has economic roots and political consequences, but it also has brought into focus the power of culture in this global environment. The impact of globalization on culture and the impact of culture on globalization merit discussion. The homogenizing influences of globalization that are most often condemned by the new nationalists and by cultural romanticists are actually positive: globalization promotes integration and the removal not only of cultural barriers but of the many of the negative dimensions of culture. Globalization is a vital step towards both a more stable world and better lives for the people in it. Furthermore these issues have serious implications for the American foreign policy. For the United States, a central objective of an Information Age foreign policy must be to win the battle of the world’s information flows, dominating the airwaves as Great Britain once ruled the seas.”<sup>6</sup> Stated simply the United States will use culture for imperialist domination.

In 1996, for example, a former assistant defence secretary, Joseph S. Nye, and a former vice-chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, William A. Owens wrote about what they considered “America’s information edge.” They said: “Just as nuclear dominance was the key to coalition leadership in the old era, information dominance

<sup>5</sup> K.N. Panikkar, “Globalization and Culture” in *Voices from the Third World*, December 1997, Bangalore, p. 52.

<sup>6</sup> David Rathkopf, “In Praise of Cultural Imperialism?” in *Foreign Policy*, Summer 1997.

will be the key in the information age.”<sup>7</sup> The reality of the networks of global technology which influences our lives (computers shifting capital around the globe in seconds) can be only dimly grasped in cultural terms. This is because none of us actually live in the global space where these processes occur: an information technology network is not really a ‘human space’. Rothkopf modestly adds, “Americans should not deny the fact that of all the nations in the history of the world, theirs is the most just, the most tolerant, the most willing to constantly reassess and improve itself, and the best model for the future.”<sup>8</sup> Tolerance is on the basis of a claim of superiority.

The US has taken control of the vocabulary, concepts and meanings of many fields. It obliges us to formulate problems of its own invention with the words it offers. It provides the codes to decipher the enigmas it created in the first place. In fact it has set up any number of research centres and think-tanks for this very purpose, employing thousands of analysts and experts.

As Ignacio Ramonet writes, “Wielding the might of information and technology, the US thus establishes, with the passive complicity of the people it dominates, what may be seen as affable oppression or delightful despotism. And this is all the more effective as its control of the culture industries lets it capture our imagination. The faithful gather to worship the new icons in malls – temples raised to the glory of all forms of consumption. All over the world these centres of shopping fever promotes the same way of life in a whirl of logos, stars, songs, idols, brands, gadgets, posters and celebrations.”<sup>9</sup>

As the capitalist economy has grown in influence and power much of our culture has been expropriated and commodified. Nowadays we create less of our culture and buy more of it, until it really is no longer our culture. Global forces are working through their Indian representatives by appropriating indigenous cultural forms and

<sup>7</sup> Joseph S. Nye and William A. Owens, “America’s Information Edge,” in *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 1996.

<sup>8</sup> David Rathkopf, *op.cit.*

<sup>9</sup> Ignacio Ramonet, “The Control of Pleasure,” *Le Monde Diplomatique*, May 2000.

practices. The appropriation of indigenous culture and its commodification are two sides of the same coin. The cultural operators are steadily moving into the terrain of popular culture, turning it into commodities for the global media to satisfy the cultural curiosity and sense of superiority of their audience.

A far greater part of culture is now aptly designated as 'mass culture', 'popular culture', and even 'media culture' owned and operated mostly by giant corporations. Their major concern is to accumulate wealth and make the world safer for their owners, the goal being social control rather than social creativity. Much of mass culture is organized to distract us from thinking about larger realities. The glossy entertainment culture creates an analysis paralysis. We lose our ability to interpret and understand the issues involved. In our living rooms we have a multi-channel society and we have the freedom to choose between the same and the same. By constantly appealing to the common denominator, a sensationalist popular culture lowers the common denominator still further. Such fare has often real ideological content. Even if supposedly apolitical, entertainment culture (which is really the entertainment industry) is political in its impact, propagating images and values that are often racist, patriarchal, consumerist, authoritarian, militaristic and imperialist, all against millennium values.

Fr. Kappen succinctly described the characteristics of the culturescape of today, "...the debasing of language into a means for commodity exchange, the harnessing of science to profit making ... the quantification of the human sciences and the cult of the statistical individual, the co-opting of art and artists in the service of transnational corporations, the commodification of women, the use of religion as a means of legitimizing unjust structures, the morality of individualism and private interest, the glorification of aggression and military might; and the regimenting and manipulation of human needs."<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Sebastian Kappen, quoted in *Indian Culture: An End of the Century View*, Kappen Memorial Lecture by U.R. Ananthamurthy.

The cultural element has been largely neglected in theory and practice since the beginning of international concern for development and social progress. The international organization which has been established to promote culture is UNESCO. The USA has not been a member of the UNESCO for almost two decades. This international agency is operating very much on its own. The World Bank, the IMF or the WTO never consults the UNESCO regarding the effect of structural adjustment or trade liberalization on cultural development. Educational projects are made or approved by the World Bank not by the UNESCO. Behind that is the policy of the World Bank on education promoting a global culture which, in essence, is an imperialist culture.

The cultural domination by the West or more precisely by the United States is facilitated by the creation of a market society. Market economy under globalization creates a market society. Some of the features of the market society were identified in a report of the government of Denmark a few years ago. This shows that there is genuine concern in the West itself about the long-term effects of globalization on society and culture. The Report (Copenhagen Seminar for Social Progress, 1996) said, "Traditional cultures and forms of social intercourse based on trust and mutuality would be destroyed. There would be a weakening and destruction of activities, organizations and associations of various types which based on dedication and generosity of individuals, provide the moral 'fuel' without which society and its major institutions cannot function. Political institutions and processes would decline, together with the notion of service; the function of teaching and educational institutions would also decline. And the medical profession and health services would entirely be commercialized. Science would be dominated by objectives of profit and power and scientific achievements would be made to serve the same purpose."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> "1996 Copenhagen Seminar for Social Progress," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Denmark.

An important dimension of culture is education. In fact education is the broadest cultural activity. Therefore, the impact of globalization on culture deserves special mention. The basic understanding about education rests on its relationship with society and state. It is assumed that education of individuals is for the development of their potential as well as for the good of the society and the state has the primary responsibility for educational activity. Globalization has changed this concept and relationship drastically. Now it is assumed that education is to prepare the individual for the market. So it is the market which decides which kind of education is to be given. Since the market decides, the state withdraws from education pleading it has no resources. We should carefully examine the consequences of giving emphasis only to technology in education. Humanities, languages, social sciences and even basic sciences are neglected. We are told that education must be job-oriented. While it is important to have jobs for those who come out of educational institutions we should consider what kind of jobs are we talking about and whose jobs are these. These are mainly jobs with little relationship to production in this country and contribute largely to the profits of multinational corporations. Emphasis is given to narrow individualism with no obligation to the society. Reforms in education on the whole provide channels for cultural imperialism.

We should recognize the possibility of a collective will to define cultural experience even in the face of the fragmentation and confusion of modern life. The ability to combat cultural loss exists. Cultural imperialism as a spread of modernity is really a spread of cultural loss. However, surviving this process of cultural loss is a matter of cultural will by defining and restructuring human goals.

The critique of cultural imperialism as a critique of modernity is valid. Modernity has produced an unprecedented interdependency that has ironically created a cultural incoherence of fragmented lives and diminished cultural security. As a result people are less able to define their roles in society and answer the question of why they do the things they do. This has caused anxiety

and produced a worldwide malaise as a result of modernization. However, even in the face of modernization's barriers, people still have the capacity to choose and process things on an individual level. The globalized context of modernity demands it. Perhaps critics can see the potential to exercise this ability as the bright spot in the dark tunnel of cultural imperialism woes. This view reinforces the fact that human cultures are not fragile and isolated. It recognizes the amazing resilience of humans and their ability to adapt themselves and their cultures to the forces that surround them.

### **Cultural Nationalism**

In dealing with cultural nationalism, which is the basis of Hindutva, as a project there is a problem. "Any attempt to clearly define Hindutva is doomed to failure: it is more a precept than a concept, more a myth than a rationally worked out project," Fr. Kappen has observed.<sup>12</sup> However, Hindutva's main proponent, the Bharatiya Janata Party, has a political project to alter the character of the nation, devaluing and undermining its secular and democratic nature.

In 1938, two years before he succeeded Hedgewar as RSS chief M.S. Golwalkar published his *We or Our Nationhood Defined*. Golwalkar's theoretical writings clearly take Savarkar's Hindutva as starting point but elaborate the ideas into what he liked to call 'cultural nationalism' as distinct from 'territorial nationalism'. Hedgewar too had been acutely aware of this distinction. In the words of his biographer, "In those days the idea of territorial nationalism held sway in the country. Even well-educated workers had developed a strong feeling that all those who live within the geographical boundaries of the country whatever their sentiments constitute the nation." Golwalkar wrote, "The themes of territorial nationalism and of common danger which formed the basis for our concept of nation, had deprived us of the positive and inspiring content of our real Hindu nationhood and made many of the freedom movements virtually anti-British movements."

<sup>12</sup> Sebastian Kappen, *Hindutva and Indian Religious Traditions*, Manusham Publications, 2000.

In a special issue of *Frontline* (August 1997), on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of Indian independence, A.B. Vajpayee wrote an article in which he said mainly three things which assume great significance in the current debate. He acknowledged his relationship with the RSS and the inspiration he derived from it. He said that the Nehruvian consensus suppressed genuine nationalism which the BJP is now reaffirming. He added that BJP made substantial electoral gains by 'joining' the Ayodhya movement. Prime Minister Vajpayee's recent statements on Ayodhya and 'national sentiment' should be seen against these earlier statements. This is a crucial area with regard to culture and secularism. The understanding of secularism is closely linked to that of nationalism.

Hindu nationalism was an important stream in the wider flow of nationalism. It is the historic decline of the Congress that forms the crucial backdrop to the story of how and why Hindu nationalism has grown the way it has. Hindutva offers no overall socio-economic, political and cultural-ideological programme. Its focus is overwhelmingly on the last, viz. cultural-ideological and its promise deceptively simple. If the nation is to be strong it must be culturally united and it can achieve this only by clarification, recognition, acceptance and consolidation of its own nationalist 'essence'. The project thus becomes one of cultural exclusivism and xenophobia. Claiming "the longest and unbroken history of civilizational and cultural evolution of an essentially indigenous nature," Hindutva acts as an exclusionary force in Indian society rather than universalistic and open to the values of other cultures. In the rhetoric of Hindu nationalists boundaries between India, Hindu religion and Hindu culture are not demarcated. In fact, for them, India becomes identified with both Hindu culture and Hinduism as religion to the exclusion of all others. Some of the recent statements by the RSS chief, Sudarshan, clearly express this view.

Hindutva seeks to redefine the nation-space. Its strategy is designed to refashion the social space of the Indian nation. Through the emphasis of 'essence' the nation space is sacralised and claimed

exclusively for Hindus alone. The strategy behind Savarkar's notion of Hindutva has, for its central theme, the redefining of the nation as a sacred space, the claim that the nation is and ought to be formed in the shape of a '*punyabhoomi*' or holy land. This means that Hindutva tends to emphasize the particularity of social space by attempting to invest it with a unique cultural specificity. This policy has sought to reverse or turn inside out Nehruvian nation-space.

The leadership of the mainstream section of the freedom struggle, Jawaharlal Nehru in particular, was to insist repeatedly and emphatically that it was undesirable to use the terms Hindu and Hinduism to characterize Indian history and culture. Even as competing religious identities polarized around the lines of the two-nation theory were to challenge and fragment the movement, the Congress continued to reiterate that the only basis upon which the new nation could be organized was secularism and the rights of the minorities to their own religion and culture. But the rhetoric that sought to mobilize the country on the grounds of a 'regenerated' Hinduism served openly to exclude the minorities from the definition of the nation. For, if the nation is defined by the fact that the majority belong to the Hindu religion, those who do not subscribe to the religion are not part of the nation. This is the clear and unambiguous message of Hindutva.

Some of the Supreme Court judgments in the mid-nineties gave legitimacy to the Hindu right's ideology of Hindutva. In one of the judgments the Court concluded that "the term Hindutva is related more to the way of life of the people in the subcontinent." In the court's view Hindutva is to be ordinarily to be understood "as a way of life or state of mind and is not be equated with, or understood as religious fundamentalism." The words Hinduism and Hindutva should not be construed narrowly to refer only to the "strict Hindu religious practices unrelated to the culture and ethos of the people of India." So, according to the Supreme Court, the term Hindu is related to the culture and ethos of the people of India.

The Supreme Court decision was immediately claimed by the

Hindu right as a vindication of their vision of Hindutva. But as Brenda Crossman and Ratna Kapur pointed out, “The Supreme Court’s conclusion on the meaning of Hindutva exemplifies the way in which the unstated norms of the majority came to be inscribed in legal principles. The Court assumes that the norms of the majority can simply be extended to apply to all Indians regardless of their religious or cultural identity. Indianisation is taken by the Court to represent the political and cultural aspirations of all Indians, in and through the construction of a uniform culture. The court does not stop to consider that this uniform culture is one based on assimilating religious and cultural minorities and in reconstituting all Indian citizens in the image of the unstated dominant norm, that is, a Hindu norm.”<sup>13</sup>

The definition of a Hindu and Hindutva was articulated by Savarkar and Golwalkar. Golwalkar’s vision of a Hindu nation included five components. “The idea contained in the word ‘nation’ is a compound of five distinct factors fused into one dissoluble whole, the famous five unities: geographical, racial, religious, cultural and linguistic.” On religion and culture Golwalkar wrote, “The great Hindu Race professes its illustrious Hindu religion, the only religion in the world worthy of being so denominated, which in its variety is still an organic whole. ... Guided by this Religion in all walks of life individual, social, political, the Race evolved a Culture which despite the degenerating contact with the debased civilizations of the Mussalmans and the Europeans for the last ten centuries, is still the noblest in the world.”

The particular meaning that the BJP gives to the equal respect of all religions is based on formally equal treatment. Accordingly, any law or policies that provide special treatment for minorities are opposed as ‘pseudo-secularism’ or the ‘appeasement of minorities’. In the discursive strategy of the Hindu right, this approach to secularism is made to sound quite reasonable. Beneath the surface,

<sup>13</sup> Brenda Crossman and Rant Kapur in *Economic and Political Weekly*, September 21, 1996.

however, this discourse of secularism and equality is an unapologetic appeal to brute majoritarianism and an assault on the very legitimacy of minority rights. This discussion on majority is important. In democracy no majority is ever assumed to be permanent, or based on a single unchanging identity alone: a majority is constructed from issue to issue and can change from programme to programme. The majority that Hindutva claims to represent is by definition permanent: the statistical majority. BJP ideologue Seshadri writes, “Democracy in normal parlance means the rule of the majority. In every single democratic country, it is the majority culture whose ideals and values of life are accepted as the national ethos by one and all.” This discourse seeks to destroy the fundamental underpinning of political democracy – the concept of an Indian citizenship which must necessarily be abstracted from the possession of any particular attribute (religion, race, language, etc.) to ensure a minority its rightful place within a democratic society not only does the majority community need to recognize the contribution of the minority to its culture but it also needs to provide constitutional safeguards for the preservation of its cultural identity. The *Organizer* wrote: “All that the Hindu wants is that our culture should flower forth into greatness. Muslims must accept the fact that India is as much a Hindu country as Pakistan is a Muslim country or Britain is a Christian country ... while politicians may play with words ‘communal’ or ‘secular’ to their hearts’ content, the fact is that the predominant culture of a country will be its basic national culture.”

Fr. Kappen speaks of the fascist features of Hindutva and its resemblance to European fascism in some of the essential points.<sup>14</sup> *We or Our Nationhood Defined* explicitly models cultural nationalism on Adolf Hitler. “German national pride has now become the topic of the day. To keep up the purity of the nation and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of the Semitic races – the Jews. National pride at its highest has been manifested

<sup>14</sup> Sebastian Kappen, *Hindutva and Indian Religious Traditions*, Manusham Publications, 2000.

here. Germany has also shown how well-nigh impossible it is for races and cultures, having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindutva to learn and profit by.”

In an article “Hindutva’s Foreign Tie-up in the 1930s” in the *Economic and Political Weekly* Maria Casolari provides archival evidence for the foreign connections of Hindutva. Casolari says, “An accurate search of the primary sources produced by the organisations of Hindu nationalism, as well as by their opponents and by the police is bound to show the connections between such organisations and Italian fascism. In fact the most important organisations of Hindu nationalism not only adopted fascist ideas in a conscious and deliberate way, but this happened only because of the existence of direct contacts between the representations of the main Hindu organisations and fascist Italy.”<sup>15</sup>

Already from the spring of 1939 Savarkar-led Hindu Mahasabha seemed to have finally chosen Germany as its main reference point at the international level. On March 25, 1939 the Mahasabha made the following statement: “Germany’s solemn idea of the revival of the Aryan culture, the glorification of the Swastika, her patronage of Vedic learning and the ardent championship of the tradition Indo-Germanic civilization are welcomed by the religious and sensible Hindus of India with a jubilant hope.” As Casolari points out the aggressive racial policy carried out by Germany in the name of Aryan culture must have played a fundamental role in the shift of interest from Italy to Germany.

There is a ‘cultural’ critique of secularism that has to be taken into account. It takes the ambitiously foundational view that India is in essence, a Hindu country, and that it would be culturally quite wrong to treat Hinduism as simply one of the various religions in India. It is argued that India denies its indigenous cultural commitment in not

<sup>15</sup> Marzia Casolari, “Hindutva’s Foreign Tie-up in the 1930s,” in *Economic and Political Weekly*, January 22, 2000.

providing anything like privileged status to its own 'tradition', to wit the predominantly Hindu heritage. The suggestion is that India should be seen as a 'Hindu country' in cultural terms.

Amartya Sen replies to this critique. "There are two questions to be raised here. First, even if it were right to see Indian culture as basically Hindu culture it would be very odd to alienate on that ground, the right to equal political and legal treatment of minorities (including the political standing and rights of the 110 million Indian Muslims). Why should the cultural dominance of one tradition, even if true, reduce the political entitlements and rights of those from other tradition? Sen points out that the second problem with the thesis under discussion is that its reading of Indian culture is extremely narrow. The cultural inheritance of contemporary India from its past combines Islamic influences with Hindu and other traditions, and the results of their interaction can be seen plentifully in literature, music, painting, architecture and many other fields. Sen adds that another serious problem with the narrow reading of 'Indian culture as Hindu culture' is the entailed neglect of many other achievements of Indian civilization that has nothing much to do with religious thinking at all."<sup>16</sup>

Fr. Kappen points out that Hindutva is selective traditionalism coupled with selective openness to aspects of modernity. The advocates of Hindutva, are critical of Western conceptions of secularism and democracy. At the same time, they welcome not only modern science and technology, but also capitalism and market economy with the consumerist culture germane to it. This is not they claim, mere capitulation before modernity since they are using science, technology and capitalism as a means to goals they themselves set.

Dr. K.N. Panikkar has pointed out the impact of cultural nationalism on education. A large number of social and cultural organizations, either sponsored by the Parivar or controlled by it have

<sup>16</sup> Amartya Sen, "Secularism and Its Discontents," *Secularism and Its Critics*, edited by Rajeev Bhargava, Oxford, 1999, p. 454.

contributed to the growth of communal consciousness. This is an outcome of a long-term dual strategy: the creation of institutional networks on the one hand and infiltration of the existing organizations on the other. A good example of this dual strategy is the field of education, which is central to the cultural activities of the RSS. Following the Constitutional principles, the Indian state has generally pursued a secular policy. But this is sought to be changed to give a Hindutva bias by changing the content of education. The BJP's policy is to 'Indianize, nationalise and spiritualise' education.<sup>17</sup>

What are the links between cultural imperialism or globalization in general and cultural nationalism? The greater social and political acceptability of Hindutva in recent times, as Jayati Ghosh suggests, "has had a lot to do with the economic repercussions of a pattern of growth which leaves the vast majority of the population either untouched or even worse off, while generating spiralling incomes and increasingly flamboyant life style of a minority."<sup>18</sup> Dr. Panikkar takes up the issue: "The politics of Hindutva has immensely gained from these adverse consequences of globalization, without, however, entering into any confrontation with it. Despite the Swadeshi rhetoric and an anti-Western civilizational stance, the Parivar does not oppose the neo-colonial tendencies inherent in the working of the transnational capital in India. On the contrary there are enough signs of compromise and collaboration. The nationalism that the Parivar espouses has no anti-imperialist content and is hence only 'cultural' posited in antagonistic relationship with the minorities within the country. The territorial, political and economic nationalism that the anti-colonial movement represented and advocated, therefore, has no use for the Parivar."<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> K.N. Panikkar, "Introduction," to *The Concerned Indian's Guide to Communalism*, Viking, 1999, p. xx.

<sup>18</sup> Jayati Ghosh, "Perceptions of Difference," in *The Concerned Indian's Guide to Communalism*, p. 117.

<sup>19</sup> K.N. Panikkar, "Introduction," *Ibid*, p. xxx.

There are many common features between cultural imperialism and cultural nationalism. Both are hegemonic. Both make universalistic claims while being exclusionary. Cultural imperialism as well as cultural nationalism is messianic. Both claim tolerance based on superiority complex and impose conditions for tolerance. While cultural imperialism marketises the global space, cultural nationalism sacralises the nation space. While the former represents imperialism the latter has many features of fascism. In all these they militate against the ethics and justice of the millennium and may rightly be called anti-millennial projects.

“Culture is not a mere instrument of politics – it is the site at which politics is made, unmade, abused and appropriated. Far from being neutral, culture is the battleground of politics in India today” (Rustom Bharucha).

## Living Democracies

Vandana Shiva

After I received the invitation to give this year's Kappen Memorial I started to read some of the materials that had been sent to me with much admiration. We have been forced to think about the situation that stares us in our face. We have to use our minds because of the crisis we are in – to understand and analyze what went wrong and how we can extricate ourselves from the mess that has engulfed us because of the much-flaunted 'globalization'. But, here was a person in Fr. Sebastian Kappen who offered alternatives long before the crisis had literally reached life and death proportions with such depth and coherence and integrity. A year ago we were talking about building a post-globalization world since globalization has turned out to be the international norm along with the World Trade Organization.

### **The Bankruptcy of Globalisation**

Globalisation was projected as the next great leap of human evolution in a linear forward march from tribes to nations to global markets. Our identities and context were to move from the national to the global, just as in the earlier phase of state driven globalisation, it was supposed to have moved from the local to the global.

Deregulated commerce and corporate rule was offered as the

alternative to the centralised bureaucratic control under communist regimes and state dominated economies. Markets were offered as an alternative to states for regulating our lives, not just our economies.

As the globalisation project has unfolded, it has exposed its bankruptcy at the philosophical, political, ecological and economic levels. The bankruptcy of the dominant world order is leading to social, ecological, political and economic non-sustainability, with societies, ecosystems, and economies disintegrating and breaking down.

The philosophical and ethical bankruptcy of globalisation was based on reducing every aspect of our lives to commodities and reducing our identities to merely that of consumers on the global market place. Our capacities as producers, our identity as members of communities, our role as custodians of our natural and cultural heritage were all to disappear or be destroyed. Markets and consumerism expanded. Our capacity to give and share were to shrink. But the human spirit refuses to be subjugated by a world view based on the dispensability of our humanity.

The dominant political and economic order has a number of features that are new, which increase injustice and non-sustainability on scales and at rates that the earth and human community have not experienced.

1. It is based on enclosures of the remaining ecological commons – biodiversity, water and air, and the destruction of local economies on which people's livelihoods and economic security depends.
2. The commodification of water and biodiversity is ensured through new property rights built into trade agreements like the WTO which are transforming people's resources into corporate monopolies viz. TRIPs and trade in environmental goods and services.
3. The transformation of commons to commodities is ensured through shifts in governance with decisions moving from

communities and countries to global institutions, and rights moving from people to corporations through increasingly centralised and unaccountable states acting on the principle of eminent domain – the absolute sovereignty of the ruler.

This in turn led to political bankruptcy and anti-democratic formations and constellations. Instead of acting on the public trust doctrine and principles of democratic accountability and subsidiarity, globalisation led to governments usurping power from parliaments, regional and local governments, and local communities.

For example the TRIPs agreement was based on central governments hijacking the rights to biodiversity and knowledge from communities and assigning them as exclusive, monopolistic rights to corporations.

The Agreement on Agriculture was based on taking decisions away from farming communities and regional governments.

The General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) takes decisions and ownership over water from the local and public domain to the privatised, global domain.

This undemocratic process of privatisation and deregulation led to increased political bankruptcy and corruption and economic bankruptcy.

A decade of corporate globalisation has led to major disillusionment and discontentment. Democracy has been eroded, livelihoods have been destroyed. Small farmers and businesses are going bankrupt everywhere. Even the promise of economic growth has not been delivered. Economic slow down has been the outcome of liberalising trade. Ironically some corporations that led the process of trade liberalisation and globalisation have themselves collapsed.

Enron which came to India as the “Flagship” project of globalisation with the full force of backing and blackmail by the U.S. Trade Representative has gone bankrupt and is steeped in scandals of corruption. Chiquita, which forced the banana wars on Europe

through a U.S./Europe W.T.O. dispute has also declared bankruptcy.

First South East Asia, now Argentina have exposed how vulnerable and volatile current economic arrangements are. The non-sustainability and bankruptcy of the ruling world order is fully evident. The need for alternatives has never been stronger.

### **Creating Alternatives to Corporate Globalisation**

During the last decade of the 20th century, corporate driven globalisation shook up the world and the economic and political structures that we have shaped to govern us.

In December 1999, citizens of the world rebelled against the economic totalitarianism of corporate globalisation. Social and economic justice and ecological sustainability became the rallying call for new movements for citizen freedoms and liberation from corporate control.

September 11th 2001 shut down the spaces that people's movements had opened up. It also brought back the focus on the intimate connection between violence, inequality and non-sustainability and the indivisibility of peace, justice and sustainability. Doha was rushed through in the shadow of global militarisation in response to the terror attacks.

As we face the double closure of spaces by corporate globalisation and militarised police states, by economic facism aided by political facism, our challenge is to reclaim our freedoms and the freedoms of our fellow beings. Reclaiming and recreating the indivisible freedom of all species is the aim of the Living Democracy Movement. The living democracy movement embodies two indivisibilities and continuums. The first is the continuum of freedom for all life on earth, and all humans without discrimination on the basis on gender, race, religion, class and species. The second is the continuum between and indivisibility of justice, peace and sustainability – without sustainability and just share of the earth's bounties there is no justice, and without justice three can be no peace.

Corporate globalisation ruptures these continuities. It establishes corporate rule through a divide and rule policy, and creates competition and conflict between different species and peoples and between different aims. It transforms diversity and multiplicity into oppositional differences both by breeding fundamentalisms through spreading insecurity and then using these fundamentalisms to shift humanities focus and preoccupation from sustainability and justice and peace to ethnic and religious conflict and violence.

We need a new paradigm to respond to the fragmentation caused by various forms of fundamentalism. We need a new movement which allows us to move from the dominant and pervasive culture of violence, destruction and death to a culture of non-violence, creative peace and life. That is why in India we started the living democracy movement.

### **Creative Resistance**

Seattle was a watershed for citizens movements. People brought an international trade agreement and W.T.O. the institution that enforces it to a halt by mobilising globally against corporate globalisation. Seattle was the success of a strategy focussing on the global level and on protest. It articulated at the international level what citizens do not want. Corporations and governments responded quickly to Seattle's success. They killed protest possibilities by moving to venues like Doha where thousands could not gather. And they started to label protest and dissent of any kind as "terrorism."

The Biotech industry (*Economist*, Jan 12th, 18th, p 62) has called on governments to use anti-terror laws against groups like Greenpeace and Friends of the earth and groups critical of the industry. Mr. Zoellick, the US Trade Representative has called the anti-globalisation movement terrorist.

A different strategy is needed post September 11/post Doha. Massive protests at global meetings can no longer be the focus on citizen mobilisation. We need international solidarity and autonomous organising. Our politics needs to reflect the principle

of subsidiarity. Our global presence cannot be a shadow of the power of corporations and Bretton Woods institutions. We need stronger movements at local and national levels, movements that combine resistance and constructive action, protests and building of alternatives non-cooperation with unjust rule and cooperation within society. The global, for us, must strengthen the local and national, not undermine it. The two tendencies that we demand of the economic system needs to be central to people's politics – localisation and alternatives. Both are not just economic alternatives they are democratic alternatives. Without them forces for change cannot be mobilised in the new context.

At the heart of building alternatives and localising economic and political systems is the recovery of the commons and the reclaiming of community. The living democracy movement is reclaiming people's sovereignty and community rights to natural resources.

Rights to natural resources are natural rights. They are not given by States, nor can they be extinguished by States, the W.T.O, or by corporations, even though under globalisation, attempts are being made to alienate people's rights to vital resources of land water and biodiversity.

Globalisation has relocated sovereignty from people to corporations, through centralising, militarising States. Rights of people are being appropriated by States to carve out monopoly rights of corporations over our land, our water, our biodiversity, our air. States acting on the principle of eminent domain or absolute sovereignty of the State are undermining people's sovereign rights and their role as trustees of people's resources on the public trust doctrine. State sovereignty, by itself, is therefore not enough to generate countervailing forces and processes to corporate globalisation.

The reinvention of sovereignty has to be based on the reinvention of the state so that the state is made accountable to the people. Sovereignty cannot reside only in centralised state structures, nor does

it disappear when the protective functions of the state with respect to its people start to wither away. The new partnership of national sovereignty needs empowered communities which assign functions to the state for their protection. Communities defending themselves always demand such duties and obligations from state structures. On the other hand, TNCs and international agencies promote the separation of the community interests from state interests and the fragmentation and divisiveness of communities.

### **The Living Democracy Movement**

We started the living democracy movement to respond to the enclosures of the commons that is at the core of economic globalisation. The living democracy movement is simultaneously an ecology movement, an anti-poverty movement, a recovery of the commons movement, a deepening of democracy movement, a peace movement. It builds on decades of movements defending people's rights to resources, the movements for local, direct democracy, our freedom movements gifts of Swadeshi (economic sovereignty), Swaraj (Self-rule) and Satyagraha (Non-cooperation with unjust rule). It seeks to strengthen rights enshrined in our Constitution.

The living democracy movement in India is a movement to rejuvenate resources, reclaim the commons and deepen democracy. It relates to the democracy of life in three dimensions:

Living democracy refers to the democracy of all life, not just human life. It is about earth democracy not just human democracy.

Living democracy is about life, at the vital everyday level, and decisions and freedoms related to everyday living – the food we eat the clothes we wear, the water we drink. It is not just about elections and casting votes once in 3 or 4 or 5 years.

It is a permanently vibrant democracy. It combines economic democracy with political democracy.

Living democracy is not dead, it is alive. Under globalisation, democracy even of the shallow representative kind is dying.

Governments everywhere are betraying the mandates that brought them to power. They are centralising authority and power, both by subverting democratic structures of constitutions and by promulgating ordinances that stifle civil liberties. The Sept 11 tragedy has become a convenient excuse for anti-people legislation worldwide. Politicians everywhere are turning to xenophobic and fundamentalist agendas to get votes in a period when economic agenda have been taken away from national levels and are being set by World Bank, IMF, W.T.O. and global corporations.

The living democracy movement is about living rather than dead democracy. Democracy is dead when governments no longer reflect the will of the people but are reduced to anti-democratic unaccountable instruments of corporate rule under the constellation of corporate globalisation as the Enron and Chiquita case make so evident.

Corporate globalisation is centered on corporate profits. Living democracy is based on maintaining life on earth and freedom for all species and people.

Corporate globalisation operates to create rules for the global, national and local markets which privilege global corporations and threaten diverse species, the livelihoods of the poor and small, local producers and businesses. Living democracy operates according to the ecological laws of nature, and limits commercial activity to prevent harm to other species and to people.

Corporate globalisation is exercised through centralising, destructive power. Living democracy is exercised through decentralised power and peaceful coexistence.

Corporate globalisation globalises greed and consumerism. Living democracy globalises compassion, caring and sharing. Democracy emptied of economic freedom and ecological freedom becomes a potent breeding ground for fundamentalism and terrorism.

Over the past two decades, I have witnessed conflicts over development and conflicts over natural resources mutate into

communal conflicts, culminating in extremism and terrorism. My book *Violence of the Green Revolution* was an attempt to understand the ecology of terrorism. The lessons I have drawn from the growing but diverse expressions of fundamentalism and terrorism are the following:

Nondemocratic economic systems that centralize control over decision making and resources and displace people from productive employment and livelihoods create a culture of insecurity. Every policy decision is translated into the politics of “we” and “they.” “We” have been unjustly treated, while “they” have gained privileges.

Destruction of resource rights and erosion of democratic control of natural resources, the economy, and means of production undermine cultural identity. With identity no longer coming from the positive experience of being a farmer, a craftsperson, a teacher, or a nurse, culture is reduced to a negative shell where one identity is in competition with the “other” over scarce resources that define economic and political power.

Centralized economic systems also erode the democratic base of politics. In a democracy, the economic agenda is the political agenda. When the former is hijacked by the World Bank, the IMF, or the WTO, democracy is decimated. The only cards left in the hands of politicians eager to garner votes are those of race, religion, and ethnicity, which subsequently give rise to fundamentalism. And fundamentalism effectively fills the vacuum left by a decaying democracy. Economic globalisation is fueling economic insecurity, eroding cultural diversity and identity, and assaulting the political freedoms of citizens. It is providing fertile ground for the cultivation of fundamentalism and terrorism. Instead of integrating people, corporate globalization is tearing apart communities.

### **True Democracy**

The survival of people and democracy are contingent on a response to the double facism of globalization – the economic facism that

destroys people's rights to resources and the fundamentalist facism that feeds on people's displacement, dispossession, economic insecurities, and fears. On September 11, 2001, the tragic terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and at the Pentagon unleashed a "war against terrorism" promulgated by the US government under George W. Bush. Despite the rhetoric, this war will not contain terrorism because it fails to address the roots of terrorism— economic insecurity, cultural subordination, and ecological dispossession. The new war is in fact creating a chain reaction of violence and spreading the virus of hate. And the magnitude of the damage to the earth caused by "smart" bombs and carpet bombing remains to be seen.

Living Democracy is true freedom of all life forms to exist on this earth. Living Democracy is true respect for life, through equitable sharing of the earth's resources with all those who live on the planet. Living Democracy is the strong and continual articulation of such democratic principles in everyday life and activity.

The constellation of living democracy is people's control over natural resources, and a just and sustainable utilisation of land, water, biodiversity, communities having the highest sovereignty and delegating power to the state in its role as trustee. The shift from the principle of eminent domain to the public trust doctrine for functions of the State is key to localisation, to recovery of the commons and the fight against privatisation and corporate take over of land, water and biodiversity.

This shift is also an ecological imperative. As members of the earth family, *Vasudhaiva Kutumbhakam*, we have a share in the earth's resources. Rights to natural resources for needs of sustenance are natural rights. They are not given or assigned. They are recognised or ignored. The eminent domain principle inevitably leads to the situation of "all for some" – corporate monopolies over biodiversity through patents, corporate monopolies on water through privatisation and corporate monopolies over food through free trade.

The most basic right we have as a species is survival, the right to life. Survival requires guaranteed access to resources. Commons

provide that guarantee. Privatisation and enclosures destroy it. Localisation is necessary for recovery of the commons. And living democracy is the movement to relocate our minds, our production systems and consumption patterns from the poverty creating global markets to the sustainability and sharing of the earth community. This shift from global markets to earth citizenship is a shift of focus from globalisation to localisation of power from corporations to citizens. The living democracy movement is a movement to establish that a better world is not just possible, it is necessary.

### **Conclusion**

In a failing democracy for us living democracy is then bringing all of life back in the future life in the nature and all its diversity.

Our life in all its generosity and abundance is in threat because what we have with globalization is in ruins and if it hadn't been for September 11 that globalization would have collapsed. Globalization based on greed, monopoly, non-sustainability and injustice can only stay propped up for little while longer with military violence backing the economic violence of the processes. We need to move exactly as Kappen was talking - from cultures and economies based on cruelty to cultures and economies based on ethics and compassion. There was a beauty to Bangalore, but now-a-days you see only big sign boards to encourage consumerism. It is really celebrating greed.

We are in a context where the fascism of the market place is being helped by fascism of fundamentalism and vice-versa. But, we need to retain, relive and redefine living democracy and, in spite of the brutality and the despair around us, we should not stop hoping and celebrating.



## Cultural Pasts and National Identity

**K N Panikkar**

I am beholden to Visthar for inviting me to deliver the Kappen memorial lecture for this year. It is an occasion to recall to memory the contribution of a sensitive mind to our cultural and intellectual struggles at a time when much of our cultural legacy is being distorted and undermined. As such, efforts like this assume greater salience than a tribute; they are in fact part of our collective endeavour to come to terms with the present, in which the past has an influential presence.

The choice of the theme of this lecture is guided by the importance of this connection between the past and the present, particularly because what constitutes the cultural past is now being subjected to selective appropriation. The relationship between the cultural past and national identity has, therefore, become a contemporary political issue, not remaining strictly within the domain of academic discourse. That the making of national identity is a complex process is generally acknowledged, but the relative significance of different constitutive elements – political, social, economic and cultural – is a matter of fierce disagreement. Privileging any one of these elements can only lead to a partial view; in fact, all of them are implicated, not in isolation, but as a part of an inter-related totality. In characterizing

the national identity, however, culture is often foregrounded as the most significant factor, for nations may share common political institutions and economic organizations, but their cultural characteristics are generally distinct.

In articulating the relationship between culture and national identity culture of either the dominant or of the religious majority is often universalized as that of the nation. The nationalist icons are culled from the pantheon of the 'cultured' or from the tradition of the majority. The popular motifs of the Indian nation, for instance, are invariably invoked from the classical art or the texts of upper caste religion. Such an identity excludes the cultural practices of the marginalized. An exclusivist view of cultural identity is thus foregrounded, which, given the immense variety in cultural practices in India, leads to a disjunction between the national and the popular. Moreover, whichever form the exclusion takes - class, caste or religious - tends to violate the culture of other sections of society, leading to cultural oppression and denial. This is particularly true of the ongoing attempt to construct a national identity based on Hindu religious cultural past.

With the emergence of communalism as an ideology of political mobilization, the concepts of 'nation' and 'nationalism' have become matters of contention. Their meaning is being reordered and their character is redefined, thereby raising the question about the relationship between the cultural past and national identity. The era of enlightenment, the coming of modernity and the early phase of the national liberation struggle had witnessed a critical introspection about this relationship. Both individuals and society were then engaged in identifying their cultural location, which was largely recognized within the context of the plural and composite cultural legacy. The quest then was to create a nation out of the diverse groups owing allegiance to different racial, linguistic and religious affiliations.

These culturally distinct groups are the 4,635 communities identified by the Anthropological Survey of India, diverse in biological traits, dress, languages, forms of worship, occupation, food habits

and kinship patterns. They belong to a variety of races, drawing from almost every stock in the world. The followers of several religions and their sects co-exist in India, pursuing their distinct worship patterns and belief systems. The number of dialects and languages in use also reflect the social and cultural plurality. Apart from thousands of dialects there are as many as 325 languages and 25 scripts derived from various linguistic families. The identity of India as a nation is a consequence of the coming together of people with such diverse social and cultural traits.

The coming together, however, is a long historical process in which the evolution of political institutions, social relations, economic production, cultural practices and intellectual engagements are implicated. Without these objective conditions, which enable the people to relate with each other the nation can neither be 'imagined' or its character constructed. Among these objective conditions the cultural past or more accurately, cultural pasts, are often overlooked, as in the case of the politics-centred analysis of anti-colonial struggle, or privileged as in the culture-centred interpretation of nationalism. The latter has a particularly powerful *avatar* in the currently popular notion of cultural nationalism. It is undeniable that the identity of the nation cannot be divorced from its cultural past, but given the internal cultural differentiation and the convergence of various cultural streams in Indian society, the cultural past is not monochromatic in its make-up. Attributing to it a monochromatic character, drawing upon religious, caste or class practices, is likely to negate the assimilative tendencies present in the cultural life of the past which in turn would lead to an identity that is not national but sectarian.

### **Nation in Search of Itself**

The formation of national identity is not an event, but a process, a process which Fernand Braudel described as follows:

A nation can have its being only at the price of being forever in search of itself, forever transforming itself in the direction of its

logical development, always measuring itself against others and identifying itself with the best, the most essential part of its being; a nation will consequently recognize itself in certain stock images, in certain passwords known to the initiated (whether the latter are the elite or a mass of people, which is not always the case); it will recognize itself in a thousand touchstones, beliefs, ways of speech, excuses, in an unbounded subconscious, in the following together of many obscure currents, in a shared ideology, shared myths, shared fantasies. And any national identity necessarily implies a degree of national unity, of which it is in some sense the reflection, the transposition and the condition.

The 'nation ever in search of itself', Braudel suggests, is bound up with a variety of factors, which contribute to the making of its identity. It is a complex process in which the conception of the people about themselves and their environment, the organization of their social life and the constitution of their ideological world are important ingredients. In other words, how people perceive themselves as belonging to an identifiable entity, in relation to others, possessing certain essential qualities and recognizable through widely shared images. Such a perception of the nation is intrinsically linked with historical experience, changing over a period of time according to the realities of social existence. The formation of national identity is therefore a process by which the people come to share, imagine and believe in certain common interests and traits. The nation is not born, it evolves. In this process, culture conceived as a dynamic, ever-changing entity is a crucial element.

### **The Setting: Geographical and Historical**

Even if a nation can exist and survive without territory, a nation can come to its own only in the context of its territory. The territory of a nation, however, is not given; it is both culturally conceived and politically constituted. The former is intrinsically interlinked with geographical knowledge and cultural experience, whereas the latter is related to the control of the territory and the organization of administration. The knowledge of territory depends upon social

experience; ever-changing according to man's engagement with nature and his access to new technologies. During ancient periods of history, his social horizon was confined to his immediate surroundings and therefore, he could hardly conceive of a large landmass as a unit to which he belonged. Only when such local knowledge coalesces due to social and political experience a geographically earmarked territory is conceived as a single unit. In the same territory that forms the limits of a nation, historically speaking, highly fragmented knowledge of geography exists.

The knowledge of the territory constituting India as a nation has also evolved over a period of time. This evolution can be understood in two ways: First, the different stages through which the subcontinent was identified as a territorial unit as spelt out in different texts, produced by elite groups or individuals. The second is a more difficult and demanding effort: mapping the understanding of the variety of people who inhabited different parts of India.

The earliest expression of the knowledge of the territory of the subcontinent can be traced to the Vedic period. At that time the territorial conception, as evident from the river hymn, did not embrace the whole subcontinent. The Rig Veda contains references to 25 streams, most of which belong to the Indus river system. On the basis of the geographical information available in the Rig Veda, it is reasonable to assume that the Aryans did not know the country beyond the Vindhya Range and the Narmada. The concept of Aryavrata was confined to the territory between the Himalayas and the Vindhyas. The unfamiliarity with the southern part of India continued till the early Buddhist period. Therefore, it is doubtful, as Radha Kumud Mukherji holds, that the river hymn of the Rig Veda "presents the first national conception of Indian unity." The Prithvi Sutra in Atharva Veda, as evident from the homage to the rivers, does not take any further.

The southern part of the subcontinent came into reckoning only during the later Vedic period. Aitreya Brahmana refers to different people of the South as living on the borders of the Aryan settlements.

The Ramayana and the Mahabharata further extends the territorial limits. The Kishkhinda Kandha in Ramayana contains a fairly broad conception of India as a whole, setting it off from the surrounding countries. A more intimate and elaborate knowledge of the territory is in Mahabharata. The Bhishmaparva lists 200 rivers, among which are mentioned the rivers in south India such as Mahanadi, Godavari, Krishna, Kaveri, Narmada, Krishnaveni, Vena and Tunga-vena. It also mentions 157 peoples belonging to northern India and 50 peoples to the south. This detailed information is significant enough, but more important is the conception of the subcontinent as a geographical unit, by envisioning it as an equilateral triangle, divided into four smaller equal triangles, the apex of which is Kanya Kumari and the base formed by the line of the Himalaya Mountains.

By the time of the Mauryan rulers the notion of the subcontinent as a territorial unit was well-marked. The Arthashastra, which contains considerable information about the economic products of the various parts of India, is a good index of this development. So are the edicts and inscriptions of Ashoka, which has information about the states in the south, the west, the northwest, and the Deccan. A view has therefore prevailed that by the end of the first millennium BCE the “knowledge of all parts of India was a common possession, a content of the popular geographical consciousness.”

Such a view about ‘popular geographical consciousness’ raises several questions. Firstly, being arrived at from an Indo-Gangetic-centred perspective whether it reflects the knowledge of the territory among the people inhabiting other parts of the subcontinent. The conception of the territory developed by the people of South India, for instance, was neither simultaneous with that of the people of the North nor did they receive and internalize the knowledge generated elsewhere. The early notices in the Sangam literature, just like the Rig Veda, point to a geographical knowledge limited to the immediate surroundings. However, the knowledge of the subcontinent as a territorial unit does not seem to be part of the Tamil consciousness before the seventh century. If that is so, the territory of the subcontinent entered the

historical consciousness of the people at different points of time and therefore not a part of uniform national memory.

However, without subscribing to a theory of geographical determinism, it is possible to suggest that the conception of the subcontinent as a territorial unit had an abiding influence on political vision and practice. "There is no country," observes historian Beniprasad, "marked out by the sea and the mountains so clearly to be a single whole as India. This geographical wholeness explains one of the central features of Indian history, the urge to political unification in defiance of vast distances and immense difficulties of transport and communication." This does not imply that political organization always coincided with the territorial limits of the subcontinent. On the contrary, it hardly happened till the colonial subjugation when the entire subcontinent was brought under one political authority, either through direct or indirect rule. Nevertheless, the political tendencies have been to integrate the entire subcontinent under a single authority. The political history of India is characterized by a continuous cyclical process, centrifugal on the one hand and centripetal, on the other.

The sixteen *janapadas* in the north and several *nadus* in the south can be reckoned as the early political formation of significance. The empire established by Ashoka incorporated the *janapadas* and extended its limits to the south, bringing into being for the first time a political formation that sought to reach out to major parts of the subcontinent. The Mauryan Empire was so vast that it could hardly sustain its control for long and was soon replaced by smaller states. Under the Guptas the limit of the empire was again stretched to approximate the territory of the subcontinent, through the conquest of Chandra Gupta and Samudra Gupta. The empire of the Guptas suffered the same fate of disintegration that had earlier beset the Mauryan. Such a process of integration and disintegration continued to mark the political history thereafter, as evident from the way in which the map of India was drawn and redrawn during the Sultanate, the Mughal and the British rule.

The cultural make-up of the nation is enmeshed with this political process. For, the integrative-disintegrative tendencies of Indian polity, cyclically manifested for 2,000 years, brought about 'regional' cultural formations as well as inter-regional cultural transactions. The empires, however, tended to be strong centripetal forces, culturally and socially, enabling diverse elements to come together and interact with each other. Such a tendency was not reflected in the convergence of artistic talent in the courts of powerful emperors alone, but more so in the assimilative cultural ambience that developed in capital cities where patronage was available.

The disintegration of empires and the consequent formation of 'regional' states opened up channels of inter-regional social and cultural penetration. The decentralization of patronage facilitated the process, as represented by miniature painting and architecture during the decline of the Mughal Empire. As a result, social and cultural life in India incorporated within it a multi-regional and multi-religious form and content. This interpenetration of cultural influences was neither uniform nor equally intense in all regions. Yet, their presence is marked all over. As a result, although historically cultural transactions and social negotiations embraced the entire sub-continent, they led to variety and plurality rather than to uniformity and homogeneity. In almost all realms of cultural production - music, drama, painting, architecture, literature and so on - as well as religion, different influences made their mark, imparting to them a composite character. As a result, historically, India developed as a colourful cultural mosaic and not as the manifestation of cultural practices inspired by a single source. The dynamism of Indian culture is derived from this diversity, which moulded the cultural practices of the people. It is in this sense that culture was embedded in national identity.

The cultural implication of this historical process is not limited to diversity and plurality at the national level, but within each region itself. The followers of the same religion observe vastly different rituals and worship patterns in the same region. There is hardly anything common in the rituals at the time of marriage and death among

different communities belonging to the same religion. Their modes of worship also differ. That is also true of the creative realm. In fact, each community has different cultural practices, even if they belong to the same religious denomination. Culture and religion after all is not synonymous in any society, even if they draw upon each other. This is particularly so in India where the differentiation within Hinduism has given rise to very sharp social distinctions.

The coming together of people of diverse cultural moorings and traditions had several cultural consequences. They have been variously conceived as synthesis, assimilation, acculturation and eclecticism. It is argued that any one of them can hardly be privileged, as all of them have contributed in varying degrees to the cultural identity of the nation. A contrary view, currently gaining currency, posits a sharp contradiction between different cultural streams, which has nothing in common except mutual antagonism. The indigenous culture, it is held, has been engaged in resisting the adverse effects of external intrusion and preserving its identity without any change. Whether India developed as a melting pot of cultures, creating a new cultural personality or has it remained a salad bowl is no more the issue. The crucial question is whether Indian culture is conceived as a static phenomenon, tracing its identity to a single unchanging source or a dynamic phenomenon, critically and creatively interrogating with all that is new.

What is new, however, was very many in Indian cultural experience. From the time of the invasion of Alexander in 327 BCE till the British colonial rule various cultures of the world marked their presence. The Greeks, the Huns, the Khusans, the Arabs, the Turks, the Mongols and the Europeans reached India in pursuit of power and pelf, but carrying with them their cultural baggage. The interaction that followed embraced almost all aspects of life, be it religious practices, food habits, dress codes, architecture, painting, music or scientific knowledge. The nature and result of this interaction has been a very decisive factor in the making of the cultural identity of the nation. The indigenous culture did not remain isolated; it

internalized various streams from outside, enriching and transforming its own cultural practices.

The nationalist interpretation of history, reflecting the aspirations and interests of the national liberation struggle, underlined synthesis as the main character of this interaction. The most representative of this view is that of Tarachand who was selected by Jawaharlal Nehru to project the Indian version of history, opposed to the colonial view in British universities and who later wrote the multi-volume history of the Indian national movement. Tracing the impact of the interaction in art and religion Tarachand comes to the following conclusion:

The Muslims who came to India made it their home. They lived surrounded by the Hindu people and a state of perennial hostility was not possible. Mutual intercourse led to mutual understanding. Many who had changed their faith differed little from those whom they had left. Thus, after the first shock of conquest was over, the Hindus and Muslims prepared to find a *via media* to live as neighbours. The effort to seek a new life led to the development of a new culture, which was neither exclusively Hindu nor purely Muslim. It was indeed a Muslim-Hindu culture. Not only did Hindu religion, Hindu art, Hindu literature and Hindu science absorb Muslim elements, but the very spirit of Hindu culture and the very stuff of Hindu mind were also altered, and the Muslim reciprocated by responding to the change in every department of life.

Such a view was generally shared by the nationalist intelligentsia, engaged at that time in search of a common denominator in a multi-religious society, which they identified in a composite culture historically evolved through continuous interaction and mutual influence. Jawaharlal Nehru, for instance, described Indian culture as a palimpsest, on which the imprint of succeeding generations has unrecognizably merged. Such a view of ideal synthesis has many skeptics, yet it is true that the cultural life of the people did comprehend different tendencies from a variety of sources. As

Humayun Kabir has observed, "Anybody who prides today in the unadulterated purity of his Hindu culture or his Muslim heritage shows a lamentable lack of historical knowledge and insight." No other area reflects the significance of mutual influence than the religious movements during the medieval times.

### **Religious Ideas and Movements**

Much of the ideas advanced by the religious movements in the medieval times are derived from a multi-religious context. They reflect the intellectual response in the wake of the coming of Islam to India and the social, cultural and intellectual interaction it occasioned. In almost all spheres of social existence the impact of this coming together has been experienced. The result has been conceptualized as synthesis by many.

The case for cultural synthesis is often overstated as a part of nationalist romanticization necessary for a people to close their ranks at the face of colonial subjection. Nevertheless, the multi-religious presence gave rise to a serious engagement with the universal, which, in some form or the other, already existed in all religions. The Upanishad provides an early articulation of this: "As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O lord, the different paths men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to thee." Quran says it in different words: "O mankind! We have created you from a single pair of male and female, constituted into diverse peoples and nations that you may know and cooperate with one another." Both Bhakti and Sufi movements were anchored in such a Universalist perspective, and sought to incorporate common elements from different religions. As a result they attempted to erase the distinctions that separate religions as irreconcilable systems with incompatible structures of belief.

The Sufi orders in India made substantial contribution in this direction by reaching out and incorporating religious ideas from the Hindu philosophical system. The translation of Hindu religious texts

were undertaken from the time of Al-Beruni in the eleventh century and pursued extensively under royal patronage during the Mughal rule. Among the many scholars who helped the dissemination of Hindu religious ideas among the Muslims the contribution of Dara Shikoh, who translated the Ramayana, the Gita, the Upanishads and Yogavasihta, is the most well-known. But there were several others who pursued the Universalist path by trying to understand the essence of Hinduism. For instance, Mirza Jan-I-Janan Mazhar who received the robe of permission from three different orders commended the religious ideas in Hindu scriptures to his disciples:

You should know that it appears from the ancient book of the Indians that the divine Mercy, in the beginning of the creation of human species, sent a book named the Beda (Veda), which is in four parts, in order to regulate the duties of this as well as the next world, containing the news of the past and the future, through an angel and divine spirit by the name of Brahma who is omnipotent and outside the creation of the universe.

If Sufism brought Islamic thought to become sensitive to Hinduism, Bhakti movement explored the universal spirit in religious philosophy and practice. In doing so it transgressed all forms of particularism to explore the truth inherent in all religions. The concept of impersonal God which the *nirguna Bhaktas* shared with the *vedantins* enabled them to underline the unity rather than differences. However, unlike the vedantins, the nirguna Bhaktas like Kabir opposed the worship of personal deities and disapproved of idol worship and all rituals connected with it. They sought religious truth not through religious practices, but through submission to an impersonal god. Therefore, they looked beyond the existing religious practices to achieve communion with god who is omnipresent and not confined within the places of worship.

Raising devotion to a high level of spirituality and recognizing the significance of submission, devoid of rituals and superstitions, the Bhakti movement tried to redeem the relation of the true seeker with God. In doing so the Bakhtas tried to overcome all religious

differences and invoked a true universal belief. Therein lie the significance of the Bakhti movement as an important marker in the construction of national identity. The Universalist ideas inherent in the Bhakti movement found re-articulation thereafter, though not as a linear development. Akbar, even if unsuccessfully, tried to bring together the essence of all religions and to initiate a new faith in Din-Ilahi. The nineteenth century reformers with a deep interest in comparative religion believed in the unity of godhead and advocated that all religions are true as an expression of one universal truth. Brahma Samaj founded by Ram Mohan Roy was intended to be a universal theistic church that his successor, Keshab Chandra Sen institutionalized as Nabha Bidhan with the symbols of Hinduism, Islam and Christianity on its masthead. In our own times Gandhi articulated it most emphatically: "I believe with my whole soul that the God of Koran is also the God of Gita, and that we are all, no matter by what name designated, children of the same God." A sense of religious universalism was not only a part of Indian intellectual tradition, but was also integral to the religious practices of the common folk, as testified by the worship of deities and saints by people belonging to different faiths. As a consequence syncretic practices flourished all over the country, bringing the Hindu and Muslim religious beliefs and practices closer. Such a perspective contributed to religious reconciliation and respect, which form the basis of Indian secularism and of national identity.

Whether the national is popular, to borrow a terminology from Antonio Gramsci would depend the nature of identity of a nation. Generally the nation is the preserve of the dominant and, therefore, identified with the culture of the dominant. Thus the culture of the dominant caste or religion becomes the marker of national identity. A change can occur only with the democratization of society, which can effect the emancipation of social institutions and cultural practices from domination. The Bakhti movement represented such a process in as much as it contributed to the cultural empowerment of the non-elite sections of society by vernacularization on the one hand and championing the emancipation from the caste restrictions on

the other. The language they employed was accessible to the common man compared to the earlier sanskritised diction, both in literature and philosophical discourses. Such a tendency was prevalent in the Bhakti compositions all over India – in Basava in Karnataka, Namdev in Maharashtra, Kabir in Uttar Pradesh and Poonthanam in Kerala. The legend that Lord Krishna preferred the devotion of Poonthanam who wrote in the vernacular to the scholarship of Meppathur Bhattatiripad, a Sanskrit scholar, was an expression of the emergent literary culture. Vernacularization, however, was not purely a shift in the mode of communication, but the representation of social assertion. It brought into being a new idiom through which protest, dissent and resistance could be effectively articulated. For the language of the dominant can hardly be an effective weapon to challenge the dominance itself.

The internal differentiation within the society represented by caste division was a concern, in both concept and practice, of the Bhakti movement, engaged as it was in the creation of an egalitarian order. Rejecting caste as a principle of social organization, the Bhaktas questioned its social relevance and sought to undermine it in practice. 'Let no one ask a man's caste' was a slogan shared by many. In practice they transcended all barriers and practices and renounced all rituals and superstitions. Rejecting caste distinctions they emphasised equality and commonness.

The creation of casteless communities, either temporary or permanent, in which the followers of Bhakti saints congregated, was the practical manifestation of the attitude towards caste. The Kabir Panthis, for instance, had a casteless existence in their *chaurahas*; so did the followers of Dadu, Raidas and Nank. The heterodox sects like the Satnami, Appapanthi and Shivnarayan sects in Uttar Pradesh, the Karthabhajas and Balramis in Bengal, the Charandasis in Rajasthan and Virabhramas in Andhra Pradesh were strongly opposed to all caste distinctions. The Karthabhajas met in congregations twice a year in which no caste distinctions were observed: they ate together as equals and addressed one another as brother and sister. The

nineteenth century reform movements carried the tradition forward. Anti-casteism was an important agenda of almost all reformers, even if compromises were not unusual in actual practice. As A.R. Desai has argued, the movement against caste distinctions was the earliest expression of democratization in Indian society.

The medieval religious movements had two significant legacies: religious universalism and social egalitarianism, developed in the context of a multi-religious society. Both found further articulation and elaboration in the religious and social thought during the colonial period. However, the movements generated by these ideas developed within them mutually contradictory tendencies. Initially, all of them were reformist in nature, seeking to change the cultural practices, which were not in conformity with reason and humanism. As a result worship patterns, marriage procedures and death rituals of religious and caste communities were substantially altered. The reform agenda of Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj, Nair Service Society and a host of other movements incorporated these changes. Over a period of time, however, these movements became increasingly inward-looking leading to internal solidarity and cohesion and the consciousness they generated remained within the boundaries of caste and religion. This transformation within social movements facilitated the construction of homogenous communities, attempting in the process to erase the internal cultural differences within the community.

### **Community as the Site of Identity**

The community has proved to be a useful tool for a variety of political and ideological interests. Colonialism invoked it to deny the national identity of the colonized. If the society is made up of well-defined communities, mutually antagonistic and in a state of perpetual conflict, national identity is hardly possible. The constant refrain of the colonial writings, from James Mill to Valentine Chirol, invariably harped on this theme. To Chirol, for instance, India was an antithesis to what the word 'national' implied, for the population of India consisted of 'the variegated jumble of races and peoples, castes and

creeds'. The nationalist view of communal ideologues is remarkably similar to that of the colonial in their conception of the composition of Indian society. They make a distinction between those who were 'born from the womb and those who were adopted', suggesting two categories of citizens on the basis of birth.

The notion of Hindutva which V.D. Savarkar invented and currently pursued by the Hindu communalists is an elaboration of this distinction. A communitarian view also informs the post-modern paradigm, without sharing the assumption of the communal and the colonial. They tend to valorize the pre-modern and indigenous communities, regarding them as 'given, fixed, definitely structured and bounded groups' and attribute to them certain autonomy, which deserves to be nourished and given latitude for making decisions in matters internal. The notion of homogenous communities straddles the colonial, the communal and the post-modern. It is used by the colonial to deny national identity, the communal to construct religious nationalism and the post-modern to discount the relevance of the nation state.

The history of communities, either of caste or religious, does not testify to a unilinear and uninterrupted progress from the time of their formation to the present day. The communities were constantly in a state of flux, constituting and reconstituting themselves, with changes in their social composition and cultural practices. Moreover, the solidarity of communities were fractured by internal movements as in the case of the Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj among the Hindus and the Wahabis and the Farazis among the Muslims or the innumerable heterodox sects which made their appearance in different parts of the country. More importantly, even within a community, differences of language, dress, food and social customs tended to create fragmented consciousness within overarching ideological belonging. Such cultural consciousnesses might remain muted or suppressed for a long time, but do find articulation at different historical moments. Such moments appear in the history of every nation, particularly of those constructed on the basis of a

single identity, leading to the undoing of the nation itself. It is rather difficult to erase the memory of cultural identities by solidarities created by religious or racial loyalties.

The internal fissures, both economic and cultural, however, did not prevent the process of integration and consolidation of the communities. Among the Hindus, it can be traced to a search for shared intellectual and cultural sources through philosophical 'conquests' as in the case of Adi Sankara's *digvijaya*. The significance of Sankara's 'conquest' was not limited to the sectarian triumph or the establishment of monism as a superior system, but of providing a common point of reference and intellectual rationale for forging a Hindu identity. "He had put into general circulation," as stated by Radhakrishnan, "a vast body of important knowledge and formative ideas which, though contained in the Upanishads, were forgotten by the people, and thus recreated for us the distant past." The latter lawgivers and religious commentators furthered the process by elaborating and disseminating the religious ideas. Such efforts were given emotional support by religious institutions and pilgrimage centres and social support was derived from the patronage of the rulers and social elite. The neo-Hinduism of the nineteenth century which attempted religious revival and consolidation by privileging the hegemonic texts of the Hindus and thus constructing a common cultural and intellectual heritage was a continuation of this tradition. The contemporary religious resurgence not only draws upon this past, but also seeks to resurrect institutions and cultural practices from that past. In the process, a highly differentiated 'community' is being turned into a homogenous entity. The Hinduisation of the Adivasis and Dalits by incorporating them into upper caste worship patterns and religious rituals is a part of this project. The increasing influence of Hindutva among the Adivasis and Dalits indicates that they have not become sufficiently sensitive to the possible loss of their cultural identity.

Similar tendencies are manifest among the Muslims as well. A highly differentiated community, particularly because of its formation

through conversions, has been put through a process of Islamisation. As a result, a common identity based on religion is gaining precedence. It is reflected in all cultural practices, ranging from dress to architecture. The skullcap and *burqa* have appeared in regions where they were not earlier prevalent. The style of mosque architecture has undergone fundamental changes during the last few years: the influence of the local has been renounced in favour of the pan-Islamic. Such a shift is a reflection of a general move towards conservatism and fundamentalism from the early modernizing reform movements. As a result internal cultural differences have been considerably erased and an identity between culture and religion constructed in popular mind.

No society, least of all a society as diverse as that of India, is amenable to a single cultural denominator, either of caste or of religion. Superimposing an identity drawn from a single source by a 'nation in search of itself' is pregnant with peril, as any exclusion would lead to cultural denial and oppression and consequent resistance and protest, endangering thereby the well-being of the nation itself. Such a prospect looms large on the Indian horizon, as the communal forces are currently engaged in recasting the identity of the nation in religious terms. This militates against the historical experience of India, which has paved the way for the assimilation of different religious faiths and cultural practices. A reverse process is currently on the anvil: to flush out all external accretions in order to resurrect an authentic and ideal cultural past. Hence the romanticization of Vedic culture and knowledge. No nation can face the future, as Tagore said, with the notion that a "social system has been perfected for all times to come by our ancestors who had the super-human vision of all eternity, and supernatural power for making infinite provision for future ages." The fear expressed by Tagore is a contemporary reality, as the social and ideological project of the Hindutva is anchored on such a view of the past which is likely to lead the society to obscurantism, despite the promises of modernity that globalization holds out at least to a section of the society.

The evolution of national identity in India is a result of a long process of inclusion of cultural practices, either internally generated or originating from outside. The cultural past of India is, therefore, a celebration of the consequent variety and plurality, although there were tendencies, which tried to negate them. The Renaissance and the national movement recognized the positive significance of cultural plurality for national identity and sought to further the syncretic tendencies already prevalent in the social and religious life. Hence the nationalist notion of unity in diversity. In contrast, the religious revivalism promoted by the advocates of neo-Hinduism in the nineteenth century and the cultural nationalism of the Hindutva attributes an exclusively Hindu religious affiliation to Indian culture. 'National identity' and 'nationalism', in this conception are, therefore, rooted in an essentially religious character of culture. It is indeed true that national identity neither evolves nor exists without a cultural basis. Yet, it is not an exclusively cultural phenomenon either, nor is culture identical with religion. Therefore a re-articulation of the meaning of the relationship between culture and national identity, at the face of the serious threat posed by cultural nationalism to the identity of the nation is called for. This is perhaps one among the many constructive tasks ahead of secularism, if the Indian Republic is to preserve its democratic character.



## Indian Culture – An End of the Century View

U.R. Ananthamurthy

I met Fr. Kappen, that is how I called him, in Kottayam for the first time. Prof Dayakrishna, a great philosopher and a very original thinker, had once asked me to invite a Greek philosopher from Cambridge and to arrange a dialogue between him with some good minds who were available in Kerala. Since I had read some of Fr. Kappen's writings I invited him, too. He was not keeping good health at that time, but I was immediately impressed by the quality of his mind which had the courage to stand up and say what he truly felt. Never did he seem to want to impress anyone with what he knew. This was his most enduring trait. I am very grateful to John for giving me Fr. Kappen's book. Whatever I say today is, in a way, related to what I read in that book as well as what Mercy Kappen spoke of just now.

I would like to talk now about the dilemmas we face in responding to our own culture. What happens is that (I am sure this happens to many others, too) the moment I begin to talk to a very orthodox, traditional man or woman in our culture I find myself taking an antagonistic position, a position that is very critical of our traditional

notions, very critical of orthodoxy. Then I begin to wonder whether I have become a modernist. But when I meet a Euro-centred modernist I see that I begin to take a position that is closer to orthodoxy and tradition, the position I was critical of the other day.

The world appears to be divided between revivalists and modernists. The revivalists are insensitive to injustice, inequality, and the meaningless superstitions in our culture. When you begin attacking them you find yourself taking the modern European rationalist position. But European rationalism is itself quite insensitive to larger questions, and insensitive to other ways of knowing and being. This, in short, is the shape of our dilemma. In this situation it becomes very difficult for anyone to be truthful to one's vision, living as we are in a divided culture.

In the fifties and sixties, when I was growing up, I found another great problem. When you talked about politics or literature or culture, you were either branded as pro-American or as pro-Russian. This happened to many friends, too – Prof. A.B. Shaw, for example. People also became recipients, without their own knowledge, of patronage and funds from the CIA or KGB. There was the famous case of Stephen Spender who was running *Encounter* with CIA funds without realizing it, as he confessed, until too late. He was actually fighting for Eastern European writers, for their freedom, and was doing enormous good service. This was done, ironically, with CIA funds. Perhaps *Quest* was also funded by the CIA without our knowledge. But look at the other side. Communist China and the Soviet Union were also funding a larger number of organizations and individuals in a similar fashion. Moreover, there were Indian writers, really fine writers, who went to the Soviet Union, stayed there a number of years, saw with their own eyes oppression and cruelty and fear and yet did not - dared not? – say a word against it all because they thought they had to stand by the principles of communism and social justice. They believed that even if there were lapses and acts of injustice in the Soviet Union, these could be condoned and rectified but that they should not play into the hands of the enemy by being critical of

these. Similarly, there was a complete silence about American excesses in Vietnam. I even heard a very dear friend of mine, a person whom I respected, say that the war in Vietnam was justified because anti-democratic forces had to be curbed. If, as intellectuals and as people of culture, we are driven to take such positions, it makes me pause and consider the strangeness of it all here in India.

### **Conflict between Modernity and Tradition**

If we take the case of India now, we find that, for the first time in our history, we are conscious of living in a century (the twentieth century) in European terms. Indians living in the nineteenth century, especially at its beginning, might not have been aware that they were in the nineteenth century – Europe's nineteenth century, that is. Whereas, the whole of Europe – be it Germany or France or Italy – was quite aware that it was in the nineteenth century. In India, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, we were not divided over an issue which was being fought out in Europe. However, today, culturally, we are all judged on the basis of what positions we take on issues which are fought elsewhere and not just those in our land. We are living in such a century and are nearing the end of it.

I was reading Kappen on "Tradition and Modernity." He writes very, very sensitively about this and shows how both the traditional and the modernist position, taken at the extreme, can lead to a lot of insensitivity. The most dangerous thing that can happen today is that one can be modern and yet use the levers of power in a traditional manner, as we see our politicians do very often. Our politicians know that they are living in the modern world, but they use caste, religion and other traditional notions. Their front is modern, rational, European, but the levers of power are managed neither by notions of equality nor by notions of justice, but by very traditional notions. This is true of politics in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu - almost everywhere. I found, to my surprise, that even Kerala was not free from that, although Kerala is a land where many of these battles for social justice have been well-fought. Kerala, which was doing class politics, was almost completely dominated by caste

politics. There was a Nair Party, a Christian party and an Ezhava party whereas, in Karnataka, Devaraj Urs was doing caste politics. But it turned into class politics. What was apparently caste politics had become class politics and what was class politics had become caste politics. What does this mean? What is the right attitude to tradition and to modernity? It is all so very confusing. Let us take a look at our century. While in the fifties and sixties it was possible for us to have a strong ideological foothold and take a firm position, now, as we are nearing the end of the century, that is no longer possible. The Emergency itself presented us with a problem. We thought we could rely on Gandhism and Gandhism was itself not clear enough to tell us what position to take when Indira Gandhi was assuming enormous power. We had one Gandhian, Jayprakash Narayan, opposing it and another Gandhian, Vinobha Bhave, supporting it. Gandhism, in itself, was not clear enough, was not unequivocal in telling us what the right view was. Although Bhave later on withdrew his support to the Emergency, he did support it initially saying that it was an era of indiscipline. Indira Gandhi, who gladly took the support given by Bhave, was in no mood to listen to him when he wanted the Emergency to end. When Gandhism, thus, was itself not very clear and could not properly guide us, we were not sure of what line to take especially as we saw Jayaprakash and Vinobha taking contrary stands.

Similar was the case with the Marxists. One group of Marxists supported it and another group opposed it. Marxism, therefore, as an ideology was not enough to tell us what the correct line to take was. In fact, no ideology in the twentieth century has been morally, spiritually able to tell us what is right and what is wrong. Our conception of these has had to come from somewhere 'within'. Mere rationality and argument and ideas and analysis were not enough. But we thought these were enough. Marxists believed that Marxism was scientific and so could never go wrong. But it did go wrong. Now, why and how did this happen? The reason, I think, is that when we have been rationalists we have not brought deeper spiritual concerns into operation. At the same time, when we have been

spiritual we have not brought deeper political and economic factors into consideration. Hence, both the traditional and the modernist arguments on many issues concerning us have been false from the beginning because there is no holistic view of the matter.

### **Gandhi's Radically Different Viewpoint**

In this context it is useful to think of Gandhi. Gandhi was constantly trying to offer a kind of alternative to evolve, we might say, an alternative that would help us solve the problems of the twentieth century. His seminal work, *Hind Swaraj*, a very important book, presents this alternative vision. Gandhi wanted Nehru to read it. Whether Nehru did so or not, I do not know. Anyway, Gandhi wrote a letter to Nehru before India became independent. He begins the letter, "Have you read my book, I wonder... I do not know whether I should write to you in Hindustani or in English." I still do not know whether he wrote it in Hindustani or English because I read it in English. Then Gandhi goes on to say that, unfortunately, Nehru has not taken the argument of "Hind Swaraj" into consideration.

In "Hind Swaraj" we find Gandhi to be very critical of the concept of development; very critical of what we call the modern system. He thinks modern civilization is sick, rather it itself is a sickness of which we have to be cured. Gandhi argues that the British are in India because we are in love with modern civilization. He does not blame the British but blames ourselves. He goes on to argue that modern civilization is bad not only for us but for the British as well. Hence, the struggle for liberation is not only of India but of the British as well.

This is radically different from the point of view of leaders like Tilak and writers like Bankim Chandra who wanted India to emerge a strong nation in the European mould. Bankim Chandra's book on Krishna is a very important book in which he argues that we do not need the mystical Krishna. What we need is the Krishna of the Mahabharata - a wily politician. We can then build ourselves into a strong force and drive away the British. In a way, he wanted Indians

to acquire some of the qualities of the British so that we could challenge them on their terms and drive them out. But the position taken by Gandhi was different. There was some hope then of a new kind of praxis appearing in India and Gandhi was trying this almost like a tantrik. Tantriks are those who want to make their ideas come into operation by employing some special techniques. Gandhi was a great tantrik in that sense. In whatever he said and did he was trying to bring an alternative mode of cultural action.

For Gandhi, the concept of the nation was a little suspect because it was people like Hitler and Mussolini who were talking in terms of a nation and propagating the ideal of nationalism. This nationalism was quite suspect for both Gandhi and Tagore, more so for Tagore who was a more radical critic of the idea of a nation. After all, Gandhi was a practical man. He had to find a suitable mode of struggle against British occupation and therefore sometimes did find the concept of the nation useful while mobilizing the masses.

On the whole, Gandhi's priorities were of a social character. He often said that he had three great ambitions. One was to end the practice of untouchability. The other two were to promote Hindu-Muslim unity and propagate the use of chakra-khadi. If you go deep into it you see a man trying to evolve a civil society rather than a strong nation. It is actually this idea of a nation that has been the twentieth century's greatest problem. What enabled the British stay in India? One was Hindu-Muslim disunity. The British could always say that, since we are not united, they were here policing. So, if Hindu-Muslim unity were to be achieved, they would have no justification for policing the country. Secondly, untouchability. There is something rotten within the Indian system and, unless others become radical critics of Hinduism and change it from within, Hinduism as a way of life will always be difficult, wrong and hence the need to end untouchability. And finally, khadi.

Symbolically, what Gandhi meant was that we did not want the modern kind of development that one saw in Europe, the love of which had made it possible for Britain to rule us. So we have to

somehow cure ourselves of that love for foreign goods. He also said, “Not mass production, but production by the masses!” That again was the economic principle - no mass production, but production by the masses. But consider this: In the whole statement, there is not a single sentence where he says one of the ambitions of his life was transfer of power. You would expect any politician at that time to talk about the transfer of power. But Gandhi said his greatest ambition was to realize these three things, not transfer of power, because transfer of power would automatically happen if these things happened. Thus, the cultural praxis at that time for writers and politicians and political workers was determined by a very fine understanding of what makes for a truly democratic movement at the grassroots level. There were other forces at work, too, and Gandhiji had to continuously work within a situation like that for the creation of what could be called a civil society rather than a strong nation.

Let me take another example. Our century begins with a very important debate – the debate between nation and society. Almost all the great minds of India were engaged in this debate. A great man like Ambedkar, and many others, argued that there was so much social injustice in Indian society, of which caste system was a glaring example, that living in a village was hell for an untouchable. Ambedkar thought that it was imperative that a social revolution take place before the transfer of power as it was necessary for the lower castes to get out of the village. Ambedkar saw the transfer of power as transfer from the British to the Indian upper castes, leaving the average Indian in misery and oppression. Tilak, on the other hand, wanted freedom from foreign rule first. Becoming a strong nation was the first priority for him. Social revolution would follow automatically once we became independent. This was how the argument went on. Of course, I am simplifying it a bit just in order to understand the nature of the duality.

### **Rooting for the Idea of India**

I began with the conflict between Modernity and Tradition. This haunted us throughout the century and the position that Gandhi took was a unique one. He asked the British to quit India. He did invoke

the idea of India as a nation, but a different kind of nation. A nation with a decentralised set-up where there would be production by the masses but no mass-production. But, at the height of the national struggle against the British, he would call it off and demand that temples be opened to the untouchables. This baffled many freedom fighters, who thought that this man was dissipating the energy of the whole movement. To them it seemed that Gandhi was dividing the nation by taking up a social issue after uniting the whole nation against foreign rule. But, actually, Gandhi derived as much strength from dividing the nation as from uniting it, for he thereby empowered the lower castes with such actions. He made them conscious of their rights. What Gandhi was trying to achieve was something unique. While the argument went on regarding which should come first – social change or national independence – here was a mode of practice which did not say what was first and what was second. Both were done together. Thus, energies of both kinds were released.

But here we are now at a point where we do not know how to act within our society under globalisation so far as our tradition is concerned. Let me take my own example. I began writing as a modernist. Most of us writing in Indian languages developed our creativity by exposure to modern ideas and not by falling back on our tradition. On the other hand, you had someone like Gandhi saying that the most creative minds in India would be those who were rooted in their soil and, at the same time, exposed to the ideas of the world. This might look contradictory, but it is true as a writer needs both. If you are just exposed to the ideas of the world – just exposed – then you are likely to become a cosmopolitan intellectual. You can find them at all times. Gramsci speaks of the urban intellectuals and the rural intellectuals. The urban intellectuals are those who serve world forces or capitalist forces. You can always have intellectuals of that kind who are free with ideas. But if you are a man rooted in you culture, you are just rooted.

When Gandhi went to Kerala for the great Satyagraha in the temple, he talked to the Namboodiri Brahmins and the Nair leaders

and found that they are totally deaf and blind to any modern idea or notion. But they were people rooted in their own culture. Gandhi had to fight them. Initially he tried to fight them with their own ideas, but when they proved implacable he had to declare a Satyagraha. Obviously, rooted-ness was not enough and openness again was just not enough too. One had to combine the two—rooted-ness and openness. This, I think, has happened with most of the writers in the regional languages.

I have often said – and it is worth saying it again – that the Indian (regional) languages have survived because the so-called backward people and the non-literate speak those languages. For a moment let us consider the situation in a city like Bangalore. We find that the highly literate speak only in English. It is as if you know fewer languages the more literate you are. But a coolie in the bus stand in Mysore who may be illiterate is yet able to speak in Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Urdu and Kannada. He may even understand some English. If you are a top level IAS officer, you can do everything that you want to do only in English. Maybe his wife and children know a little of the local language because they have to go to the bazaar or play in the streets. Thus you have this strange situation—the more literate you are, the fewer are the languages you know.

### **Masses Nurture Cultures**

Friends, let us for a moment pause and consider who the people are who have preserved our languages through the centuries? If, at any point of time, everyone in India had been literate, Sanskrit, most probably, would have been everyone's language, later to be followed by Persian and English. But our local languages have survived because the masses speak these and not Sanskrit. And these masses are the carriers of our culture, of our great stories and epics. There is some strange kind of intertextuality. Although the people might not have read the text, they are aware of the text.

Take this example: There are a few thousand *Ramayanas* in Kannada, a thousand folk *Ramayanas*. They are not written down

but they are all narrated. In one of the folk *Ramayanas*, a rural Sita argues with Rama before he goes to the forest. Rama says to Sita, “Don’t come to the forest, you are a princess, your feet are very tender and you will be hurt. There are tigers and lions and snakes and you should not come.” She argues, “No, I am your wife and I have to come.” When Rama persists, she says, “I know Sita goes to the forest in every Ramayana. How can you deny it to me?” Obviously, this Sita was aware of the other Ramayanas. There is an inter-textuality. They are all connected. As a matter of fact, India has two languages other than its thousands of languages – *The Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. They connect not only the intelligentsia of the country, but also the masses. Tulsidas or Ezhuthachan wrote for the masses and, as you know, Ezhuthachan also was a lower-caste man.

There are so many stories about Ezhuthachan in Kerala – fascinating stories. One is about his meeting with the great Namboodiri poet, Bhattathiripad, who wrote in Sanskrit. This great Sanskrit Scholar does not know how to begin his *Bhagawatha*. He does not know what metre to use, what form to adopt, etc. He is just a scholar and the story as the Malayalees narrate it is interesting. You know, in Kerala everyone begins a meal with a bite of the fish. So when Bhattathiripad asked Ezhuthachan, “How do I begin?” “With fish,” came the reply. This is said to a Brahmin, you see. What he means is, of course, Matsyavathar. He is to begin with Matsyavathar. That is the first avathar in *bhagawatha*.

Here is an instance of a very interesting cultural tale that tells you how a lower caste man like Ezhuthachan was able to set in motion a great Sanskrit epic. He had that creativity. There is another story concerning Bhattathiripad who often had pain in the joints. It seems he had refused to read a *Bhagawatha* written in Malayalam. Bhattathiripad, who had written his *Bhagawatha* in order to get cured of the pain in his body – and had actually got cured – now got the pain in his joints again as he refused to read the Malayalam *Bhagawatha*. Then God came to him and said, “You are preoccupied with Vibhakti and hence refuse to read the Malayalam *Bhagawatha*,

whereas in it you have real Bhakti which is what you need.” There are numerous such stories in Malayalam. And what they reveal is a certain upsurge of the culture of the masses through the Indian languages.

The twentieth century has again seen the emergence of Indian languages and literary activity in these languages acting as carriers of both tradition and modernity. I began with my own example. The tradition that I am aware of is sort of almost unconscious, subconscious. Only when you use the language you get its verve, the strength of the language which comes from your memory. And if you have had a rural upbringing all memory of the rural life comes back to you. Let me tell you of an interesting experience. I was in England for nearly three years and had to speak English. Once, I went out with Martin Greene, a great Gandhian, and he took me up North. While travelling I would start talking to him in Kannada. As I went on talking I would suddenly become aware that he didn't know Kannada. But, because of this outburst, I wrote my novel *Samskara* within a few days because all my language came back to me, thanks to my rural memories. I am giving you this example to show how the Indian cultural intelligentsia coming from a rural background and using one of the regional languages are like what Gramsci speaks of, the rural intellectual, who is in a way dealing with both tradition and modernity. And it is in him that you find this duality, this dilemma because without tradition he would not have had this language to write, and without modernity, he would not be exposed to new ideas and would not be creative in new areas. The tension between the two is very intense. You find it in Bendre, Kuvempu, and Masti. You find it in all the great writers, this tension between Modernity and Tradition. And hence they carry a lot of the meanings of our times.

How do we resolve this tension between tradition and modernity without giving up either of them? At any particular moment I may sound anti-modern, but the next moment I know that the comforts I want, the books that I want to read, the people who I want to talk to are those who are exposed to what is called Modernity. One

becomes dishonest if one takes an extreme position. There are quite a few amusing tales about this. I shall relate one involving Gorur Ramaswamy Iyengar, a very fine orthodox-looking writer in Kannada. He was a great Gandhian and looked very traditional. He told me once that whenever he met an English educated person, he would say, "What is there in English? You should read Kalidasa, Bhasa, Bhavabhuti and the Bhagwatha." If he met a Sanskrit scholar, he would tell him, "It is not enough if you read only Sanskrit, you should read Shakespeare and other wonderful European writers." This is both amusing and interesting because, as I said earlier, one's position is determined by what one is speaking against.

Russian intellectuals in the tenth century were in a similar situation. They were torn between Westernisation and the love of Russia. They loved to live in Petersburg, but were also drawn towards Moscow which was the centre of Russian culture. Petersburg was the centre of urbanized European culture. Some of the greatest writings of the 19<sup>th</sup> century are products of this tension. When you read Tolstoy you realize that some of the characters are like rich Indian women. They speak to their children and husbands in French, not Russian. This is because using French is a way of showing that they are upper class and also a way of hiding from the servants the fact that they are quarrelling. In this respect, the Russians are very much like us. This is how modernity and tradition come together in a tension. This has given birth to creativity. But this creativity itself can be often Euro-centric.

Look at the early novels in all the Indian languages. They are all so sick of tradition. The novelists are so angry and indignant about superstition and injustice. They are very 'rational'. It is as if they write not knowing that there is a Kumaravyasa, a Pampa, an Ezhuthachan, or that we have a great tradition. For them this tradition is not of any use at all. And a third-rate British writer becomes a model. Not Shakespeare, mind you. This is because the urge to change one's society, to fight for social justice, to build a strong nation is derived from all types of very cheap European sources. When I was

growing up the name of Ingersoll was bandied about. He was considered a great intellectual though I doubt if any American had ever heard of him. I was told in my village that I ought to read Ingersoll and Reynolds, the latter a third-rate novelist from Britain. Reynolds in those days was a big hero. I still remember those folios – two volumes. And they were all stories of Dukes and Duchesses, their love affairs and had a lot of humbug in them. Reynolds was banned in England but was a model for us. This may seem strange but I believe that the first rush of modernity made us completely forget our tradition. Later we became aware of the strength of our tradition through Max Mueller. But even then our reaction, “See, a European has translated our Vedas. They must be great because a European has translated them.”

### **Truth Confrontation**

I do not think that we have even now, at the end of the century, truly resolved this tension between tradition and modernity. I believe we have lost something and this is the most crucial point to which I want to bring my argument. While living in Mysore I observed that the Ayyappa movement attracted almost all kinds of people. In particular I observed a Harijan, who I knew was a drunkard and often beat his wife, suddenly turning devout, observing a 40-day vratha, living away from his wife in the midst of his friends and finally, embarking upon this great pilgrimage to Sabarimala. His wife was happy that, at least for 40 days, he would be a reformed man. When I asked her what would happen after he returned, she would say, “Oh, he will go back to his old ways, but anyway another Ayyappa vratha will come next year.” She lived with that hope. I realized then that the Ayyappa movement had all the qualities of the Bhakti movement. Certain things are characteristic of Bhakti movements in general. One is congregation. You can find people coming together, singing bhajans and performing poojas. The other is abstinence from sex and liquor and such other things. The third is equality among men. Once you become an Ayyappa devotee, you become a swamy. There is no caste distinction here. Castes may exist outside, but for

40 days there are no separate castes. The Ayyappa movement seemed to me superficially to resemble a Bhakti movement. However, though I saw the movement was growing and though I became very curious, I could not feel myself to be a part of it. It struck me then that Indian history had been different in the past. We have always had Shramana movements in India, so have we had the Vaidika movement.

It was in the nineteenth century that Matthew Arnold talked of European society being both Hebraic and Hellenic in character. Hebraic is the religious and Hellenic is the cultural, derived from Greeks. Arnold argued that whenever there was excessive Hellenism, Hebraism would correct it and whenever there was an excessive religious Puritanism, Hellenism would correct it.

In India we too had a similar kind of, what I would call, truth confrontation. The Vaidika system which believed in getting more power from nature and making man equal to gods through Yagna or tapas existed along with Jainism, Buddhism and a lot of movements like the Veerashaiva movement – where the shudras got involved. These movements were very intense, sometimes even extremist. Gandhi was a product of the Shramana movement in India. But no Shramana movement remains entirely that. A Vaidika element is always bound to be present in it just as a Vaidika movement is bound to have in it Vaidika element. This enabled India to correct itself as the Shramana and Vaidika elements came together notwithstanding the rigidities of the caste system. I once heard, with surprise, a professor of History in Kerala say that the caste system was first questioned in India after the Portuguese arrived. The truth is that, as you all know, the caste system was questioned first by the Buddha and, later on, by Tukaram, Basava and Kabir. We have a number of saint-poets who belong to the Shramana tradition. There may be a lot of the Vaidika element too. Like the Hebraic and Hellenic they are not present in isolation. At any particular time, however, one of the two may be dominant.

The point of my raising this question here is that in spite of a superficial resemblance, the Ayyappa movement is not a Bhakti

movement. I cannot respond to it as such. Compare it with the Dasa movement and the movement of the Veerashaivas, the great Vachana movement. The Ayyappa movement has not produced great poetry in spite of Jesudas singing Ayyappa bhajans. It is crude. Its music is loud. It does not have those magnificent qualities which you see in the Bhakti movement, which produced a Basava, an Allamma, a Tukaram, a Kabir. The modern Bhakti movement has not been able to do that. As a matter of fact it has been used by interested elements within each culture to present their own demands. That has not only not had a good effect but it has also had the effect of using power for wrong reasons.

I wrote at length about the Ayyappa movement sometime ago. My point is that the Vaidika and the Shramana have got separated in our century. Except during the period when Gandhi brought us all together, there has been no big movement in India which has brought the intellectuals and the common people together. There is no fusion of the two. I feel something has gone wrong somewhere. Indians, in general, have the tendency to convert every place into a place of pilgrimage. There is a place of pilgrimage in almost every village in Karnataka. A saint was born here, a Dasa there, they say. In North Karnataka, there are a number of places where one or the other Dasa is supposed to have been born. Then, why is it that for Indians Naokhali has not become a place of pilgrimage? After all, Naokhali is no less important than the places where Buddha went. It was in Naokhali that a miracle took place when Gandhi walked barefoot to defuse the communal situation and overcome the distrust and hostility of the Muslims. He was, of course, later killed by a Hindu. Gandhi worked tirelessly to assuage Muslim feelings and overcome hostility. It was such a great trial for him. But the Hindu mind has not taken Naokhali up as a place of pilgrimage. Our religious imagination has failed us in spite of Mahatma Gandhi being at its centre.

The Indian religious imagination, if it had been affected by our system, should have taken up 15 August and 26 January as days of profound mourning. Unfortunately, they are considered merely as

government holidays. They are events where Ministers come and go. Dasara used to be a great festival in Mysore. Ever since our Ministers started participating in it, it has ceased to be a festival. Somewhere the Shramana and the Vaidika have got separated. What was Vaidika then is just upper caste or the ruling class now, in which I place Yadavas – Laloo Prasad and those like him who belong to the ruling class. They cannot be exonerated just because they are lower-caste people. They have actually nothing to do with the ordinary masses. Anyway there has been a total separation of Vaidika and the Shramana which had previously interacted.

Indian languages had been the languages of this interaction, not Sanskrit, which was limited in its use. Certainly Buddha did not use it; he used the language of the common people. That is why I say, that the Indian languages are profoundly inter-textual in spirit. The Indian languages, the languages of the masses, preserved through illiteracy, have digested Sanskrit, English and, in fact, a part of Europe. You can see this in Tagore, in Tulsidas when he writes his Ramayana or Allama when he writes his Vachana and in the great Upanishads, in anything that cuts into the languages preserved by the masses. So, in a way, the Shramana and the Vaidika came together and got resolved. But today they are not getting resolved.

### **Globalization and India**

Finally, we come to the question of globalization. This is how the century is ending. Gandhi tried to evolve a civil society, not a strong nation as in Europe. He knew that it would be difficult for us to build a nation of the European kind. A European nation has one language, one religion and one culture. India is different given its diversity, and any attempt to build a nation of the European kind here is bound to fail. We have to accept plurality and then we will be a nation – a nation with a difference. These pluralities are of vital importance. There shall be no attempt to homogenisation, as Fr. Kappen kept saying.

I always wonder why Gandhi chose Nehru as his successor. Nehru

was a great man but he had serious differences with Gandhi. In fact, there are only two ideologies in India – Nehruism and Gandhism. There is no Marxism in India. All the Marxists are essentially Nehruites, though they do not want to show it. Whenever the Marxists have their conference in Kerala they have only the portraits of Lenin, Stalin and Marx and not of Ezhuthachan, without whom there is no Malayalam language. He was really a man of the masses. The Marxists could ignore him because Marxism is essentially Eurocentric just as Nehruism is. Nehru is emotionally hostile to Europe, but intellectually servile, whereas Gandhi was intellectually hostile to Europe, and emotionally one with it. Gandhi had no emotional problems with Europe. To him Europeans were also human beings like us, who live, suffer, love, and die just as we do and, therefore, there was no question of emotional hostility. Some of his close associates were Jews and Christians. Intellectually, he might have differed with them but emotionally there were no problems. But Nehru, Subash Chandra Bose, and most other Indian leaders were emotionally hostile and intellectually servile to Europe. They could not think in any other way. Since Gandhi was leading a national upsurge they went along with it. Nehru even wove a sari with his own hands; the sari now worn by his grandson's daughter. It has been preserved. This may seem a mere ritual, but we have to note that some memory is thus preserved. Nehru must have woven the sari in prison – that he chose to weave a sari is important. Gandhi, then, might have chosen Nehru because he felt that Nehru was emotionally a rich soul and hence would not sell India completely away to modernity. Most probably he was a better carrier of the tension of modernity and tradition than the others. If we had chosen or rejected modernity outright, I think India would have rebelled against such a situation. There was no way we could reject modernity altogether. We had to accept it because a certain kind of creativity was possible only when there was a transaction between modernity and tradition. Europe was the “other” and was necessary, I think, for making India creative again. But, to what extent shall we embrace modernity? That is the question to be faced now. In a way the choice of Nehru was inevitable then.

Further there is the question of development. We all believed that this basically European concept would ensure better jobs for the poor people since the use of science and technology would help build new dams and new factories and create more jobs. Gandhi, however, rejected it as he had his own ideas regarding employment and education for the Indian masses. Even Kamaraj did not agree with Gandhi because if the masses were to be educated in the traditional way the caste system could not be ended. Even if a carpenter's son attains a B.E. degree in carpentry, he will remain a carpenter and the caste system will remain as rigid. So, we have had to mix things up, welcome modernity and modern education. Equality and social justice have similarly become our goal. All this seemed obvious and inevitable. I think a genuine counter-culture ought to think of means by which the alternatives that are offered to us are seen to be not the only alternatives. Inspired by figures like Fr. Kappen we are in search now of precisely the genuine alternatives. Even if there was some sincerity in the notion of development, we find that even in Europe development of the sort Truman wanted is no longer possible. In America and Germany no factory can be opened where the people, conscious of environmental issues, oppose it. Hence all the dirty factories find their way into the under-developed countries, and this process is honoured by the name of 'globalisation'. Development has thus evolved into globalisation. The tragedy is that the latter does not have an iota of idealism attached to it – the idealism that 'development' had originally.

### **Search for Radical Action**

Let me here introspect and indulge in a bit of self-criticism. In our hostility to tradition, because it was unbearable for most of us, we wanted to get away from our villages. I myself wanted to get away from my caste, from the values and notions of my relations. I married outside my caste. I got English education. Finally, I had to go back to Kannada. But any one of the extremes would have taken me nowhere if I had become completely modern. I would have become totally uncreative. But, by marrying outside my caste I find I cannot live in

an area like Jayanagar, where most of the Hindus live. I begin to live in the Cantonment area. I speak only English and begin to move with people who have no caste. This is a handicap because a lot of our culture is carried through caste. Caste is the basis of a lot of our culture. A lot of our food habits are based on caste. There are so many things that caste carries. But when you rebel against your caste, you become modernised. You may also reach a point where you have to be an IAS officer only. I mean you have to go so far in education and live away from your people, speak a different kind of language and get a totally different identity. The alternative to this is to live and marry within your own caste. Then you have no experience at all of living outside a small circle. Neither tradition nor modernity has any solution for it.

One has to constantly search for radical action against caste and other traditional notions just as Fr. Kappen did. But, all the time, we have to keep alive our sense of the sacred because, without it we are lost. This is to be borne in mind while fighting globalisation. Some of you were there at the huge meeting at Mangalore against Cogentrix where fisherwomen had also come. You have to be inspired by a sense of the sacred, of the simple life in order to be able to fight for life against, say, Cogentrix. Otherwise, you can't. And we get this sense of the sacred from tradition. Traditional ways of living are still ways by which one can keep oneself alive.

There is an interesting tale about ragi and rice in Kannada. Ragi, you know, does not need much rain to grow, whereas rice needs a lot of rain. The rich eat rice and the poor, ragi. This tale is drawn from Kanakadasa, one of our Bhakti poets. It appears ragi and rice once had a quarrel. Rice told ragi, "You are good for nothing. Nobody uses you as a mantrakshata. In a wedding you are not used, nor are you used in death. You are useless, I, rice, am used in everything." Ragi was very angry and took the case to Sri Ramachandra, who called all the sages, heard the quarrel and then said, "I will put both of you in prison for six months." So they were imprisoned for six months. When they came out, rice was moulded and could not be

used, whereas ragi was still fresh. Ragi was very pleased with Rama who got the name Raghava because he was on the side of ragi. I narrate this parable only to demonstrate that India had in the past a creative mind, a mind that could be critical of itself. It did not mean that if you were traditional you had to accept everything in your tradition. One could quarrel with tradition as Basava and Tukaram did. The internal quarrel would result in the evolution of something new. Today when we are fighting globalisation we tend to become more and more traditional. People look at me now and remark. "Oh, Ananthamurthy who used to be so much against religion has now become very religious." I do not now what the truth is, but I believe I have always had a sense of the sacred.

There is a place called Pajaka in Udupi where Madhavacharya, the thirteenth century Dwaita philosopher was born. Just as in Kalady, the birth place of Sankara, you find nothing to remind you of the real man. In Pajaka people have been quarrying for the past 15 years. It is a rocky place with some lovely hills, some of which have temples built on them. Ironically, one of the Maths has given permission for quarrying. I was shocked. As a child I grew up with the philosophy of Madhwa though I have been very critical of him in my novels. People used to discuss Madhwa's philosophy in my presence and one thing that struck me about Madhwa was that he was alone among the Indian philosophers, who said that the world which was transitory was also real. Probably there was the influence of Christianity also. By the thirteenth century this was contested. There is only one god - Vishnu. Like Christianity, there is only one god though Christians also have a hegemonic view of angels and archangels, high and low. If you read Milton you can see how the gods are graded. Madhwacharya took the world as real and argued that 'Satyam Jagath'. Man is human and so is different from God. Bhakti is the only relation, not Jnana. So it says. This is radically different from Advaita. Anyway, after returning from Pajaka, I found I would get no sleep. I wondered how Madhva got the idea 'Satyam Jagath'. Because the rocks have always been there and will always be there. There are so many stories of young Madhwacharya running around those hills.

There is even a story that he held on to the tail of a calf and went wherever the calf went. What happens is, when you are a Bhakta, the supernatural takes over. The supernatural which was born from natural now becomes something in itself and you do not even respond to the fact that this boy must have seen those stones that subsequently have been destroyed. These stones must have taught him something. Wordsworth, you may know, shows how nature produces your consciousness. It is one of the producers of the human consciousness.

### **In Conclusion**

Action against globalisation and commercialisation is possible if you can recover your sense of the sacred in the tradition, without at the same time losing your critical sense, your sense of what is wrong in the tradition. You have to keep the two together, though you may be forced at certain moments to appear to have become very traditional, or completely modern. One should not worry about what people say. You will have to show what you are through your actions and have that realised slowly. It is imperative for us to recover this sense of the sacred, and, at the same time, keep a critical outlook, remaining thus a “critical insider” and not allow us to be guided by the globalised knowledge which may seem important to Indians but which will destroy us eventually.

I thought there was some hope of a new consciousness emerging where the intellectuals are not apart from the masses, where Gandhi once again will become meaningful. Although I must say, that Gandhism has failed in India just as Marxism failed in Russia. No longer is Gandhism in practice in India. Perhaps the best in Marxism is still alive for Marx was undoubtedly a great visionary. He was the first one to point out how production can become a mere commodity production. Those were the days when the railway lines were a big craze with the Europeans, and Marx immediately saw the potential from creating ‘markets’. And Gandhi offers us a useful insight with regard to the way in which we have to deal with tradition, what is to be accepted and what is to be rejected.

Prof. A.B. Shaw once told me a story. It seems Gandhi asked Tarkathirta, a great Maharashtrian writer, about his argument with the Banaras Pandits. Gandhi had asked them if the Vaidika tradition sanctioned untouchability. The Pandits replied in the negative because for the Vaidika tradition the world is one and we all belong to the same God. One can even invoke the vedas to prove that there is no sanction or untouchability. Noblest principles and dirty practices seem to go together. Yet the Banaras Pandits said, that it was all universal. Tarkathirtha, who was a Sanskrit scholar, then said that one could argue plausibly that the Vedas sanctioned untouchability. To which Gandhi characteristically replied that he would have to oppose Hinduism on this count. If you oppose you must juxtapose. Because your sense of the sacred makes you think that this religion is wrong. It is this that is of vital importance to us today, at the end of this century. This is what we are going to look for in our economic development, political development, and our literary and cultural heroes will be Allamma, Blake, Tolstoy. We have a great past that is our chief source of strength. A book like *Tradition, Modernity, Counterculture* has set me thinking along these lines. People like Fr. Kappen are deeply relevant to our times. Thank you for the patient listening.



## Happiness<sup>1</sup>: The Fate of an Idea

Ashis Nandy

*'What good is happiness if it cannot buy you money?'*  
— Attributed to Zsa Zsa Gabor

In 2007, one of Britain's leading schools, Wellington College at Crowthorne, announced that it would offer classes on happiness to combat materialism and celebrity obsession.<sup>2</sup> The following year, *New Scientist* summarized the results of a 65-country survey to show that the highest proportion of happy persons lived in, of all places, Nigeria, followed by Mexico, Venezuela, El Salvador and Puerto Rico. It is true that happiness surveys differ in their findings. According to some, happiness has much to do with prosperity, levels of development and health care; according to others, these things do not matter. It is the second set that has produced countries like Vanuatu, a former 'happiest' country in the world that most have not heard of, and last year's world champion in happiness, Bangladesh, which many believe

<sup>1</sup> It has grown out of a brief dialogue among Tamotsu Aoki, Nur Yalman, and me, organized some years ago by *Iwanami Shoten* at Tokyo. The discussion spilt into a conference on Culture and Hegemony: Politics of Culture in the Age of Globalization, organized by GRIPS project of the University of Tokyo and by the Institut für Ethnologie, Ruprecht-Karls-Universität, Heidelberg, and into a small article published in Spanish in a Yearbook.

<sup>2</sup> [www.wellingtoncollege.org.uk](http://www.wellingtoncollege.org.uk).

could well qualify as one of the world's unhappiest countries.<sup>3</sup> In comparison, some of the richest nations languish near the bottom of the list.

However, I am not concerned here with comparative happiness or the methodology of studying happiness; I am concerned with the emergence of happiness as a measurable, autonomous, manageable, psychological variable in the global middle-class culture. And the two events can be read as parts of the same story. If the first factoid – discovery of happiness as a teachable discipline – suggests that in some parts of the world happiness is becoming a realm of training, guidance and expertise, the second reaffirms the ancient 'self-consoling', 'naïve' belief that that you cannot be always be happy just by virtue of being wealthy, secure or occupied. You have to learn to be happy.

Together they partly explain why clenched-teeth pursuit of happiness has become a major feature and a discovery of our times. The other explanations possibly are the growing confidence in some sections of the globe in the power of human volition and the developing technology of human self-engineering as by-products of the ideology of individualism. These changes have pushed many to believe that it is up to them, individually, to do something about their happiness, that happiness cannot happen, nor can it be given. It has to be earned or acquired. This self-conscious, determined search for happiness has gradually transformed the idea of happiness from a mental state to an objectified quality of life that can be attained the way an athlete – after training under specialists and going through a strict regimen of exercises and diet – wins a medal in a track meet.

I am tempted to trace this change in the idea of happiness to the especial style of death-denial encouraged by late twentieth-century capitalism. But that would be a simplification. I agree with Ernest

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.thehappinessshow.com/HappiestCountries.htm>. This is only an example. The internet is now flush with surveys of happiness. They use different measures and arrive at different results, but I have not come across serious efforts to examine what these differences mean culturally and psychologically.

Becker that there is an element of death-denial in all societies – indeed, societies can be seen as systems of death denial – but under fully secular, successful capitalist societies that denial takes a special form.<sup>4</sup> In these societies a tacit, gnawing fear of death throws into relief a form of denial that rejects the traditional belief in many societies that the philosophically-minded must think of nothing less than death as the starting point of all philosophy. In a fully secularized society, fear of death cannot but be a constant presence in everyday life and the idea of an afterlife a fragile defence. We shall briefly return to this issue again.

This is a reversal. At one stage, Protestant ethics, sired by Puritanism and widely seen as the engine of industrial capitalism, sought to purge happiness as a major goal of life. Puritanism tended to equate the search for happiness with hedonism. Max Weber emphasized the first part of the story, Karl Marx the second. Marx called political economy a ‘science of wealth’ and ‘a science of marvellous industry’ that was “simultaneously the science of denial, of want, of thrift, of saving ... the science of asceticism. The discipline’s true ideal is the ascetic but extortionate miser and the ascetic but productive slave.” The later part of the twentieth century, perhaps as a consequence of the spectacular death dance in the form of the two world wars, saw the collapse of that ideal.

The determined pursuit of happiness is now seen as a response to a disease called unhappiness. In the post-World War II period, unhappiness in some parts of the world has been systematically medicalized. It is now the domain of professionals, where the laity by itself cannot do much except cooperate with the experts. To acquire normal happiness, one now requires therapy, counselling or expert guidance – from a psychiatrist, psychoanalyst or professional counsellor or, alternatively, from a personal philosopher, wise man or woman, or a guru. In the post-war era, there were a number of bestsellers by respected scholars, such as Bertrand

<sup>4</sup> Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: Collier-Mac, 1973). This is one of the very few works that seem to see death denial as a crucial building block of cultures and societies.

Russell, Erich Fromm and Eric Berne, which sought to guide us through this troublesome, unhealthy state called unhappiness and to help us 'conquer happiness', as Russell put it.<sup>5</sup> I am not surprised that such an over-planned, aggressively rational search for happiness produced as its side-effect some rather determined efforts to escape its clutches. To judge by Russell's daughter's memoirs, her schizophrenic brother's illness might have been a direct defiance of her father's mechanomorphic concept of happiness. She in effect wishes that her father had been more open to the less 'scientific', but perhaps more humane school of psychology pioneered by Sigmund Freud and less in awe of the hard, ultra-positivist behaviourism of J.B. Watson.

The trend continues. Only recent guides to happiness are less magisterial. However, they are by no means less popular, whether written by such space-age sages like Deepak Chopra and the intrepid author of the *Chicken Soup* series, Jack Canfield or by their less ambitious siblings in the form of agony aunts and quick-fix, week-end advisors in newspapers and tabloids. Recently, psychoanalyst Avner Falk sent me the following apocryphal exchange from Jerusalem:

Dear Walter:

The other day I set off for work leaving my husband in the house watching the TV as usual. I hadn't gone more than a mile down the road when my engine conked out and the car shudder-ed to a halt. I walked back home to get my husband's help. When I got home I couldn't believe my eyes. My husband was in the bedroom with a neighbour, making passionate love to her. I was floored. ... I love him very much.... I feel like my whole life is in ruins and I want to kill him and myself.

Can you please help?

Sincerely,

Sheila

<sup>5</sup> Bertrand Russell, *The Conquest of Happiness* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1930); Erich Fromm, *To Have or to Be?* (1976), *The Art of Being* (1993) and *On Being Human* (New York: 1997); Eric Berne, *Games People Play* (New York: Grove, 1964). It is unfair to bunch together these diverse scholars, especially the mechanomorphic, soulless concept of happiness in Russell with the now-unfashionable Fromm who probably supplied the first serious social criticism of 'prefabricated happiness', but I am merely speaking here of the rediscovery of happiness as an achievable individual goal and a matter of individual and social engineering.

*Selected Kappen Memorial Lectures*

Dear Sheila:

A car stalling after being driven a short distance can be caused by a variety of faults with the engine. Start by checking that there is no debris in the fuel line. If it is clear, check the jubilee clips holding the vacuum pipes onto the inlet manifold. If none of these approaches solves the problem, it could be that the fuel pump itself is faulty, causing low delivery pressure to the carburettor float chamber, in which case it must be replaced.

I hope this helps.

Walter

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Both the disease called unhappiness and its adjunct, the determined search for happiness, seem to afflict more the developed, prosperous, modern societies. Certainly these societies do not usually come off very well in many happiness surveys — one is tempted to guess that only after one's basic needs have been met, following the likes of Abraham Maslow, one can afford to have the luxury of worrying about vague, subjective states like happiness and unhappiness. Alternatively, following Ivan Illich, one can hazard the guess that only those who have lost their moorings in conviviality and the normal algorithm of community life can hope to learn to be happy from professionals.

This conscious pursuit of happiness, though it came into its own in the twentieth century, is mostly a contribution of the Enlightenment. The belief that one can scientifically fashion a happy life, despite hostile environmental factors and what we call random interventions of probability or chance — our ill-educated forefathers called them conspiracies of fate — requires confidence in human agency, rationality and individual will. Indeed, the search for happiness consolidated itself as a legitimate yearning only in the late eighteenth century, by when the Enlightenment values had made inroads into the European middle class. The Constitution of the United States of America was the first constitution to sanction the demand for and the pursuit of happiness. But it was a very specific kind of happiness that Thomas Jefferson had in mind. Hanna Arendt says that in the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson personally substituted the term happiness for the term property. She adds that American usage, especially in the eighteenth century, spoke of 'public

happiness' where the French spoke of 'public freedom'.<sup>6</sup>

This marked a break. Before the eighteenth century, the predominant mode of seeking happiness was aligned to, and intertwined with, theories of transcendence. And outside Europe that alignment continued. Both the Buddhist concept of *ananda*, which later seeped into the Vedantic worldview and the Christian concept of bliss had little to do with the new idea of happiness in modernizing West, buffeted by institutional forces on one side and internalized social norms on the other. *Ananda* or bliss happened. It rarely came to those who searched for happiness. You could, of course, hasten or precipitate it, without actually striving for it, through correct rites and rituals, mystic experiences, meditation or other forms of exercises in self-transcendence. Happiness of the kind we now associate with individualism and the juridical self has an uncertain status in the non-modern world, more so because some of the major civilizations of the world, such as the Chinese and the Indian, locate their utopias in the past.<sup>7</sup> Given their non-linear concept of time, the past in these civilizations do have the prerogative and the potentiality to become the future. But, for all practical purposes, one has to be reconciled to live in this imperfect world with what Freud once called the normal unhappiness to which we are heir. The past like the future often serves as a social and moral critique of the present.

Indeed, in some Indian texts, the search for happiness is seen as slightly *déclassé*. Valmiki's *Ramayana* – others mention other texts – tells us that the benefits of reading the epic are different for different castes. The Brahmins who read it get *gyana* (knowledge), the martial Kshatriyas *kirti* (fame/glory), the business-minded Vaishyas money,

<sup>6</sup> Hanna Arendt, *On Revolution* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), p.115. See particularly Ch. 3: 'The Pursuit of Happiness.'

<sup>7</sup> The idea of utopias-in-the-past was not unknown to the Judea-Christian and Islamic traditions. The garden of Eden was utopic in many ways, but it had to be rejected in post-medieval Europe as an appropriate utopian vision. It had to learn to survive in an attenuated form and a metaphor the way the idea of primitive communism survives in Marxism—a somewhat tattered, Rousseau-esque, child-like and childish construct fit for the premoderns and nonmoderns.

and the lowly Shudras get – Chopra and Canfield may be mortified by this – happiness.

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The expanding sense of human omnipotence and the growing confidence in social and psychological engineering after Renaissance brought a different concept of human agency into play in social affairs. New theologies of the State, history and science began to talk of building from scratch a ‘new man’ better suited to human potentialities according to their competing dogmas. A parallel process in psychology firmed up the trend in the late nineteenth century. Almost all of the emerging models of human personality and society promised a this-worldly, non-transcendental version of happiness and were confident that, through proper retooling of social institutions, it could be ensured in the short run. Not surprisingly, once the idea of cultivable, learnt or achieved happiness entered the scene, many authoritarian regimes in our times, unlike earlier despotisms, began to claim that they were pushing their subjects into the best of all possible worlds and began to demand that their subjects be happy.

In such regimes, if anyone claimed to be unhappy, it became a confession of delinquency and his or her normal place remained, officially, outside society. Happiness, like school uniforms, became compulsory. For, not to be happy in a utopia is, by definition, a criticism of the utopia and unforgivable dissent. In the twentieth century, in many societies such dissenters have filled psychiatric clinics and jails. The Soviet Union, for instance, was never secretive about this tacit component of its ideology of the state. The Soviet psychiatrists were mobilized to give teeth to the state’s official vision of an ideal society. Nazi Germany did even better. It liquidated such delinquents as enemies of the state.

In Lin Yutang’s interpretation of Confucius, for anyone seeking happiness it is important to find a good chair to sit.<sup>8</sup> The gifted Indian

<sup>8</sup> Lin Yutang, *The Importance of Living* (New York: William Morrow, 1996).

philosopher, Ramchandra Gandhi discovered this independently. For the last twenty years of his life he was known by his chair at the India International Centre at New Delhi, on which he spent long hours under the portico of the Centre. *Panchatantra*, the ancient Indian collection of folk tales, is only slightly more ambitious. The way to happiness, it claims, is finding one or two good friends. Such modest prescriptions for happiness – a version of the small happiness that cultural anthropologist Tamotsu Aoki commends – are possible only in societies where grander versions of happiness are usually seen as mostly outside the reach of human volition and individual effort. In such societies people are socialized to be happy with odd bits of happiness that come their way. General Eustace D'Souza, an Indian officer in the British Indian Army, who saw action in World War II, was accidentally posted both at Italy and Japan when these two countries surrendered to nations of, and were occupied by, the Allied forces. He recalled for a now-defunct popular magazine in India, *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, the different responses of the two defeated peoples. While in Italy there was a scramble for rations and other goodies being distributed by the victorious Allied army and undignified fights to get larger shares, in Japan even the obviously starving never rushed for food and there was no jostling for rations.

One doubts if this can be read as a comment on the relative merits of the two cultures or their capacity to withstand deprivation. The difference perhaps indicates that, in some cultures, happiness – or, at least, reduction of unhappiness – is less a matter of personal attainments or gains and more a state of mind associated with community affiliations and social behaviour. Most individuals in these cultures tend to believe that happiness cannot come to one when one functions only as an individual competing aggressively with everyone else and, hence, it is probably pointless to ignore the codes of social conduct to run for individual gains only. One must learn to wait for such gains. Which is probably another way of saying that happiness comes mostly from within a form of inter-subjectivity that has something to do with, what Illich calls 'conviviality' in addition

to accumulating, possessing or becoming.<sup>9</sup>

Appropriately, Aoki pleads that we give up the grand idea of happiness and opt for small ideas of happiness, the kinds that one finds strewn around in everyday life. The smallness, I presume he believes, itself ensures that the ideas of large, dramatic, organized, expert-guided happiness get a lesser run in our lives and are not allowed to overwhelm entire societies by democratic consent, manufactured or otherwise. Such small forms of happiness can even serve as oases within overwhelming unhappiness. In the genocidal battle of Kurukshetra in the epic Mahabharata, which lasted for days, conventions demanded that the battle began everyday at sunrise and stopped at sunset. At the end of the day, the warriors of the two sides visited each other's camps, exchanged pleasantries and talked of happier days they had spent together earlier.

The presently dominant idea of happiness, being subject to individual volition and effort, ensures that the search for happiness has a linear trajectory. In that idea, there is always a hope for perfection. Perfect happiness comes when one eliminates, one by one, all unhappiness. This is not an easy task. You cannot, for instance, eliminate death, old age and many forms of illness and chances of catastrophes. But at least you can live a happy life, the presumption goes, by forgetting them or by denying their existence. All societies institutionalise an element of death-denial. Only in modern societies does that denial take the form of a panicky repudiation of the idea of death itself. Not only because, in the mythos of modernity, there is no genuine place for the idea of a life after death or but also because in that mythos there is no admission of a natural limit to individual consumption through death. Death-denial and a debilitating fear of pain are the obverse of the modern idea of happiness.

The changing culture of modern medicine and the contemporary

<sup>9</sup> Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973). This still remains a powerful plea for a robust skepticism towards the reign of professionalism and expertise apart from being an early, if indirect critique of the happiness industry.

idea of healing have begun to faithfully reflect this connection. As a result, the formulations of Ivan Illich, Manu Kothari and Lopa Mehta are at long last showing signs of seeping into professional consciousness within the discipline. Surveying recent literature on the subject, Toby Miller and Pal Ahluwalia draw attention to the way the *British Medical Journal* derides modern medicine for fighting:

... an unwinnable battle against death, pain and sickness' at the price of adequate education, culture, food, and travel, in a world where the more you pay for health, the sicker you feel, and 'social construction of illness is being replaced by the corporate construction of disease.'<sup>10</sup>

\* \* \*

There survives another concept of happiness, more nuanced and yet, at the same time, more down-to-earth. It affirms that healthy, robust, authentic happiness – 'authentic' in the sense existential psychoanalysis deploy the term – must have a place for unhappiness. Aoki talks about the sadness of unrealized hope and the struggle to acquire a language in which to talk about happiness. In such instances, the presence of the unpleasant does not necessarily mean the diminution of happiness. It becomes part of a happy life that oscillates between the pleasant and the unpleasant, achievement and failure, being and becoming, work and play. In such a life, work becomes vocation and leisure need not be reinvented as the antithesis of work. Vocation includes leisure, exactly as a pleasurable pastime may comprise some amount of work. The idea of perfect happiness is consigned either to the domain of the momentary or the transient or to the mythic or the legendary. It cannot be achieved in life, but may be realized in exceptional moments.

<sup>10</sup> Toby Miller and Pal Ahluwalia, 'Editorial: Psychocivilized?', *Social Identities*, March 2008, 14(2), pp. 143-4; see p. 143. The quotes are from R. Moynihan and R. Smith, 'Too Much Medicine?', *British Medical Journal*, 2002, 324, pp. 859-60, see p. 859; and R. Moynihan, I. Heath, and D. Henry, 'Selling Sickness: The Pharmaceutical Industry and Disease Mongering', *British Medical Journal*, 2002, 324, 886-90, see p. 886.

Years ago, philosopher K.J. Shah, simultaneously an admirer of Wittgenstein and Gandhi, found, on reading Erik Erikson's celebrated book *Gandhi's Truth*, the author's concept of a happy marriage problematic. Erikson seemed to believe, Shah said, that Gandhi's relationship with his wife was ambivalent and his marriage less than happy, because the two of them constantly quarrelled. Shah found this concept of marriage strange. According to him, the strength of a human relationship should be measured not by the absence of quarrels, but by how much quarrel the relationship could take. This argument, too, has a parallel definition of happiness built into it – a happy person should be able to bear larger doses of unhappiness. This is not Oriental wisdom, for Erikson's guru Sigmund Freud's Dostoevskyan, tragic vision of life can easily accommodate Shah's definition of happiness. To the first psychoanalyst too, the sense of well-being of a mentally healthy person shows its robustness by being able to live with some amount of unhappiness and what is commonly seen as ill-health. This is probably what Freud meant in his famous letter to a patient's mother, in which the intrepid healer advised the worried mother to reconcile herself to the 'normal' unhappiness in her son's life.



*Tributes to Sebastian Kappen*







## Kappen: The Advocate of Radical Consciousness

Sadanand Menon\*

How apt of David to conclude his introduction to Kappen with the splendid sentence, “He leaves behind a legacy both disturbing and comforting.” Indeed, it is an unresolved legacy.

Being anarchic by temperament, I have usually found it difficult to ‘follow’ anyone or acknowledge discipleship. ‘Critical thinking’ has been a consistent motto with me since an early age and I have resisted allegiance to any set of ideas or thinkers in any dogmatic sense.

I can, however, with no qualms, claim Kappen as one of my ‘gurus’. We were introduced to each other in 1974 by Siddhartha, with whom we were briefly part of the collective called Centre for Development

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Research and Action (CDRA). Though our ways soon parted as the 1975 'Emergency' imposed its own sense of urgency or caution on the directions that activists and developmentalists should take, Kappen and I continued to be in an engaged exchange of ideas. As the state of Emergency persisted, some of us felt it necessary to temper activism with deeper comprehension of the roots of radical theory... and Kappen was the obvious teacher who could lead us through the maze of Kant, Hegel, Feuerbach, Marx, Heidegger, Husserl, Wittgenstein, Cassirer, Saussure and so on, in a stimulating series of 'Study Classes' lasting some four years.

Of course, I had little patience with his notion of 'liberation theology' and have always imagined it as a compromise, a falling short of actual social engagement or even socio-historic theory. I had many good-natured verbal duels with Kappen on this and enjoyed taunting him with examples of practical living atheism among the people of this country - the multiple strands of resistance to spiritual authority and cognitive theology amidst a large section of the Indian population. For example, the first time I was in Ayodhya, a saffron-robed 'sadhu' at a tea-stall had regaled me with this mock 'chaupai', imitating Tulsiramayan:

*Ram, Ram sab Kahai,  
Dashrath Kahai na koi;  
Gar Dahsrath Kasrath na karai,  
Toh Ram kahan se hoi?*

*Ram, Ram they all chant  
None cares for poor Dashrath;  
Had Dashrath ignored his push-ups  
Pray, would Ram have been relevant?*

Yet, through all our arguments, there was one message that emanated loud and clear from Kappen - a valuable message for which I hold Kappen in high regard - the message of the *natural antipathy* between 'organised religion' and 'spirituality'. It is a precious concept worth recovering and developing in our times, when religious bigotry

of all kinds – from the kind that demolished Babri Masjid to the kind that launched the murderous attack on Asghar Ali Engineer - is on the ascendant, claiming spiritual agency and positing a bogus majoritarian moralism as justification for crude violence and criminality.

Having read his Gandhi and his Lohia quite closely, Kappen was also among the few voices of the seventies advocating a ‘cultural politics’ that could unsettle the suzerainty, the hegemonic control of the idea of a ‘revolution of structures’ in favour of a ‘revolution of consciousness’. It was, in fact, dancer/artist Chadralekha who, in a series of brilliant exchange with Kappen, was instrumental in jostling his ‘theory’ and provoking him to re-conceptualise the political dimensions of ‘body’ and ‘culture’. Kappen wrote in *Socialist Perspectives* (Vol. 1, Dec. 1978), - an occasional pamphlet that grew out of some of our conversations and which, along with other occasional pamphlets like *Anawim*, Chandra and I actually designed for him - “Unfortunately, the traditional emphasis on revolution of structures has led to the neglect of the subjective revolution, that is, the revolution of consciousness and values... It is erroneously assumed that the transformation of the economy will automatically bring about changes at the super-structural level... Cultural revolution will come to its own only when it is realized that culture has autonomy of its own and that it is much more internal to social agents than economic or other institutions.”

‘Cultural imperialism’ of any kind (more so in theology) was something Kappen detested without reservation. He was unsparing in his critique of the ‘imperium of Rome’ and its authoritarian control over the trajectory of Asian theology. And he was incensed at attempts to censor his own projection of the ‘humanity of Jesus’ over the ‘divinity of Jesus’. In his open rejoinder to the official Jesuit censors of his book *Jesus and Freedom* in 1980, Kappen was at his acidic best: “Traditional practice of censorship has meaning only where theology has become a mere academic exercise... Censorship makes sense only in a world from which God has been banished,” he thundered. To

rub it in, Kappen continued, “As a true Asian and a Hebrew, Jesus did **not** think in scholastic categories.”

But his best was reserved for a splendid passage in which he wrote: “If God is alive and speaks to humans of **all places and cultures**, there is no basis for a censorship that evaluates **all** theology by the standard of **one** theology, I mean by the standard of the dogmas and concepts developed in the Western historical-cultural context. The traditional mode of thinking in the West is representational. It seeks to abstract the essence from the existents, thereby forming concepts meant to represent reality. By the same token it is also analytical, bent on dissecting the real into its constituent elements. In the process it disrupts the primordial unity of being and knowing. In essence, this way of thinking is technological, its goal being the domination of the given world. By elaborating concepts and systems it strives to gain mastery over the earth. Knowledge thus becomes a means to power, if not power itself. Thinking rooted in and spurred on by the will to power ends up becoming an instrument for the domination of human beings as is borne out by the history of colonialism, fascism, and the on-going technocratic manipulation of the masses. This kind of thinking can only beget a theology that strives to gain mastery over God by reducing him to manageable concepts. The spirit that split the atom and the spirit that dissects God into concepts are at bottom one and the same. It is through this mould of thinking as it had developed in the Graeco-Roman world that the prophetic life and message of Jesus was destined to pass. Naturally, what came out of it was no longer the live Jesus but dead, ossified concepts. These concepts, further elaborated on through the course of the cultural history of the West, are today used to measure the truth or falsehood of the theological discourse of people who do not belong to that cultural context, who do not share that history.

“As Asians, our mode of thinking is unitive rather than analytic, experiential rather than representational, existentialist rather than essentialist. The dichotomies Western thought has thrown up - matter and spirit, faith and reason, nature and grace, temporal and eternal,

human and divine, and the like - are foreign to us. For us, thinking is communing, not conquering; is being present to what presents itself, not representing it through concepts; is being one with the oneness of all, not exploding the one into the manifold. Our ancient seers would have questioned even the 'and' in the customary formulation 'God and man' if understood in the additive, disjunctive sense; so finely tuned were they to the underlying oneness of the many. These cultural specificities are ignored by the Church when she compels us, Asians, to think as people in the West do. What is this but cultural imperialism and colonization of the mind?"

It is, in fact, such intellectual colonization of the mind that my friend Rustom Bharucha too has been addressing over the past decade and more - essentially helping to open out 'critical' spaces in our engagement with ideas in a dizzy range of connections from radical theatre inter-culturalism, the politics of performance, counter-cultural artists and institutions, the hidden persuaders in cinematic entertainment, the secular project, issues of faith, and so on.

## Kappen, the Inspirer

Babu Mathew\*

I had the privilege of knowing Fr. Kappen for more than 20 years. This happened through a students' movement many of us in the 1970s belonged to - the All India Catholic University Students Federation (AICUF). I happened to be the National President of the AICUF in 1972. At that time, the situation in our country was such the students were searching for radical solutions. We naturally took a great liking for Fr. Kappen for the reasons you have already know. I remember Fr. Kappen especially for two things. One is the manner in which he could portray the life of Jesus Christ and the other is the manner in which he could tell us about Karl Marx and his ability to bring these two streams together. He left a profound impact on all of us as students. One of his favourite themes was alienation. He linked alienation with the process of oppression and Jesus' fight against oppression. The question of alienation should be addressed in our fight against oppression in contemporary society. This naturally meant that he had to delve into the writings of Marx.

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Kappen was a great teacher, very meticulous, difficult to listen to his lecture without getting completely involved in it. He never spoke in any superficial manner. He would have pondered several hours over every word he uttered. There was a man who sat late in the night with a cup of coffee/tea smoking away, sitting and continuously reading, reflecting, making notes and coming to meet the audience. As a result of this exposure many of us naturally got involved both in terms of radical theology as well the left movements. And, I must say looking back on my life that perhaps the single most important influencing factor that made me join the communist movement in India was Fr. Kappen's contribution. I don't know whether he intended that. But we were very good friends even after he knew that I was in the communist movement and it was always a great pleasure to be with him. The advantage I derived from that association was the ability to reflect on Marxism in a non-dogmatic way. He had taught us the basics in such a useful manner that we did imbibe the methodology of Marxism and were able to differentiate the dogmatic conclusions that Marxists often drew. Under influence of Fr. Kappen there was an attempt in the '70s to set up a forum for Marxist-Christian dialogue. Five Marxists and five Christians were selected in order to start the dialogue. That dialogue was quite a unique experience which brought into focus different schools of thought with far-reaching influence.

So these are the reasons why I remember him. He touched us in a deep manner. So I am extremely happy that in his memory a public lecture has been instituted.



## Kappen – Pioneer of Indian Theology of Liberation

Sathish Kumar Thiyagarajan\*

### The Person

In our interactions with Kutti Revathi during the Theological Symposium, one of the questions subtly surveyed her scholarly foundations. Revathi wittingly responded, I quote from my memory “we are not academicians but activists thinking in the field.” Far from escaping scholarly research, she affirmed that she was not an armchair thinker or academician but an activist-thinker. Somewhat similar to this type is Sebastian Kappen (1924-1993), a Jesuit Indian Priest activist-theologian from Kerala. From what I gather from his close associates, I picture Kappen to be an independent, critical, unsparing, Marxist, Christian, social-activist-theologian. Quite approvingly, Felix Wilfred phrases him as ‘very much admired at the same time a controverted theologian’. All through his life, Kappen

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remained engaged in different streams of liberation in our country and with several groups of social activists. Therefore, with his style/method and thought, he became a milestone in the evolution of the Indian Christian theology of liberation. He was a bilingual theologian literally active in both Malayalam and Tamil. Two of his famous works are *Jesus and Freedom* (Orbis, NY, 1977), *Jesus and Cultural Revolution: An Asian Perspective* (Bombay, 1983). Generally, scholars/theologians esteem Kappen for his efforts to translate Christianity relevant to the world of the poor and the marginalized through writings and social action.

### **Thought: Theology of Liberation**

In contrast to those who cone human liberation as a secular struggle carefully undoing it from theology, Kappen, founded on the Asian wisdom and *Sraminik* traditions (Jainism, Buddhism, etc.), put liberation as the ultimate concern of theology. Liberation here signifies the total (secular/material and sacred/spiritual) wellbeing of the human person. Hence he envisaged theology as a collaborative project between different traditions (religions and ideologies) including secular traditions, everyone, for that matter, who worked for the emancipation of the marginalized. He defined it as a critical reflection on the 'historical self-manifestation of the Divine as gift-call and on the human response to it'.<sup>1</sup> Wilfred mentions that Kappen made a conscious choice of the term *divine* than *god* to stay away from prejudices and to incorporate secular atheistic traditions in the project of emancipation – theology.

Kappen held that divine manifested in and through history. In other words, we continually encounter divine in the events that go on in and around us day after day. He proposed two modes of encounter with the mystery: one as a *gift* and another as a *call*. It becomes a *gift* in moments of joy, love, friendship, well-being, peace

<sup>1</sup> S. Kappen, *Liberation Theology and Marxism* (Puntamba: Asha Kendra, 1986), p. 42 as cited in Felix Wilfred, *Beyond Settled Foundations* (Chennai: University of Madras, 1993), p. 140.

and similar events that enhance the integral growth of individual, society and environment. On the other hand, in the face of injustices, discrimination, exploitation and abuses we experience the mystery as extending a mandatory invitation, a *call*, to become agents of transformation. He named this continuous dynamics of divine revelation and human response in the heart of history as *theandric praxis*. This way everyone's life would be a fiat, instruments for the establishment of the kingdom of God.

Theology, for Kappen, is the discipline that facilitates these encounters and critically reflects to strip off the prejudices that hinder an authentic divine encounter, a true discernment of the divine will in the daily living. We revise the definition, "Theology is a critical reflection on the 'historical self-manifestation of the Divine as gift-call and on the human response to it'." He called this as the *foundational* theology of liberation. Thus, he evolved an Indian version of the liberation theology. It was comparatively broader than the Latin American and sensitive to the religio-cultural dimension and the pluralistic context of India.

Kappen envisioned Christian theology of liberation within the broader framework of the foundational theology and our commitment as one among the others who have undertaken this project. In the Indian context, he noted that such humility was inevitable as we were a minority in the country. With his invitations for collaborations, Kappen stood out as offering a realistic solution to the problem of liberation in India. He described Christian theology of liberation as theandric process founded on Jesus and his Gospel; but that was one side of the story. According to him, it implied a radical shift from a religion centred on the scripture and tradition of a distant past looking forward to the future reward to one that made the presence of the mystery/divine, tangible in the joys and struggles of the people.

### **Christianity in India**

Kappen contended the irrelevance of Christianity as a religion similar to Hinduism with all its code, creed, cult and community. I quote,

Further the type of religiosity it (Christianity) represents dovetails, in the main, with that of popular Hinduism. Both religions hold fast the distinction between the pure and impure, cult, priesthood, the veneration of image and pietistic devotions. The figure of Christ who had already taken on features of a Hellenistic God, became further assimilated to the gods of Hinduism. He has lost much of his uniqueness and has consequently little now to give to India.<sup>2</sup>

He held that India never needed another god in Jesus Christ, which it possessed in great numbers, instead Jesus the prophet of Nazareth and his teachings. Quite different from the debates of other Indian Christian theologians, he likened Christianity to form part of the ethical religious traditions beginning from Mahavira, Buddha, and Medieval Bhaktas to the contemporary secular humanitarian traditions. He writes, "What I claim therefore is not the superiority of Christianity over the Indian religious traditions, but the superiority of the humanizing religiosity of the Buddha, the radical Bhaktas and Jesus over the magico-ritualistic religiosity of orthodox Hinduism and the depropheticised religiosity of tradition-based Christianity."<sup>3</sup>

### **Marxism**

Kappen acknowledged the contribution of Marxism in the development of his interests for the poor and the marginalized and his critical thinking. However, he extended the Marxian social analysis to the religio-cultural dimensions of human being to effect a total liberation of the human person who is more than mere economic being.

### **Conclusion**

In the history of Indian Christian theology Kappen is irresistible as he takes Christianity to the adulthood of its presence in India. He evoked the urgency to initiate and join efforts to work for the well-

<sup>2</sup> S. Kappen, *Jesus and Cultural Revolution: An Asian Perspective* (Mumbai: Build, 1983), p. 53 as cited in Wilfred, p. 143.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 144.

*Selected Kappen Memorial Lectures*

being of the poor and marginalized and to break every structure of injustice in the society. While he apparently sounds irrational in his rejection of Christianity as a religion and Jesus as God, in the context of the full picture of his theology of liberation and the history of religious traditions of India, it is courageous work to explore the possibilities of Christianity's collaboration with non-theistic religious traditions of India which rose as a revolt to the mainstream Brahminic ritualistic religious traditions. It is in this bargain his choice for the historical Jesus than the mystical Christ would make sense. In this we find a good blending of Marxism, Christianity and Indian religious traditions. Unlike other theologians/activists who belonged to either of these traditions, Wilfred notes that Kappen's life manifested that he belonged to the marginalized and the downtrodden Indian masses. His life was music of liberation that soothed the ears of the poor, while discomfoting the complacent people.



*"Ingathering"*  
*The unfinished autobiography of Sebastian Kappen*







## Ingathering

My cardiologist thinks I may have another heart-attack any time, without any provocation from within or without. Death is now ever with me like my shadow, a shadow that will inevitably swallow up the shadowed and itself. Only in recent years did I become acutely aware of the shadow. Earlier I could flee from it, take refuge in work, in the pursuit of what I thought was my mission. Occasionally, I shudder at the fear of the Unknown. But soon I seek and find in the Unknown the visage of the Divine that spawns up everything that is but, only to take them back into its own Within that is without name and form.

The reality of death appeared to me for the first time at the death of my eldest sister. I still remember her death-bed, surrounded by grieving relatives, the more pious dinning into her ears the prayers for the departing. I was not overwhelmed by grief. I did not weep. I don't think I was particularly attached to her. She was a beautiful young woman of, may be, 23 or 24 years of age when death claimed her. She was my mother reborn while alive, full of grace and charm. Today when I recollect her last days, what looms large in my mind is the anxiety I experienced about the salvation of her soul. For her to have a happy death I knew it was essential to get a priest to administer the last sacraments. And the local parish priest was out of station. I therefore ran to the Carmelite monastery 4 or 5 kilometres away. There too no priest was available. Another bout of frantic cross-country race brought me to a parish priest miles away from home

who finally agreed to come. And I felt relieved. So deeply ingrained in me those days was the belief that the priest held the key to heaven. Be that as it may, in my youth death meant the soul's departure from the body. This dualist conception of life persisted with me for years.

\* \* \*

I was born in a remote village in the former state of Travancore. The village was Kodikulam situated mid-way between Thodupuzha and Kaliyar river. Today, when in the light of the ecological problems we are facing, I look back on my childhood and early years, I realize not without a tinge of nostalgia how intimately my being, spirit and flesh, was bound up with the earth of my village. I knew every plant, and creeper and bush and tree not only by name but also by touch and smell and taste. In more than one place on our property there were thick groves of trees, exfoliating luxuriantly into green canopies that scarcely let sunlight in. Beneath lay ruins of old houses, witnesses of the births and deaths, joys and sorrows of generations gone by. One could not go into these mysterious haunts without experiencing awe and fear, all heightened by the ominous silence that enveloped them.

On such occasions, you felt as though nature spoke to you, now soothing, now healing, now revealing her heights, depths and immensities. In those days, I felt a sense of intimacy with the row earth, with the ploughed up soil, with the streams skirting our paddy fields. When you sat down on bare earth, when you dipped into the crystal clear waters of the stream, when you let yourself get drenched in rain, when you stood under the scorching rays of the sun, your very being throbbled with an earthy, telluric orgasm. Contact with the soil was itself a blessing, an inpouring of grace. This was particularly true of contact through labour. If ever there was a man to whom work was play and passion rolled into one, that was my father. Invariably I accompanied him to the field tilled and ploughed and planted with him until, on warm days, salt formed on my back, something that did me and my father proud. By noon I would be exhausted, covered with mud and bathed in sweat. For me those were moments of intense contentment, when I experienced the

drunkenness of being and being well. That is why there is something radically wrong with the kind of development that seeks to reduce manual labour to the minimum.

Unfortunately, the period of communion with nature was not to last long. It ended with my joining the Society of Jesus in 1944. The espousal of poverty, chastity and obedience had for its obverse side forgetfulness of Mother Earth.

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Of all those who peopled my past, my father is the most present. I can still feel him hovering about me and coursing through my veins. How palaeozoic, how plasmic was my bond with him was revealed to me only when he was no more. The snapping of that bond had a shattering effect – in more than one sense. That happened when I was staying at Narayanappa Block, Bangalore in 1983. Moll (Mercy, niece) and I were making tea in the kitchen. While pouring out boiling tea into glasses, my fingers came in contact with a glass and for no conceivable reason it broke into two. Moll was quick to remind me that the incident, according to popular belief, announced the death of someone in the family. And that was precisely what happened. Late that night, Sr. José and another sister came to tell me that my father had passed away at Calicut. To me it was a revelation of the spirituality of the body, the transcendence of the flesh. The implosion of his being into death had to have its repercussion in me, flesh of his flesh, blood of his blood. Away from each other, we had formed a biotic-spiritual continuum. Sometimes I feel that the same continuum persists even today - though in an attenuated form, nourishing and sustaining me.

Curiously, I was more attached to my father than to my mother. Mother was like an ocean with depths none could fathom. She was always self-possessed, unruffled, full of nurturing concern. Neighbours had a sort of implicit faith in her healing touch. They used to bring children suffering from diarrhea and constipation to be massaged by her back to health, which she invariably did. Like my father, she was wary of showing her emotions, be it joy or sorrow. I have never seen her hysterical or raging angry. She was like a mountain not even faith

could move.

My father was just the opposite. He was like a creeper tossed by every wind, that blew.

He was quick to lose his temper, also quick to relent and to forgive. I have even seen him cry, after his occasional minor altercations with mother, scenes which only served to bind them ever closer. But what endeared my father to all was his unfailing humour. He had an inexhaustible store of amusing incidents which he would narrate so graphically that we just hung on his lips. And all this with a cynical, bewitching smile on his face. In the heat of excitement, he would walk up and down the room as though he was a caged mongoose. Humour that was in the beginning little more than a frolicking stream would suddenly become a cascade if fuelled by a glass of toddy. With him drinking was a chaste ritual. He would fill the glass, then stand up as though to make a solemn announcement and at one gulp consume the whole beverage. The gesture would never be repeated the same day. In fact, I have never seen my father drunk.

The Kappens were on the whole not a pious lot. My father chose to settle down somewhere on the borderland between piety and impiety. He would never miss Sunday Mass, but would seat himself not in the church but outside, on the out-jutting roots of a jack tree which abounded in the church yard. He was cynical about priests and nuns. His own uncle was a well known priest. Once in a way he would land in our village with his personal cook accompanying him. Rumour was that the entire village belonged to him and that it was he who distributed the land among his nephews, including my father. No wonder all his relatives vied with one another to curry favour with him. This senior Father Kappen was much dedicated to country liquor. Rebelling was in his blood. My father used to approvingly speak of his uncle's defiance of the Arch-bishop of Ernakulam with the retort, "why put on airs your Excellency, when you know very well that you are as much born of a woman as I am?" No wonder, he lived the latter part of his life under ecclesiastical suspension.

\* \* \*

There is much I learned from my father – the humanizing and ludic character of work, the therapeutic effects of communion with nature, the conviction that much of what goes by religion is sham and hypocritical. More importantly, he instilled in me the mystique of striving. In 1944 as I was getting into the bullock cart that was to drive me away from home for good, and my relatives and neighbours had gathered to say good-bye, my father had only this to say, “Wherever you go, try to excel.” That advice I have conscientiously followed whether in the pursuit of spirituality, study of humanities or mastery of philosophies. Much before the advice was given, I had already excelled myself in the Middle School, Karimannoor. At one anniversary celebration I collected 13 first prizes including those for general proficiency, good conduct, elocution, poetry recitation, long jump , high-jump and sprinting. In the Society of Jesus too I excelled but that was as a dissenter. Though my father did not know the implications of it I am sure the rebel in him would have approved of my adventures into the realm of the hitherto unexplored and unquestioned.

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Considering that neither my father nor mother were particularly pious, I fail to see how I became a “model” of piety. I guess, it must have been under the influence of the Carmelite Fathers under whom I did my secondary schooling. I was a boarder and as such daily mass, week-end confession and regular hours of prayer became my second nature. In those days I was like one possessed with devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. “Christ the King” by one Matteo Crowley had become my daily reading. In the church I was often transported to an ecstasy of devotion with tears rolling down my eyes. The reverse side of my piety was an acute and ever-abiding, ever-growing sense of sin. And sin in those days boiled down to the so-called impure thoughts and desires. The greater the sense of sin, the more frequent became my confessions. I remember my often going back to the confessional I had just left because I was tormented by the doubt whether I confessed all my sins by number and species. Looking back on those days I realize that the growing sense of sin was like a cancer

that ate away the most creative core of my being, that primal eros that was straining towards its goal - the beautiful, especially the beautiful of the opposite sex. By eroding eros piety and the sense of sin sapped my very creativity, it killed once and for all the poet and the artist in me. What price I had to pay for the kind of piety I nurtured? I became a sexual neurotic, incapable of looking at a woman in the face and yet morbidly curious about all that woman is. I was a person riven into two: my eyes glued to the heaven above, yet enamoured of the joys that 'paved the way to hell'. This neurotic strain was further reinforced by the kind of spiritual formation I received in the Society of Jesus from novitiate onwards. It persisted into my maturity when I was already a priest. It took me years of reflection and satisfying friendships with women to slough off the dualistic, sexual-pessimistic spirituality I inherited. The realization dawned on me that there is only one sin i.e the refusal to love. That was the beginning of my liberation. And I owe it to the study of the original message of Jesus.

There is little realization even today of the havoc done to humans by the sense of sin, the churches systematically and assiduously cultivate. How many millions of lives have been doomed, how many hopes frustrated, how much love smothered, how much joy turned into bitterness, how much beauty trampled underfoot by a morbid sense of sin parading as the peak of virtue. The fear of sin coupled with frustrated sexuality is at the root of the oppressiveness that is found in the churches - aggressiveness that takes the form of over-discipline, regimentation, authoritarianism and dogmatism. The sense of sin also underpins the political economy of the church. Take away the fear of sin, there will be fewer people at Sunday Masses, fewer people to make confessions, fewer to receive the sacraments, fewer still to make votive offerings. Churches will remain mostly unfrequented and priests un- or under-employed. The end result will be the collapse of ecclesiastical institutions. Thus the fear of sin is not only the beginning of wisdom but also the royal road to affluence - at least for the higher clergy and bishops and the guarantor of stability.

\* \* \*

I was born to Syrian Christian parents. It is amusing to remember how Syrianness itself could feel ( or feed ?) piety. Our parish church too had a choir of its own which was largely monopolized by an uncle of mine and his sons. The main musical instruments consisted of a violin, a drum and an iron triangle which one rhythmically beat with an iron rod. It was enough for the members of the orchestra to start cleaning and tuning their instruments for the well-springs of piety in us to jet forth. It was not necessary to understand the wording of Music which was in Syriac. So too when after the Gospel, the priest climbed up the pulpit, he invariably opened his sermon with a quotation from Syriac, which no one understood, yet produced ripples of piety in the unconscious. No better revelation of the magical power of sound. The piety thus induced could easily co-exist with lechery, fornication and the unprincipled lust for power, both in the laity and among priests. To be sure, there were also authentic humans whose piety radiated into mercy and compassion.

\* \* \*

What constituted the principal attraction of the Catholic Church was the aesthetic character of its ceremonies. Few cared about doctrines. One even turned a tolerant eye to the manifest weaknesses and wrong doings of the priests so long as they maintained the aesthetic facade of the diverse ceremonies.

The aesthetic side of religion was very much stressed in the early years of my religious life as a Jesuit. Every solemn feast like Christmas and Easter brought with it decorations and ceremonies that served to create an atmosphere of beauty, harmony and majesty. The most thrilling moment was the benediction when, against the background of tens of lit candles, of clouds of incense winding their way heavenwards, and the many church bells tolling, the priest, clad in golden vestments, would raise the blessed sacrament for public veneration. It was only years later that I realized many of these ceremonies had little basis in the original teaching of Jesus. With that, they ceased to have any appeal. The result was a progressive self-distancing from ceremonies including the Eucharist. The ensuing aesthetic vacuum

should have been filled by forging relevant communitarian symbols in tune with the re-interpreted message of Jesus. This did not happen. Mainly because the dissenting faith could not be embodied in any local dissenting community. Today, I miss the aesthetic dimension of religion. I make up for it by listening to carnatic (?) devotional music and north Indian Bhajans. Thus I realize, however imperfectly, the ecstasy (ex + stasis = being out of oneself, going forth from oneself) religious ceremonies once conferred.

Traditional religious aesthetics has all but disappeared from the society. In a way the “spirit” of the society is anti-aesthetic, based as it is on the rationalism of Aristotle re-interpreted subsequently by Aquinas. The spirituality of the Exercises is a spirituality of cold reason. Moreover, the conception of the human underlying it is dualistic, based on the opposition between body and soul, matter and spirit. The aim of Jesuit spirituality and Jesuit ministry is the salvation of the soul. In the mental world of the Jesuit, there is no place for art nor for the creation of the beautiful nor for the emotions and sensuousness, nor for the body and the earth.

\* \* \*

Be that as it may, it was the traditional dualistic interpretations of Christianity that in 1944 moved me to join the Society of Jesus. It had been drilled into my ears that humans are mostly busy going to hell, particularly so if they happened to be non-Christians. The most important task for a Christian was to save souls. And I had been told of the many Malayalees doing mission work in the North. As saviours of souls, they appealed to my idealism. I was in a mood to give my best and that too once and for all. And it was Fr. Florence CMI - he was at that time Director of the Boarding House at Vazhakulam where I was a boarder - who suggested that I become a Jesuit “because”, he said, “Jesuits will give you the best intellectual formation.” Though I am today highly critical of the Society of Jesus, I never regretted following the advice of my boarding Director.

In 1944, at the end of my secondary education, I left home for

Calicut along with my cousin, George Kappen. We were to leave in a bullock-cart - and my relatives and neighbours had gathered to bid us farewell. The idea of having made the 'ultimate sacrifice' intoxicated me. I was so elated that all through the journey to Calicut, my feet didn't touch the ground.

Was it Fr. Patroni who welcomed us on arrival at Christ Hall, the Jesuit novitiate? Memory fails me. In any case, sooner had we settled down in our cubicles than we were taken to the tailor and the shoe maker to cloak us out in the customary costume of a novice. I found myself soon frocked, with a straw hat on my head and brand new shoes on my feet. I soon saw myself raised in social scale of respectability as the chosen one called to save the mundane masses. I did not realize then what I cherished as the insignia of my vocation in fact estranged me from my people and uprooted me from my culture. The kind of Jesuit formation I received was geared to systematically deconstructing my indigenous personality and remaking me in the mould of the Western religious man. Even my name, Devasia, was changed to Sebastian, which I then welcomed but today deeply resent.

In the novitiate I practically bade good-bye to Malayalam to which we were allowed to devote only half an hour in a week. If in the novitiate the focus was on imbibing western Christian spirituality, juniorate - the period set apart for the study of humanities - concentrated on mastering English and Western classical languages like Greek and Latin. With all these I was right on the royal road to de-indigenization. Of course the training we received had its own positive side. It helped disciplined work and opened our minds to western culture. In fact if I have achieved anything in life it can be traced back to my Jesuit training. But the same training was also responsible for the limited impact I have had on the Indian public. It all but severed my umbilical bond with my cultural past.

\* \* \*

I was lucky I had Fr. Patroni as my Novice-Master until he became the

Bishop of Calicut. He had a soft corner for me. While he initiated me to Jesuit spirituality, I initiated him, during our customary evening walks, into the intricacies of Malayalam. Patroni was a noble kind-hearted soul. His instructions were ordinary common place. He was competent in explaining the rules of the Society of Jesus. But he could not inspire. Nor could he provide a vision. Religion was reduced, on the one hand, to a series of practices (meditation, mass, Rosary, etc.) and, on the other, to observing the rules laid down. God confronted us in the chapel or in the will of superiors. What of the God who unveils himself in the .... of things given and made, in the annunciations of the earth, in the ecstasy of love, in the joy of birth, in the communion and community of humans? That God remained unknown and un-introduced to us. That may be why the exercises of piety did not touch the depth of my soul. This was true also of prayer. As a novice I was all consumed by the zeal to become a saint. And prayer was the recognized measure of sanctity. And pray I did with a vengeance. I strove to be the first to enter the chapel and the last to quit. If I failed in that, that day I was a dejected man. Thus competition became the motive power behind prayer. Years later I would give up once and for all the ambition of becoming a saint. With that I regained peace.

Today having come to the late evening of my life, I have ceased to be a 'man of prayer' by accepted standards. But I feel the need to surrender my past and present to the Divine that spawned me up. To be fully human, it is essential to hearken to the promptings of the Divine, to cast one's lot with the forces of life, light and beauty. The study of humanities at Christ Hall, Calicut, went off uneventfully. I brought all my energies to bear on the mastery of Latin, Greek and English. But my achievement in that domain was rather mediocre. I had no linguistic bent. Besides, there was no link between life and study. The study of Latin and the practices of piety were unrelated and ran parallelly. And both were unrelated to secular world whence I came. What is more, we learned new languages without learning new ideas. Nothing that we studied, be it languages, science or history, had a value in itself. They were all means to an end, the end being



the study of Theology and subsequent ordination. This was particularly true of philosophy which was called the handmaid of Theology, ancilla theologiae.

**Sebastian Kappen**



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## Contributors

**Dr. M. M. Thomas** was a renowned Indian Christian theologian, social thinker, activist and former Governor of Nagaland (from May 1990 to April 1992). He also served as the Chairperson of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches (1968-1975) and was Director of the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society (CISRS), Bangalore. Dr. Thomas delivered the inaugural edition of the Kappen Memorial Lecture in 1994 titled "Towards an Alternative Paradigm."

**Dr. Shobha Raghuram**, who gave the 1996 Kappen Memorial Lecture on "Rethinking Development," is an independent Researcher at Independent Development Consultancy Support and a former director of Hivos India (Regional Office of Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries, the Netherlands - Hivos). She also served as Senior Fellow at the Centre for Population and Development, University of Harvard, Cambridge, USA.

**Prof. U.R. Ananthamurthy** is a contemporary writer and critic in Kannada and is considered as one of the pioneers of the Navya movement. He is the sixth person among eight recipients of the Jnanpith Award for Kannada literature. He was the Vice-Chancellor of Mahatma Gandhi University in Kerala during the late 1980s and a recipient of the Padma Bhushan award. Prof Ananthamurthy delivered 1997 Kappen Memorial Lecture on "Indian Culture - An End of the Century View."

**Dr. Romila Thapar** is a well-known historian whose principal area of study is ancient India. She earned her doctorate under A. L. Basham at the School of Oriental and African Studies, the University of London in 1958 and later she worked as Professor of Ancient Indian History at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, where she is Professor Emerita. Dr. Thapar gave the 1999 lecture on "Historical Interpretations and the Secularizing of Indian Society."

**Dr. Rustom Bharucha** is an independent Indian textbook writer, director and cultural critic. A former theatre manager who still works as a director, but it is particularly as a writer he has acquired a name. Among Rustom Bharucha's highest valued books are *Theatre and the World*, *The Question of Faith*, *In the Name of the Secular*, *The Politics of Cultural Practice* and *Rajasthan: An Oral History*. For the end-of-century (2000) edition of the Memorial Lecture, Bharucha chose the title "Enigmas of Time – Reflections on Culture, History and Politics."

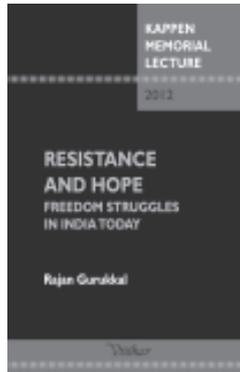
**Prof. Ninan Koshy** is a noted political thinker, foreign affairs expert, theologian and social analyst. Former director of the WCC's Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, he is also well known as a political commentator, author and orator. Prof. Koshy served on a committee to draft Kerala's policy on higher education in 2007. His topic for the 2002 edition of the Memorial Lecture was "The New Millennium and the Anti-Millennial Projects."

**Dr. Vandana Shiva** is an environmental activist and anti-globalization author, currently based in Delhi. She was trained as a physicist and received her PhD in philosophy from the University of Western Ontario, Canada. She is one of the leaders and board members of the International Forum on Globalization, and a leading figure of the global solidarity movement known as the 'Alter Globalization' movement. Dr. Shiva gave the 2003 Kappen Memorial Lecture on the theme, "Living Democracies."

**Dr. K. N. Panikkar** is a renowned educationist and historian, associated with the 'Marxist school' of historiography. Dr. Panikkar was Professor of Modern Indian History at the Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University. In 2001, he was appointed as the Vice-Chancellor of Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, Kerala. Currently he serves as the Chairman of the Kerala Council for Historical Research and the General President of the Indian History Congress. He delivered the 2004 Kappen Memorial Lecture on the theme, "Cultural Pasts and National Identity."

**Dr. Ashis Nandy** is a political psychologist, a social theorist, and a contemporary cultural and political critic. A trained sociologist and clinical psychologist, his body of work covers a variety of topics, including public conscience, mass violence, and dialogues of civilizations. He was Senior Fellow and Director of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), New Delhi for several years. Currently, he is a Senior Honorary Fellow at the institute apart from being the Chairperson of the Committee for Cultural Choices and Global Futures. His Lecture in 2011 was titled "Happiness: The Fate of an Idea."

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