



# HISTORY AND HISTORIZING

## Philosophical Reflections

Edited by

John Peter Vallabadoss

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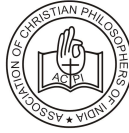
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**HISTORY AND HISTORIZING**  
**Philosophical Reflections**



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## **Philosophical Reflections**

Edited by

**John Peter Vallabadoss**

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## INTRODUCTION

Past always fascinates. 'Ancient' is often glorified as 'classical' and golden age. The past is never a dead past in any case. It is ever alive with present and future implications. Taking pride in the past is for ascertaining one's rootedness, for seeking identity - specific identity, for conservation and preservation of one's tradition and for upholding national, racial, geographical and demographical identity of a community. Fundamental importance is attached to history in any given tradition that without it a tradition cannot hold good and stable. Ordinarily history is record of past events; but is not merely objectified accounts of a person or a group. They are deposits of marks left in the form of memories, experiences and scars. History begins with humans in the condition in which it actually finds them. The ancient records are fossils of identity of oneself and community. In this sense, history of the past is never a consultation with the archives and reference to antiques alone. In it we try to understand the antiquity of the lives and thoughts of the people of that time, to whom we get connected as humans, particularly as humans related to our present existential being. Their quest, insights and conclusions in the past are ever fresh in our contemporary period too. They are ancient but never antiquated or outdated. The history gives meaning to human living.

History makes sense for the human life. To some extent one could say history makes sense only to humans. Human search for meaning is from time immemorial, when first humans started wondering and questioning. History reminds of the possible explanations and conclusions of ancient human quest for truth, becoming rich philosophical insights into reality. This quest for reality is continuous and never ending. Time and again, humans check with their conclusions and definitions of reality with contemporary issues and questions. When encountered with irrelevant answers from the previous conceptions, new answers for new questions or even for the same old questions are sought. History and philosophy are interconnected and hence, the present book containing philosophical reflections on history and historizing.

History writing as meaning making process plays an important role in identity formation and assertion of individuals and community. As memories are the stuff to contemporary subjectivity history becomes not only a recollection of the past but also a visioning process. Recollecting the past is to strengthen the present understanding and 'claims' or one's status, and to move forward in the future. It is a process of assertion of one's own individual or community identity and envisioning existence in the present and the future. Every historiography is a project of identity formation. They are defining moments of one's own. History is all about mapping the identities in the past for asserting the same in the Present.

History takes us to the reality of the past but in an interpretive mode. Presented past is always contended to be one-sided, subjective and 'constructed.' In any case of contested past where different groups try to claim ownership of the events and the age, such subjective interpretations become possible. There is nothing as 'immutable past,' but questionable and interpretable. As they are constructed pasts they become 'disputed areas' to be revisited, reflected and reinterpreted.

In the context of critically questioning the idea of 'history' and the method of 'historiography' we come across instances of selectively choosing the data, viciously twisting facts and subjectively interpreting the historical. History makes connections, highlights details, focuses on 'some' events in interpreting them rather than giving an exact account of how the past was. We become 'suspicious' of history and think that all history is nothing but propaganda; all historiography

is at the service of covert or overt agenda. Postmodern reading of history gives ample possibilities for the diverse groups to affirm their own identities and points to the violence inherent in the metanarratives, suppressing variety of views and possibilities of differences in representation of the past. Shattering the overarching claims of 'objectivity' in the presented past, we look forward in acknowledging 'histories' of the past. Taking a cue from postmodernism and using its insights as tools in our efforts of analysing notion of history and data available in historiographies, we move forward for further historizing in our land.

Historizing calls for rootedness in one's past, in one's givenness and opening to possibilities. Historizing without neglecting the past, redefines the givenness and makes the event happened in individual or community's existential situations as historical. If the idea of history is like a dead and monumental past mostly formalized and exhausted, historizing makes use of the past contents for the everydayness of life. Historizing becomes not a dead label but one of the essential ways of human existence. Historizing takes into account the existential experiences of humans as historical which is living the possibilities by choosing from the given. The possibilities are in the past, the already given. Historizing is a process, never an end product as conceived in the understanding of history.

The historical roots of individuals or the community, remind us that we exist as humans creating ourselves and our communities as active agents and subjects of history. Historizing is a process of enabling humans to identify as persons, inevitable component of any history making. It enables humans to look at the existential givenness from the past and to deploy it creatively towards the future. Humans historize by being subjects of history by their existence. History is more than chronological account of the past but ontological in human sphere. Historizing is a creative venture from the present into the past for the future. Historizing is a way of being human in the world.

## **1. History and Historiography: A Philosophical Analysis**

The part one contains articles analysing general notions and perspectives on history and different ways of writings of history. It offers a philosophical critique of history and historiographies. Our philosophical reflections compel historians to look more closely at available data, to interrogate their own methods and procedures and to be self-critical. Greater emphasis is on open acknowledgement of the historian's own subjectivity which can only help the reader engaged in a critical assessment of historical work.

The first two papers point out to the readers the exact nature of history and historiography. The postmodern context calls for the need and urgency to think critically and differently on history and writing of history. **Johnson Puthenpurackal** examines the notion 'history as the story of victors,' to bring to light the hidden nature of 'history,' exposing the plot and monopoly of powerful victors. History has been but a story told or written by the victors about themselves and others. Defying the truth and objectivity of 'history,' the postmodern trend raises 'doubt' about the 'indubitable' character of history. The paper makes an implicit plea to include in history the story of the victims as well. **George Panthammackal** in his paper concretely analyses various historiographical presentation of caste system in India, with a call for historians to employ critical investigative powers, to be free from prejudice and particular agenda, and to examine critically and impartially their own historiographies as true philosophers do. Philosophy of history is to bring out a critical investigation into the meaning and truth of things and events. Analysing confusions caused by a variety of historiographies that are only partial in their views, but claim to have comprehensive historical representation,

the author is convinced that only a philosophical historiography can be an adequate response in this context where historians philosophize history and historize philosophy.

**Sekar Sebastian** attempts to explain what postmodernism is with reference to historical writing or other forms of production and representation of the past. Postmodern reading of history is believed to free from the tyranny of totalising discourses, great truths, great systems and great syntheses, and rediscovers struggles and fragmented, subjugated, local and specific narrations. The author looks at history and historiography from postmodern perspective keeping away ahistorical attitude. Postmodernism has extended the scope of history and drawn the attention of historians towards hitherto unknown sources of history writing; but on the whole its impact on historical theory and practice has been rather marginal. **Nishant Irudayadason** enumerates the debate between postmodern thinkers, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida on the concept of history by reading Descartes' Meditations. While agreeing that the history of reason is a construction there is a fundamental difference between the two in understanding history of madness. The author shows how both of them are at crossroads, in their different styles and projects. Construction of a history of madness is indispensable for Foucault to challenge the construction of the history of reason. But Derrida seeks to displace the construction of history itself in terms of reason or unreason. Madness is therefore inscribed in discourse of reason so excessively that it includes its outside in its inside.

The article by **Keith D'Souza** on history as unique genre of narrative, examines significant aspects of narrative theory, especially as applied to historical composition. Detailing on the epistemological constraints of depicting the past in history, the author explains of moral and social sensitivities of readers and their communities. The paper calls for an attention to these constraints along with narrative skills of the composer of historical texts. While acknowledging that it may neither be possible nor desirable to have a complete and detailed access to the past there is a general expectation from a historian to compose a faithful as well as responsible representation of the past.

Critically assessing the notion that history and myth describe the reality and become the specific form of our understanding of the past, **Victor Ferrao** exposes the narrative dependence of history that there is a gap between the reality of the past and its representation as history. Such a gap becomes a fertile ground for mythicization of the past, historicization of myth and demythologization of history. The study brings to light the possibility of an ideological underpinning of history, which discloses the agendas of power regimes, with an aim of humbling of triumphalist versions of history and of making room for histories rather than history. **Nelson Falcao** presents the two world views, namely the Archaic and the Historical, which are simply two ways of experiencing our Being in the world. Dismissing that they are not antithetical, the paper asserts that they are rather two different ways of looking at a single reality, representing two universes of meaning. Pleading for an encounter of these two, namely, *mythos* and *logos*, it calls for a cross-culturation, cross-fertilization, mutual-correction and mutual-enrichment.

Critically observing that the statistical data, facts and figures pertaining to present situations which could be cross checked and verified, are misrepresented and misinterpreted in present day media itself, a question arises about verifiability of presented 'historical accounts' of past happenings. **Ashley Miranda** discusses on this 'epistemological fragility' in recounting the past as 'subjective interpretations' or 'personal constructs' determined by the historian's perspective. Analysing the speculative and analytic trends of philosophy of history in the light of postmodern critique, the author asserts that 'history' is not a straightforward, black

and white, simple discipline presenting an indisputable account of the past and that history is not so much a collection of facts as it is of interpretations. In his paper on 'mass mediated history,' **Francis Arackal** depicts history altering events of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, focussing on misleading mass media discourses on the twentieth century's history both in their reporting and in creating consequences. Crying foul on its practice of being influenced by market forces and ideologies, the paper highlights that the mediated history that is produced in the newsroom is a distorted version of reality out there.

**Gerard Pushparaj** in his rather short paper attempts to describe what history, science and art are in order to initiate a discussion on whether history is science or art. History as the study of the past, has been understood as the study of reality in its aspect of becoming. The historical study becomes an art of presenting everything connected with humans and uses scientific method in accessing and presenting the facts. The paper qualifies history as science in one sense and art in another sense.

Philosophical reflections in the first part of the book reveal that history could no longer claim to reach 'ultimate truth' of the past, as there are different perspectives of a single historical event in various 'subjectively' interested historiographies. As the past is viewed and presented in the interests and needs of the present there are multiple interpretations of the same event. Hence, there is no absolute interpretation and presentation of the past. History and historiography cannot be viewed as an exhaustive reporting of the past, rather a selective and interpretative recording of the past. In the context of varying and even contradictory and competing understandings of histories based on different ontological and religio-ethical perspectives with individual and collective interests, objective history remains an ideal. The presence of multiple discourses makes us aware of play of differences. The conflicting and competing historical perspectives may find legitimate place through dialogical process based on critical reflection.

## **2. Specific Modes and Moments of Historizing**

The second part of the book deals with the specific modes and moments of historizing in different contexts. Various religious understanding of history portrays a unique way of depicting the past. Every religion has its own history and history is inseparable from the religion itself. Religious history and culture shape every single aspect of civilization as it existed, exists, and will exist in future. Religions tend to project human history only from their view point to justify their formulations, doctrines and beliefs. Religions incorporate faith, myth, history and reality to give answers to questions raised by human experiences. The question of developing an objective history from religious historizing is relevant and compelling.

Moving further, philosophical reflections focus on the grand narratives of histories that are often narrated by the powerful from their own perspectives leading to the rendering of various little communities voiceless. Contemporary trend of philosophy of history, dethrones the 'grand narratives,' and gives sufficient space for 'little and local narratives,' as in the subaltern studies. It emphasises 'history from below,' paying close attention to their version of historical data and offering ways of listening to voices that have been suppressed. A couple of papers bring out this aspect and support these communities for whom their identities as subjects of history are denied and their stories suppressed. It is intended to emphasise that we make history in our contemporary times emphasising the inclusive and all-embracing outlook in accounting for the past.

**Selva Raj** in his paper on religious perspective of history states that each religion has its own understanding human history and claims that religious interpretations are meaningful, keeping the aspect of the sacred interacting with humanity and world. Being open to the critical role of reason in understanding religious beliefs amidst human predicaments of calamities and suffering, the paper examines salvific reading of history in explaining and structuring human life. Following four papers deal with specific modes of religious understanding of human history in four major religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Protestant Christianity and Islam.

**Dolerich Pereira** in his paper examines the Indian notion of history rather elaborately with a nuance of ‘cyclic’ and ‘circular’ in comparison with Greek and Christian thought. Terms like ‘cyclic’ and ‘linear’ frequently crop up, in a rather stereotyped manner in understanding ‘Western’ and ‘Indian’ ways of understanding history. While these labels are assumed to represent radically different time-experiences, we need to examine the cliché that cyclic time is a predominant trait of the Indian conceptual world. The inbuilt paradox of history is that no history is without facts and no collection of facts is without a selection. As both fact and value are interdependent, interconnected, a “*Mādhyaṃika*-seeing,” plays a third level of understanding history. **Kurian Alumkal** insightfully portrays this seeing as the conscience of history, presenting three levels of historizing within Buddhist parameters. Intended purpose of any historizing has to make society little more liveable with mutual respect and openness.

The religious understanding from the Protestant Christian view on human history starts with some major presuppositions like ‘God is the Creator of History,’ ‘God directs Human History,’ ‘The Bible gives accurate accounts of History,’ and ‘World History consummates in the inauguration of God’s.’ **James Chellappa’s** paper describes these aspects and critically poses a question of negation of modern and scientific views on history and of projecting human history only from Biblical and Israel’s perspectives. History writing takes into account the social environment and their influence on shaping a particular event. **Jose Pennaparambil’s** paper on Islamic historizing attempts to explain the religion of Islam in the historical environment in which it sprang up and spread, considering its various traditional aspects of the Qur’an, *Sunnah* (trodden path or the way of the Prophet or tradition), and *Hadiths* (the record of acts and words of the Prophet not recorded in the Qur’an).

Historizing in specific contexts, leave us with a scope of entertaining many little narratives in the midst of many grand narratives; of creating an autonomous space for the neglected and victims of histories. Papers of **John Peter Vallabadoss** and **Mathias Toppo** representing the subalterns, namely the Dalits and Tribals, expose not only the dominant discourses that neglected the subaltern ‘little narratives,’ but also concretely affirm them as subjects of history. In giving voice to the untold stories of subalterns they depict the subalterns as creative, original and ingenious humans, writing their own ‘onto-graphies.’

Claim over the past for asserting oneself is frequently a prop up issue in Indian discourse of the ‘Ancient Indian.’ Issues over Indus Valley and Harappan Civilization, are for instance, revolving around the question of who claims ownership for this golden era of well-developed civilization - Invading Aryans or Indigenous Dravidians, and whose ancient past are the roots of Indian culture. **Andrew Anbarasu** has a descriptive as well as analytical presentation on roots of Indian past with detailed portrayal of a great culture and critically presents that it belonged to Indigenous pre-Vedic tradition.

All through the pages of this book we discuss that history makes sense to human beings. The question about the history of the physical universe also gets our attention and is presented

rather descriptively in **Mathew Chandrankunnel's** paper with all technical terms of astrophysics. The presentation focusses on the modern works based on the Big Bang relativistic model of the universe and relativistic cosmology, along with philosophical and religious significance.

Finally, our philosophical reflections on history and historizing began with the already given, the notions of history and practices of history writing. By analysing the givenness we look for possibilities in the present and the future, of better accessing, understanding, representing and interpreting the historical past. From notion of 'history' as more than mere recorded facts of the past, we emphasize on 'Historizing' as a specific mode of making events in human life as historical, where humans become 'subjects' and 'creators' of history. Liability of misrepresenting and misinterpreting past data does not hinder us move forward in analysing the bygone days and moments in human history, but only help us delve deeper into the realms of human endeavours to ascertain and reclaim individual or community's 'lived lives.'

Our reflections become a moment of historizing in our particular context. A general view about Indian ways of understanding history is a point of concern in this context. Absence of a sense of history in India is a popular notion of many scholars, including some Indians. That Ancient India did not develop a historical tradition or a historical consciousness and Indians have been least history-conscious are sometimes meant to degrade Indian understanding of history, yet, to show that India is a peculiar civilization without a 'history.' Indian tradition has unique insight concerning history and time. Examination on the question of 'sense of history' leads us to question even the very framing of the former in one's fixed definition of history. It moves ahead with a notion that question of history involves inter-traditional and cross-cultural issues without prefixed theoretical bias. And again, the presented past is greatly contented area especially in India where different groups and communities try to claim ownership over the Indian antiquity. Fascination for the past as the golden past and commitment to be traditional has been characteristic of any Indian discourse. In such context, Indian Christian Philosophers dared to reflect, with ability and potentialities to offer philosophical reflections on history and historizing to the academic world.

The Indian Christian philosophical reflections on history and historizing are never meant for an engagement of the bygone days with a timeless fascination, but to present a philosophical perspective that would be holistic and comprehensive. It is to think aloud and to think ahead. As the postmodernists content that we need to look at the history with new eyes, reflections of Indian Christian Philosophers become 'historical' as we create history in analysing our past in the present for the future, the way we define ourselves and create ourselves.

I am immensely grateful to Prof. Dr. George Panthanmackal and Dr. Johnson Puthenpurackal, President and Secretary of the ACPI respectively, Dr. Keith D'Souza and other executive members of ACPI for the trust they placed in me in the task of editing this book and for their constant support, guidance and encouragement. I cannot but express my deep sentiments of gratitude to all the contributors of this volume. They have taken trouble to prepare reflectively and to present the papers effectively in the 36<sup>th</sup> Annual ACPI seminar held in Kunnoth, Kerala and spent their time and energy in finalizing and handing over the manuscripts in time for editing. I thank the National Printers for neatly arranging the manuscripts and for the good quality printing. My heartfelt thanks go to the publishers, Asian Trading Corporation (ATC) for their unconditional support and service they render in publishing ACPI books. Lastly I thank all ACPI members and friends who encourage me continuously to take up challenges and tasks in contributing to academic field.

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*Series Editors*  
ACPI Annual Series

# **PART I**

## **HISTORY AND HISTORIOGRAPHY**

### **A Philosophical Analysis**

## History as the Story of Victors: A Postmodern Reading

- Johnson Puthenpurackal

*The title of this paper can point to two directions: 'the story of victors' can be taken either as a meaning imposed on or as an elucidation of 'history.' In the first case, a novel and apparently non-existent meaning for history as 'the story of victors' is created and philosophically established; in the second, this meaning of history has been kept concealed by the powerful victors, and it is brought to light when people began to give thought to it in authentic thinking. As the journey of this search moves on, the direction it takes will show itself. The proposition, 'history is the story of victors,' defies the truth and objectivity of history, which has been hitherto considered as a solid and dependable deposit of truth. On this 'unshakable' edifice of the understanding of history 'cracks' began to show themselves in the contemporary period of postmodern thinking; the 'indubitable' character of history seems no more tenable! The stray expressions of 'doubt' about the indubitable history gradually grew louder under the protection of postmodern thought. The need and urgency to think critically and differently on history began to be felt among the thinking people. It is in response to such a felt need that an attempt is made in this paper towards bringing to light through a postmodern reading an aspect of history that has long been in darkness.<sup>1</sup>*

### Introductory Clarifications

Since the scope of the present paper has to be seen in the context of the general theme of the seminar, namely, "History and Historizing: Philosophical Reflections," the notional clarification can be limited to those notions that exclusively and prominently figure in the title of this article. History is referred to as the 'story of victors.' In this study we take the term 'history' in the limited sense of the popular meaning (in the sense of *Historie*, as different from *Geschichte* and *Geschichtlichkeit*), namely, the 'recorded document' of what is said to have happened in the past—persons who lived, events that took place, experiences that were undergone, etc. 'Story,' as per the Dictionary meaning, means "the past course of person's or institution's life...piece of narrative of actual or fictitious events."<sup>2</sup> In postmodernism, this ordinary meaning of 'story' is given a philosophical depth. The term 'victors' refers to the conquerors in battle or contest, which implies that it is a relative term that gets its meaning in relation to the 'conquered,' the 'victims.' In the context of the present study, we take 'victors' in the sense of 'the powerful'—a wider meaning—which respects the above-given dictionary meaning. The powerful—filled with any kind of power: economic, military, physical, religious, etc.—are the victors, the conquerors, whereas the powerless are the victims, the conquered. Finally, how is the genitive in the phrase 'the story of victors' to be understood? The notions of 'story' and 'victors' are linked together by means of the preposition 'of'—story of victors. We take the genitive here in its twofold meaning: subjective genitive and objective genitive. In the expression 'story of victors' the term 'victors' can be taken either as the *subject* or as the *object* of story. Thus it can mean 'story by victors (subjective genitive) or 'story about victors' (objective genitive)<sup>3</sup>—victors as the subject and the object of story.

<sup>1</sup> It has been the avowed pattern of the ACPI seminars since a few years that it takes up themes of socio-philosophical relevance. By taking up the question of 'history and historizing' ACPI is responding to the urgency and importance of some of the areas of philosophizing that have not been trodden upon.

<sup>2</sup> *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 1982 edition, s.v., "story."

<sup>3</sup> The inspiration for this distinction is from Heidegger when he clarifies the meaning of 'thinking of Being' as a call that comes from Being and as a response that listens to Being. He uses a French expression to clarify this twofold meaning:

The proposed thesis of this paper is that history has been but a story told/written by the victors about themselves and others.

‘History is the story of victors’: herein is contained an implicit plea. In making history as the exclusive monopoly of the powerful victors, the powerless victims have been excluded from history. Hence it is necessary to make such a plea to include in history the story of the victims as well. When someone speaks about ‘the story of the victims,’ the normal reaction is expressed with questions of surprise: Are they ‘important’ enough to be included in history? Are they ‘knowledgeable’ enough to let them make their version of history? The implicit meaning in such expressions of surprise is quite explicit. From time immemorial the victors have always been wielding power over the powerless victims, and keeping them subjugated and marginalized in such a way that one finds it difficult to consider them along with others, capable and worthy of being part of history.<sup>4</sup> But, do they not have a history...a story to tell about themselves as well as about others? How has history become ‘the story of victors’? Is there any philosophical reason as to why the humans want to be victors who can control and manipulate even the history of the victims? The main focus of this paper is to establish a philosophical basis for it.

## 1. Culture of Domination: Creation of Victors and Victims

Humans have embraced a culture of domination that has given rise to the separation between the conquering victors and the conquered victims. Such a victorious march of conquest is philosophically explained in various ways by different thinkers.

### 1.1. Subjectivity as Domineering: Heidegger

The culture of domination with which humans are characterized can be traced back to the metaphysical nature of the humans: *being* one’s self, ego or subjectivity. According to Heidegger, Western metaphysical tradition, which has been a subject-centred thought-pattern, began with Plato and Aristotle, culminated in German idealism and became complete in Nietzsche.<sup>5</sup> During the long metaphysical period of two millennia, Western thought has been developing itself into a logic-dominated conceptual philosophy, which grew in its intensity during the modern period, when metaphysics became epistemology with emphasis on the subject-object dichotomy. The subject becomes the arbiter of truth, and the world becomes for the representing subject<sup>6</sup> a ‘picture,’ an ‘object’ (*Gegenstand*)—that which is made to stand over against the representing subject. Such an ‘objectifying’ thinking by the subject gradually becomes an established fact in science and technology.

The ‘intellectual domination’ over reality enjoyed by the metaphysical subjectivity has been growing in its depth and width; the culture of domination gradually took a more aggressive expression, extending it

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“Thinking is *l’engagement par l’être pour l’être*.” Heidegger, *Basic Writings: From ‘Being and Time’ (1927) to ‘The Task of Thinking’ (1964)*, David F. Krell, ed., (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 194.

<sup>4</sup> According to Foucault’s philosophy the socially marginalized and victimized are considered as infants, not yet grown up, immature, as a result of which they are rendered voiceless, as their voice is appropriated by the powerful. Cf., Anness Mathew, “Communication from the Standpoint of Power: A Study Based on Michel Foucault,” *Vijnanadipti*, vol. 8, No. 1 (January 2006), 33.

<sup>5</sup> “Mit Nietzsches Metaphysik ist die philosophie vollendet.” Heidegger, *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (4. Aufl., Pfullingen: Neske, 1978), 79; *The End of Philosophy*, trans., J. Stambaugh (London: Souvenir Press, 1975), 95.

<sup>6</sup> Heidegger dwells at length on this question in his “Die Zeit des Weltbildes,” in *Holzwege*, 5. Aufl., (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1972), 69-104; *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans., W. Lovitt (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1977), 115-54.

to all the dimensions of reality: the natural, the human and the divine. The powerful victors, with their thirst for domination, try to subjugate everything and to bring it under their exploitative control. What dictates this exploitative attitude and the ‘planetary imperialism’<sup>7</sup> is the humans’ unbridled thirst for domination, especially in the economic field. The whole earth has become a market place, where everything—including the humans—has become a commodity of calculated market value.<sup>8</sup> In such a culture of domination, laments Heidegger, not even God is spared. The ‘encapsulating’ of God in high-precision concepts is indicative of the humans’ presumptuous monopoly over the truth of the Divine.<sup>9</sup> Thus along with the nature and the humans, the divine too has become a victim in the victorious march of the victors. Behind this victorious march of domination, there remains concealed the great villain: the metaphysical subjectivity with its domineering tendency.

The unbridled thirst of the humans to be victors and conquerors gets intensified and legitimized in globalization.<sup>10</sup> The invasion and manipulation of nature has become more organized and ‘legalized’ in the onslaught of globalization, since the whole globe is dragged into this consumerist and manipulative culture. Globalization exploits and controls the humans in a carefully concealed and apparently ‘civilized’ way. What ultimately motivates such a culture is nothing but ‘*power and money*,’ and it dictates what is ‘objectively’ true and what is ‘morally’ right.<sup>11</sup> The power of thinking and reasoning is bought and controlled by the powerful with the power of money, through the twin power-strategies of ‘infantalization’ and ‘appropriation of voices.’<sup>12</sup>

## 1.2. Western Philosophy as Totalizing: Levinas

Heidegger’s characterization of ‘subjectivity’ as the ultimate source of the culture of domination, giving rise to victors and victims, is presented by Emmanuel Levinas<sup>13</sup> in a language with an ethical colouring. Although Levinas was a harsh critic of Heidegger,<sup>14</sup> both of them agree on tracing back to the same

<sup>7</sup> Holzwege, 102; *The Question Concerning Technology*, 152.

<sup>8</sup> Cf., Johnson Puthenpurackal, “The Question of the Human in the Postmodern Context of the Growth of Technology and Birth of Globalization,” in *Rehumanizing the Human: Inter disciplinary Essays on Human Person in Context*, ed. Augustine Pamplany (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2006), 34.

<sup>9</sup> For a detailed presentation of the critique of the traditional understanding of God as a concept of human construct, cf., J. J. Puthenpurackal, “Essencing or Essence of God: The Heideggerian Perspective,” *Indian Theological Studies* 29, (March-June 1992), 93-106.

<sup>10</sup> Although Heidegger was not alive when globalization invaded humanity, his philosophical understanding of ‘domination,’ fits perfectly well with globalization.

<sup>11</sup> In the recently waged American-led wars against Iraq and Afghanistan, it was evident that truth and rectitude was decided with the economic and military power. Those who can ‘speak’ with the might of power and money decide as to who is ‘terrorist’ and who is ‘civilized.’

<sup>12</sup> It is Michel Foucault (1926-84) who uses these expressions to refer to the presence of concealed power-structures in the discourses of knowledge.

<sup>13</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, born in an orthodox Jewish family in Kaunas, Lithuania, on December 30, 1905 (on 12 January 1906, according to Gregorian calendar), emigrated to France for philosophical studies. Here he was fascinated by phenomenology, especially as developed by Heidegger. His intellectual growth, thus, was nourished by his twofold background of Jewish religiosity and Western rationality. His personality is the result of his constant movement between the two poles of Jerusalem and Athens, or between prophecy and philosophy.

<sup>14</sup> Levinas’ attack on Heidegger is vaguely present in almost all his writings, more explicitly in his *Totality and infinity*. The main accusations of Levinas can be given under five headings: (1) Heideggerian ontology gives priority to Being over existents. (2) It gives priority to the knowledge of Being over the relation between persons. (3) The other is comprehended within the established boundaries of Being. (4) Through its thematization ontology masters and controls the other. (5) As a philosophy of power ontology insulates itself from other’s capacity to criticize and to challenge it.

source as the ‘reason’ for humans thirst to be victors and conquerors. According to Levinas, Western philosophy has been considering everything under the encompassing notion of Being, under its various guises, such as the One, the *Same* (*le Même*), the Totality, the there-is (*il y a*), etc., as a result of which the other-than-Being [Transcendence, exteriority, Infinity, the Other, alterity (*l’Autre*), etc.] was excluded. Such a philosophy of the *Same* is a celebration of the narcissism<sup>15</sup> of the ego, with an over-emphasis on *autonomy* and individual freedom. By excluding the transcendent and by encompassing every Other in the Same, Western philosophy has been proclaiming “the philosophical birthright of autonomy.”<sup>16</sup> The ego or the ‘I’, in its totalizing tendency, looks at the other in terms of an economical relation of ‘utility’ and ‘profit’.<sup>17</sup> The essence of *totalization* thus consists in the I’s desire to make itself the focus of totality, by drawing the world into its circle and by trying to consolidate and expand this circle. Thus Levinas, through his characterization of Western philosophy as *totalizing* and *auto-nomous*, shows that the self has been consolidating and expanding itself into the world of persons and things. The ‘auto-nomous’ totalization of the world of persons and things into one’s self implies one’s never-ending control and domination over the *being* and *having* of the victims—control over the persons and their possessions. The ego-centrism of one subject collides with that of other subjects; the result is inevitable conflict!<sup>18</sup> Everyone wants to be victors over others; and hence everyone sees the others not as ‘persons,’ but as ‘powers’ to be conquered.

### 1.3. Civilizing Process of Control: Foucault

Michel Foucault has made a penetrating analysis of the ‘power-mechanism’ that is operating in the humans under the guise of knowledge. Humans’ craze for power and domination, outlined in a rather refined language of Heidegger and Levinas, is bluntly presented by Foucault. Foucault unmasks the concealed play of power in the humans with his peculiar way of unraveling the question of ‘madness,’ not as illness, but as a concept reinvented at different periods of time for the same purpose of *healing*, *educating* and *civilizing* the people who deviate from the ‘normal.’ This process had its origin in the institution of ‘leprosarium’ meant to keep the lepers away from the society. As the leprosaria were being emptied of lepers, the empty places were slowly filled in with the ‘mad’—people whom society found appropriate to marginalize and segregate. The elements that outlasted leprosaria were the values and images attached to the figure of lepers as well as the meaning of their exclusion from the ‘sacred circle’ of society. Foucault finds that the process of exclusion and confinement takes on new forms, such as asylums, hospitals, prisons, houses of formation, schools, hostels, etc. The deviants with ‘*unreason*’ were put into the fortress of confinement well planned and laid down by the ‘normal.’ Foucault finds that the reform movements were not motivated by humanitarian concerns for the inmates but fear of

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<sup>15</sup> The term ‘narcissism’ is coined by Freud, basing himself on the Greek myth of Narcissus (or Narkisos), according to which the attractive young man became so enamoured with his reflection in water, that he falls in love with himself. Thus narcissism stands for self-love.

<sup>16</sup> Levinas, “Philosophy and the Idea of the Infinite” (No. 1), as presented by Adriaan Peperzak in his *To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1993), 93.

<sup>17</sup> Heidegger has made a masterly interpretation of the modern technology in terms of Western metaphysical tendency of ‘intellectual domination’ becoming ‘physical manipulation’ of reality. For a more detailed study of Heidegger’s critique of Western thought and technology, cf., Johnson Puthenpurackal, *Heidegger Through Authentic Totality to Total Authenticity: A Unitary Approach to His Thought in Its Two Phases* (Louvain: Leuven University Press, 1987), 112-16, 120-31; *Idem*, “Technology to Ecology: Provocation to Evocation: A Probe into Heidegger’s Thought,” in *Call to Evangelization: The Franciscan Response in the Socio-Ecological Context of India*, ed., J.J.Puthenpurackal (Janampet: ICRF, 1997), 108-27.

<sup>18</sup> In his explanation of conflict, Levinas must have been influenced by Sartre, according to whom every subject tries to reduce the other to an object by his hateful stare. The result is mutual enslavement and conflict.

‘unreason’—a new disease or a new leprosy! Thus the strategy behind the exclusion-inclusion process is nothing but the exercise of power to ‘normalize’ the abnormal, to ‘civilize’ the uncivilized.

#### **1.4.Process of Marginalization: Derrida**

From the standpoint of the established thought-pattern of modernity, the socio-religious system has been considered as a hierarchical structure with different groups placed one over the other or one around the other according to the assumed priority of importance. Postmodern thought has brought to light and destroyed such a myth of the higher and the lower, or the center and the periphery. Lyotard’s definition of postmodernism as “incredulity toward meta-narratives,”<sup>19</sup> is indicative of this shift of thought. Jacques Derrida has given greater clarity to it by his *deconstruction* of the binary opposites. According to him, Western thinking—and Eastern thinking is no different<sup>20</sup>—has been based on a hierarchical system of binary opposites of the center and the periphery. The center has been taken as that which guarantees meaning and truth, and what is at the periphery has meaning only in reference to the center.<sup>21</sup> Philosophy, morality, social structure, etc., have been built exclusively *on* and *for* the center, and the periphery is totally excluded.<sup>22</sup> The centre not only keeps on trying to exclude, ignore and repress those at the margins, but it wants to freeze the structure of binary opposites. Such a relation of marginalization is what exists between the victors and victims; the victors always want to have supremacy over the victims to such an extent that they are pushed to perpetual insignificance and irrelevance.

Journeying along with the thought of some of the contemporary thinkers we have philosophically shown that humans by their nature have a leaning towards domineering over other humans—to be victors over the victims. This tendency is kept intensified down through the centuries, and has been manifesting itself in almost all realms of human life and thought. Humans are thus hierarchically divided into the powerful victors and the powerless victims.

## **2. Manipulative Communication and Story of the Victors**

The victors’ craving to be victorious over the victims is such that they want to establish it as a ‘fact’ for the future generations as well. ‘Facts’ are created by the ‘story-tellers,’ who can create the story the way they want it to be; the genuineness of the fact depends on the credibility of the ‘creators of facts.’ Before we consider as to who are the creators of the story, we shall show that there remains real possibility of manipulating the story by those who are powerful to do it. It is again Foucault who comes to our aid with his reflections on ‘manipulative communication.’ He, basing himself on Heidegger, Adorno, and Nietzsche, unmasks the contemporary systems of communication, and shows the hidden power behind such systems—the same ‘treatment’ that was meted out to the ‘mad’ in the Middle Ages is inflicted on the powerless in the contemporary period in a concealed way. Originally communication has been a sharing or exchange of ideas and information. This original meaning got radically changed in the

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<sup>19</sup> François Lyotard came to be known as the thinker most associated with postmodernism, especially with the publication of his book: *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, published in 1979.

<sup>20</sup> Although the notion of binary opposites got developed in reference to the Western thought and life, we find that in India too this pattern of hierarchizing the higher and lower has been prevalent.

<sup>21</sup> We can give a number of binary opposites in which the first term stands for the privileged center, and the second is excluded as the periphery: man-woman, Christian-pagan, reason-emotion, nature-culture, truth-falsity, sacred-profane, etc. The second term has only a negative meaning; thus, woman is what is not man, pagan is one who is not a Christian, etc.

<sup>22</sup> Thus philosophy is based on what is true, ethics on what is right, aesthetics on what is beautiful, religion on what is sacred, etc. The periphery exists only as totally excluded.

contemporary media of communication. It has become a means to monopolize and to assert the will of those who control the media of communication.<sup>23</sup>

The powerful in the world, by manipulating the media of communication, have the control over ‘truth’ and ‘rectitude’ for others to follow. What is advantageous and useful to them is presented and imposed on others as what is true and what is right. As a result of such monopolizing communication only *one* view is heard as the ‘only view.’ The other views are silenced in the onslaught of the ‘loud’ view of the powerful. In imposing one’s ideology as true and right, the powerful do away with the ‘different’—different ideologies, different perspectives, different value-judgments, etc. They keep on justifying their manipulative control of communication by convincing (*cum+vincere*: to conquer)<sup>24</sup> themselves and others that the powerless are infants—illiterate, inefficient, irrational—and hence, instead of them, the powerful (the grown-ups, the intelligent, the rational) will speak; their ‘voice’ is silenced and appropriated by the powerful by imposing ‘infancy’ on them.<sup>25</sup> Thus only one voice is heard, and what is communicated through that voice is unquestionably true and right. Foucault’s thought-provoking analysis of the concealed presence of power-structures in communication makes sense in the context of this paper: ‘history as the story of the victors.’ The victors—those who claim themselves to be literate, capable, important, grown up, civilized—consider the victims (the poor, the powerless, the illiterate, the uncivilized) as not ‘worth’ being spoken of and remembered. In the outlook of the victors, the victims need not have a story to tell about themselves. Thus not only the victims, but even their ‘story’ too is subjected to be victimized to the point of total elimination!

### 3. History and Memory: Means to Perpetuate Oneself

From what has been worked out from the perspectives of different thinkers, we are brought to the same conclusion, namely that humans always want to be more than and higher than all others. The craze for power and name will be on the rampage until one has conquered everyone else. The humans are always on the watch out for any opportunity to domineer over others, and to have power over them. Even by using unfair and vicious means everyone wants to establish one’s supremacy over others—everyone wants to be ‘victors’ by victimizing others. Thus along with ‘enthroning oneself,’ there takes place a ‘dethroning’ of others. The longing to keep oneself enthroned is not limited only to the present, but to one’s future as well. One’s future is not limited to one’s life; it is limitlessly extended to the future beyond one’s life. One wants to remain ‘enthroned’ to the indefinite future!

The genuinely historical persons, because of the caliber and depth of their life and message, continue to be alive even after so many centuries; their life is extended to the future, and their names are perpetuated. Through the historizing process,<sup>26</sup> persons and events become historically significant. They have become historical as they have created history. But there are also persons who perpetuate their

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<sup>23</sup> In order to understand as to how communication is made use of as a means of wielding power in our society we need to look back into the earlier ‘regimented institutions’ (leprosarium, mental asylum, hospital, prison, school, etc.) that Foucault speaks of.

<sup>24</sup> Panikkar exploits the etymology of ‘convince’ to bring out the meaning of ‘conquering.’ Cf., Panikkar, *Cultural Disarmament: The Way to Peace*, trans., Robert R. Barr (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 88.

<sup>25</sup> Cf., Aneesh Mathew, “Communication from the Standpoint of Power: A Study Based on Michel Foucault,” *Vijnanadipti*, vol. 8, No. 1 (January 2006), 33.

<sup>26</sup> The process of historizing consists in the living of the existentiell possibilities by a *choosing* from the *given*. The possibilities are rooted in the past (the already), though projected to the future (the ahead). In choosing the possibilities, the humans have to keep themselves before the *fate* and *destiny* of their givenness as individual and as social beings. This process is also referred to as the ‘re-claiming’ or ‘repeating’ (*Wieder-holung*) from the inherited possibilities.

names by the strength of their power; they create a story of their own and establish it as the history. Thus one's excessive craving for domination has taken the form of one's desire for immortalizing oneself by a manipulative creation of and tampering with the story of history, so that one will be remembered with respect and reverence by the future generations. One's name will be engraved in the annals of history, and enthroned in memory.

In the expression, 'to be enthroned in memory,' the notion of *memory* has a richer meaning than what has been hitherto popularly understood. Until recently memory has been considered as limited only to the past.<sup>27</sup> Memory refers to one's ability to extend oneself to the past and to the future. In the words of Heidegger, "The gathering of thinking back [*des Andenkens*] into what must be thought is what we call memory [*Gedächtnis*]."<sup>28</sup> Thus it is not merely a 'recalling' (*Gedenken*) [of the past], but primarily a 're-collecting' (*An-denken*) [to the future]. As re-collective thinking' memory is primordial thanks (*Dank*) and devotion (*An-dacht*).<sup>29</sup> When we remember persons, institutions or events with devotion and thanks, they become alive and present, as a result of which the spatio-temporal interval (here and there, now and then) is done away with. Thus memory has to do both with the past and the future. A 'thinking on' what is to come can only be a 'thinking on' what has been;... in thinking back one thinks ahead.<sup>30</sup> Thus, when a person has gained a place in memory, s/he is perpetuated to the future; memory takes one beyond the spatio-temporal confines of one's life. One perpetuates oneself through memory.

Persons and events in memory can either become more intensely remembered to the point of their becoming vibrantly alive, or they can also fade themselves into oblivion; it depends on the 'way' in which the persons and events of the past are 'recalled' and 're-collected': with fascination or with indifference. When the persons and events are not genuinely historical there is every danger of their names gradually fading into oblivion, in spite of their 'names' being enforced into memory. The 'enforcing' of the memory is carried out by the powerful victors; but it can last as long as the victims can be kept under the force of power. Hence the desire to perpetuate themselves makes the powerful victors look for ways and means to engrave their names in memory in such a way that they do not fade away; and the easy way found was to stagnate the memory by documenting its content. Thus history, as different from humans' historizing existence (*Geschichtlichkeit*) and historizing event (*Geschichte*), became the deposit of the dead past (*Historie*).<sup>31</sup> Since such a recorded history is not easily eradicable, the powerful have been on the look out to manipulate the 'recording' as favourably to them as possible.

#### 4. Victors vs. Victims in Perpetuating Themselves

In the process of perpetuating themselves through the manipulative recording of history, the victors and the victims are differently placed: the former are placed in an advantageous position in comparison to the latter. First of all, the victors have an advantage in promoting their version of history, since it is they

<sup>27</sup> For a rather detailed study on 'memory,' cf., Sydney Shoemaker, "Memory," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol., 5, Reprint Edition, Paul Edwards, ed. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1972), 265-74.

<sup>28</sup> "Wir nennen die Versammlung des Andenkens an das zu-Denkende das Gedächtnis." Heidegger, *Was heißt Denken?* 3. Auflage (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1971), 95.

<sup>29</sup> For a concise consideration of Heidegger's understanding of 'memory,' cf., Johnson Puthenpurackal, *Heidegger, through Authentic Totality to Total Authenticity* (Louvain: Leuven University Press, 1987), 152-56.

<sup>30</sup> Heidegger, *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung*, 5. Auflage (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1981), 84.

<sup>31</sup> This distinction is made by Heidegger. Traditionally history has been passively understood as '*Historie*'—the record of the dead deposit of the past (persons who lived, events that took place, etc). This fits well with the linear conception of time. With Heidegger time is no more understood as a long stretch of 'nows,' and thus history too gets a more dynamic meaning as '*Geschichtlichkeit*,' and '*Geschichte*.' Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 15<sup>th</sup> ed. (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1979), 372-404.

who write the history.<sup>32</sup> The teller of the story can control it in the way one wants; and the truth of the story is very much dependent on the ‘truth’ of the person who tells the story. It is highly improbable that the victors—the tellers of the story—who want, by hook or by crook, to perpetuate themselves as victors, will be ‘honest’ enough not to manipulate the story to their advantage. They will, in all probability, tell a story extolling their ‘glories.’ Besides, the victors have the infra-structural means to mould the consciousness and discourse of those under their rule. If the rulers happen to be dictators, they can enforce ruthless censorship that allows only the state-approved version of events to be made public, and any event that proved hurtful to the ruling elite would be kept in total darkness. Even in democratic countries media has control over the parameters of public discourse that determine the ‘truth’ of the events of history.<sup>33</sup> When the story is shrouded in events that happened many years before one is born, verification of the veracity of facts would be almost impossible, as a result of which one is forced to accept the documented version of history as the true version.

But there is the other side of the story—the victims’ version! In very many instances that version is made unavailable by doing away with them without leaving even a trace of them.<sup>34</sup> In case some of the victims who happen to survive have a chance to write their version of the story, they tend to tone down their version to make it agree with the so-called ‘official record’ of events for fear of being exiled or executed.<sup>35</sup> Thus the victims not only never received the historical attention they deserved, but the little attention that they were given was painted in dark colours and negative images.<sup>36</sup>

The writers of history—both religious and secular—are motivated by some ‘ideological interest.’<sup>37</sup> The Europeans, especially the British people, made sure that the way Indian history is formulated suited the cause of their colonial rule. The colonization of India was their only ‘ideological interest,’ for which they were prepared to tamper with the interpretation of Indian History. The British rulers found that upholding the socio-religious structures of the ‘natives’ could be of help to entrench and enforce their colonial structure. The religious writers too were not free from ‘ideological interests.’ In the *Vedas* and *Purāṇas*, historical myths were created to legitimize some of the prevailing aspects of social and religious life.<sup>38</sup> In order to freeze and solidify the desired social structure and value system, having recourse to religion and gods has been found to be very effective.<sup>39</sup> Conformity to law and structure is almost guaranteed, when they are presented as the *will* of the Divine. Since the religious centre of power

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<sup>32</sup> Americans find it difficult to imagine for a moment if Nazi Germany had been the victors of World War II, and thus had written the history books! Their perceptions of Adolph Hitler would be vastly different from what they have now. This expression of fear confirms that history is manipulated by the powerful victors.

<sup>33</sup> All the same, it cannot be denied that the freedom of expression in democracy contributes towards presenting the historical events with greater transparency.

<sup>34</sup> We have several examples in history. Roman historians left tales of cruelty and human sacrifice practiced by their longtime enemies; however no Carthaginian was left alive to give their side of the story. Similarly, we only have the Christian side of how Christianity came to be the dominant religion of Europe; we know hardly anything about other European religions before Christianity. We have only the European version of the conquest of the Americas; but since the early 1980s the native version of events are slowly emerging to popular consciousness.

<sup>35</sup> Can the ‘official version’ of Tiananmen Square incident in 1989, given by a regime that does not tolerate free speech, be accepted as ‘truth,’ when there is no voice to alternatives? There are also counter examples, such as the ‘American Civil War’ where the ‘losers’ (Southerners) have written more history books on the subject than the winners and, until recently, dominated the national perception of history.

<sup>36</sup> It has been the experience of all victims: the tribals, the dalits, the colonized, etc. They have been sidelined or negatively presented by the historians. The present-day literature by the victims gives vivid narrations of the other side of the story.

<sup>37</sup> This is the main thesis proposed by Romila Thapar in her *Interpreting Early India*. As quoted by James Massey, “History and Dalit Identity,” in *Dalit Solidarity*, Bhagwan Das & James Massey, ed., (Delhi: ISPCK, 1995), 18.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

has had the exclusive monopoly over the *will* of God, the cause of the victims could never get into the *plan* of God. They have been at a disadvantageous position even in religious history.

In short, because of humans' craze and craving for domination, individuals and institutions, groups and nations are always on the watch out to establish their power over others by any means and in all areas. Panikkar has rightly hit the point: "Our civilization is a civilization of armed reason. Our reason is no longer..wisdom or experience. It is experiment and power. Our reason makes conquerors of us..., "<sup>40</sup> con-vincing,<sup>41</sup> conquering every other who think and act 'otherwise.' The victims are kept victimized by the victors even in telling their stories.

## 5. A Plea for a Paradigm-Shift in Historizing

Derrida's notion of *deconstruction* not only shows the hierarchically structured binary opposites of the centre and the periphery, but also deconstructs it, as a result of which there is no more a center and periphery, higher and lower. In its place there is only a 'free play' of the opposites, of the different. Postmodernism is thus a celebration of difference, of variety, without any higher or lower.

This postmodern ideal can very well be applied to the way in which historizing takes place in the hierarchical structure of our society, according to which history has been nothing but the story of and by the victors, and the victims are pushed to the margins without any right to have a story of their own. This structure has been kept frozen for several centuries by relating it to gods and religion. In the postmodern context, just as no philosophy can claim to be universal, perennial and certain,<sup>42</sup> posing itself as superior to all the rest, so also no social group can pose itself as central and superior, and no group can be thrown out to be trampled upon by the others, and thus no group can claim exclusive monopoly over history by insisting on their version of story. If no social group can claim to be superior to the others, there cannot be any meta-narrative<sup>43</sup> of 'big story' of the victors as the history. There are no 'big stories' in society; every narrative is a 'small story,' 'under erasure' (*sous rature*). Thus with the equally placed different stories that do not have any fixed place of priority or superiority, they are in a 'play' of difference, where every 'player' is different from one another, and no 'player' is superior to the other. In the postmodern context the scenario of history as story-telling has to be seen as a *play of difference*.

In such a postmodern outlook the victims—the vast majority of people—are not to be looked down upon in contempt as 'history-unworthy' non-humans, nor are they to be looked at in sympathy as pitiable creatures. What they need is neither 'contempt' nor 'sympathy,' but their 'right' to be recognized as humans,<sup>44</sup> who are worthy to be 'subjects' of history, along with and equal to others, and not merely as

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<sup>39</sup> This technique was employed in Hinduism in order to establish some social order (caste system, the custom of *sati*, etc.) that is advantageous to the powerful high-caste people. Even Christianity is not spared of this. Its moral teachings are attached to *Divine will* or *Divine law*.

<sup>40</sup> R. Panikkar, *Cultural Disarmament: The Way to Peace*, trans., Robert R. Barr (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 88.

<sup>41</sup> 'Vincere' in Latin means 'to conquer'. Panikkar exploits this root-meaning in the English term: to con-vince. Cf., *Ibid*.

<sup>42</sup> Philosophy of modernity is characterized by these three characteristics. For more on 'postmodernism,' cf., Johnson Puthenpurackal, ed., *The Postmodern...: A Siege of the Citadel of Reason* (Delhi: Media House, 2002).

<sup>43</sup> It is an expression used by Lyotard to destroy the assumed superiority of any philosophical thought, cultural expression, social group, etc.

<sup>44</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, in the context of his 'phenomenological analysis of the face' dwells at length on the ethical demand emanating from the *face* of the other to be *recognized* as a human being. The face reveals simultaneously my *responsibility* for the other, and other's *right* to be recognized. His analysis has to be seen in the Judeo-Christian religious context.

‘objects’ for the victors.<sup>45</sup> The historizing humans are the ‘subjects’ of history, and the things that are used by the ‘subjects’ of history are the ‘objects’ of history. The ‘victims’ have been regarded as ‘objects’ of history, since they have been considered as mere ‘objects’ to be used, manipulated, exploited, by the ‘subjects’ of history. With the deconstruction of the structure of the primary and the secondary, the higher and the lower, among the humans, every individual and group is history-worthy ‘subjects.’

The plea that this study makes is for a cosmic philosophizing and historizing that is open to variety - variety in thinking, in historizing, in story-telling. It must be like a cosmic garden with different philosophical plants, that is open enough to accept the various plants of philosophical thoughts and perspectives. It must be a garden of unity and variety: a unity of complementarity,<sup>46</sup> and a variety of uniqueness. When each of the various small stories sees the other as complementing and enriching one another, there exists a unity of symphony; just as varieties of sounds make a beautiful piece of music, so also the various ‘stories’ of different groups of people constitute a ‘history’ strengthened by mutual enrichment. Such an interaction with one another is a ‘play’—a play *with* one another, rather than *against* one another.

The culture of ‘unity in variety’ is different from the culture of uniformity, that does not tolerate any difference or variety; it levels down every different to the level of the powerful. History too has been dictated by the powerful victors with their version as the only version of history. If such a caricature of history as the story of victors is laid open in this paper, it has implicitly made the plea for an attitudinal change that accepts the different stories as mutually complementary.

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<sup>45</sup> The ‘object’ and ‘subject’ of history could be given a little of philosophical clarification. ‘To be historical’ is not a *dead label* or characteristic of the humans, it is one of the essential ways of human existence; the humans are *historical* insofar as they exist as *historizing*. The humans, as historizing, are ‘primarily historical’ (*primär geschichtlich*); the non-human entities, as related to the historizing humans, are only ‘secondarily historical’ (*sekundär geschichtlich*). For instance, the walking-stick of Mahatma Gandhi is historically significant only in relation to Gandhiji, who is primarily historical. This distinction between the primary and secondary historical can be applied to the expression, subject and object of history.

<sup>46</sup> For a philosophical consideration of ‘complementarity,’ cf., Johnson Puthenpurackal “Complementarity,” in *ACPI Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2010), 305-07.

## **Towards Philosophical Historiographies and Historical Philographies**

- George Panthanmackel

*Historiography meaning writing of history is the study of the various approaches to historical method, the actual writing of history, the various interpretations of historical events, and the study of the techniques employed by the individual historians. Indian historiography has mainly been divided into four: nationalist historiography, communal historiography, secular historiography, and subaltern historiography. How each of them has presented the caste issue in Indian context. The study proposes to critically examine each of them as each historiography has presented a view that best suits their ideology. As philosophy aims at critical investigation of events with a systematic and comprehensive worldview, philosophers of history cannot afford to be blind to the fact of partial representation of the past in however well acclaimed historiography. Historians might tend to be representing partial accounts of events but any historiography is to be subjected to serious philosophical scrutiny. Such philosophically scrutinized historiographies are philosophical historiographies. The paper aims at philosophizing history and historizing philosophy.*

### **Introduction**

Philosophy aims at a comprehensive, critical investigation into the meaning and truth of things and events. Hence, only a philosophical historiography can be an adequate response to the confusions caused by a variety of historiographies that are only partial historiographies. In this article we make an effort to show how historians interpret *the origin of caste-system in India*. As we sum up their views on the same, we also come to know how the same phenomenon can be so interpreted that an ordinary reader may be confused or misled by their partial views. A philosopher, on the other hand, should not identify oneself with any one view but understand all possible views on the same in order to have a more comprehensive synthesis of the same. Only then, a philosopher can be faithful to one's specific task of enabling others to understand the meaning and truth of things and events. Here, after briefly explaining the meaning of history and historiography, a humble attempt is made to present various views on 'caste system' (taken as a sample case of historiographies) as understood and interpreted by some of the prominent historians of India before stating the concluding views.

### **1. History and Historiography**

The word 'history' comes from the Latin *historia* derived from the Greek root *istorein*. *Istorein* means to know or investigate. It is the study or science of history. It enables us to understand ourselves better in the present, by understanding the forces, choices, and

circumstances that brought us to our current situation. It is different from the German *Geschichte* (historicity). *Geschichte* refers to the event itself. Event includes first the individual occurrence and then the individual life-process and the total world-process. It is the irresistible working of historical forces which is more emphasized than the sense of research and knowledge. It connotes the one great comprehensive event, the *one* history. This *one* history is the one world of human in one's historicity. Here *Geschichte* (historicity) means the peculiar nature of human existence by which human stands between a past which is imposed on and an outstanding (standing out) future which one must try to procure in freedom. Human understands oneself as exposed to the two poles of determinism and freedom. This exposition of human to the two poles of determinism and freedom has its basis in the ontological structure of human being temporal, in the three dimensions of past, present and future. Since human always experiences oneself as a given, in a given world reality and situation, one experiences oneself as a 'has-been' which determines one's being now by virtue of the past. Thus the past continues to be effectively present as what has been. However, the past is present to as escaping human. At the same time, the past is also present as within one's grasp since the present situation in which one finds oneself is the result of one's own arrival from the past, which demands to be accepted. So the past arrives as a task yet to be accomplished, as something which transcends one's capacities of achievement. In this sense, the future is present only as something still outstanding. Of course, human can repress the past by way of protest or take it over freely in recollection. This re-collection is a sort of re-possession that takes place in tradition through which the original reality of the past is permanently visible.<sup>1</sup>

'Historiography' literally means 'the writing of history.' In modern usage, the word refers to the study of the way history has been and is written. When one studies 'historiography' one does not study the events of the past directly, but the changing interpretations of those events in the works of individual historians. To acquaint oneself, for example, with the variety of ways Indian historians have tried to explain the origin of caste system in India is to become familiar with the historiography of that subject. It is the study of the various approaches to historical method, the actual writing of history, and the various interpretations of historical events. It is the study of the techniques employed by the individual historian. It is not necessary to study primary materials, i.e., original source materials, in order to study historiography. For historiography is concerned mainly with what has been written about historical events. The primary sources of historiography are the works of historians.<sup>2</sup>

Historiography is the written record of human lives and societies in the past and how historians have attempted to understand them. The concern of all serious historians has been to record facts about the human past and often to discover new facts. They are often aware that the information they have is incomplete, or biased and requires careful

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<sup>1</sup> Adolf Darlap and Jörg Splett, "History," In *Sacramentum Mundi*, Edited by Karl Rahner with Cornelius Ernst and Kevin Smith, Vol. III (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1978), 31-36; see also George Panthanmackel, "Transcendence of Tradition Through Innovative Meaning," in: *Tradition and Innovation: Philosophy of Rootedness and Openness*, Edited by Saju Chackalackal (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2011), 32-34.

<sup>2</sup> [www.writing.ku.edu/~writing/guides/historiography.shtml](http://www.writing.ku.edu/~writing/guides/historiography.shtml), Retrieved on 10-09-2011.

attention. They try to discover in the facts patterns of meaning addressed to the enduring questions of human life.<sup>3</sup>

Most historical facts can only be known through intermediary sources. These include testimony from living witnesses, narrative records (such as previous histories, memoirs, letters, and imaginative literature), the legal and financial records (of courts, legislatures, religious institutions or businesses), and the unwritten information derived from the physical remains of past civilizations (such as architecture, arts and crafts, burial grounds, and cultivated land). All these sources of information provide the evidence from which the historian deciphers historical facts. The relation between evidence and fact, however, is rarely simple and direct. The evidence may be biased or mistaken, or nearly unintelligible after long periods of cultural change. Historians, therefore, have to evaluate their evidences critically.<sup>4</sup>

Fact-finding is only the foundation for the selection and explanation that constitute historical interpretation. The interpretation informs all aspects of historical inquiry, beginning with the selection of a subject for investigation. The selection of a subject itself is an act of judgment that asserts the importance of the subject. Once chosen, the subject itself suggests a hypothesis that guides research and helps the historian to assess and classify the available evidence and to present a detailed and coherent account of the subject. The historian must respect the facts, avoid error as far as possible, and provide a convincing interpretation.<sup>5</sup>

## 2. Indian Historiography

Indian historiography can be mainly divided into four: nationalist historiography, communal historiography, secular historiography and subaltern historiography.

Nationalist Historiography: Indian historiography of today owes much to the nationalist schools of history that developed before Independence. The prefix 'nationalist' applies to those historians who rejected the view, current among a number of British historians, that the history of the 'natives' could not be trusted as one would trust the history of any European people. Many British historians thought that the historiographies of the Indians were no better than that of courtiers or religious fanatics. The nationalist Indian historians, on the other hand, held that Indian sources were susceptible to the same kind of critical examination as those of other peoples, that India too had its economic, social or cultural history. Tara Chand, author of the *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture* (first pub., 1922), and Mohammad Habib, author of *Mahmud of Ghazni* (pub., 1924), are two of such nationalist historians.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> [cuwhist.wordpress.com/research-writing/historiography](http://cuwhist.wordpress.com/research-writing/historiography), Retrieved on 27-08-2011.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Shireen Moosvi, "Open Door' in Indian Historiography," On: [ahsaligarh.tripod.com/opendoor.htm](http://ahsaligarh.tripod.com/opendoor.htm), Retrieved on 23-08-2011.

Communal Historiography: A branch of historiography grew, essentially hostile to mainstream nationalism, which has been described as communal. Soon after Independence the Hindu and Muslim communal schools found their standard statements in two series on either side of the border of the Partitioned subcontinent. The technically better edited and produced *History and Culture of the Indian People*, edited by R.C. Majumdar and published by the Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan, and the *Freedom Struggle of the Muslims in the Indo-Pakistan Sub-continent*, edited by I.H. Qureshi, are works that believe in the Two-Nation theory, since they assume an irreconcilable hostility between Hindus and Muslims from the very point that Islam arrived in India. The Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan volumes added chauvinism in high doses as well. They claim that Indo-Europeans originated in India and went out from here to civilize the world. These historians, by denying the central theme of Indian history which is the formation of India's composite culture, stand in direct confrontation with nationalist historiography. The free invocation of religious beliefs, which are supposedly beyond the historians' field, is a common feature among them.<sup>7</sup>

Secular Historiography: There developed in time the secular historiography in our country. Its early products were R.P. Dutt's *India Today* (1940) and Shevlankar's *Problem of India* (1940). Both dealt with India under British rule. Secular influences are perceptible in Jawaharlal Nehru's writings as well. But full scale secular writing came alive only later. D.D. Kosambi's *Introduction to the Study of Indian History* (1956) and Romila Thapar's *A History of India*, while Mohammad Habib in his long introduction to a reprint of Elliot and Dowson's *History of India Vol.II*, essayed an interpretation of the Delhi Sultanate. In the second line came R.S. Sharma, with his secularist analysis of ancient social phenomena, culminating in two major works *Sudras in Ancient India* (1958) and *Indian Feudalism* (1965). The other important secular writers are D.N. Jha, Suvira Jaiswal, Iqtidar A.Khan and A. Bagchi.<sup>8</sup>

Subaltern Historiography: The 'Subaltern' historians, especially Ranjit Guha in *Subaltern Studies*, made use of some of Gramsci's terminology notably the term 'subaltern' itself. The 'Subaltern' historians insist on researches in the conditions of life and thought of the ordinary people. The Elite vs. Subalterns becomes a dominant motif among them, rather than the class analysis derived from the Marxist method. In more recent days, the Subalterns have found regionalism and communalism to be more authentic expressions of subaltern consciousness than the phenomenon of nationalism.<sup>9</sup>

### 3. Secular and Communal Historiographies on the Origin of Caste-System

In India, the secular historiographies co-exist with communal historiographies. Most of the secular historiographies also include the concerns of subaltern historiographies. The following synoptic accounts on the origin of caste-system reflect the prejudice of historians for or against the system. The following are not comprehensive accounts on the origin of caste-system, but sample accounts to show how the same issue can be looked at

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

from both secular and communal viewpoints. Even the secularists and communalists also vary vastly among themselves in interpreting the same issue.

### 3.1. Sample Secular Historiographies

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru: The coming of the Aryans into India raised both racial and political problems. The conquered race, the Dravidians, had a long background of civilization behind them. However, the Aryans considered themselves vastly superior to the Dravidians, the aboriginal tribes, nomads and forest-dwellers. The caste-system, which would later affect Indian life so profoundly, arose out of this conflict of races. In the beginning caste, probably, was neither Aryan nor Dravidian, but an attempt at social organization of different races and a rationalization of the facts. It brought degradation afterwards and “it is still a burden and a curse.”<sup>10</sup> All the same, we can hardly judge it from subsequent developments since it was in keeping with the spirit of the times when some such grading took place in most of the ancient civilizations.<sup>11</sup>

Caste originated with a hard and fast division between Aryans and non-Aryans. The Aryans formed one class without any specialization. The word “Arya” means “to till.” The Aryans were mostly agriculturists, who also functioned as priest, soldier, or trader. There was no privileged order of priests. The caste divisions were originally intended to separate the Aryans from the non-Aryans. However, in the course of time, it reacted on the Aryans themselves as division of functions and specialization increased.<sup>12</sup>

At a time when it was customary for the conquerors to exterminate or enslave the conquered races, caste enabled a more peaceful solution on the basis of growing specialization of functions in a graded manner as *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas*, and *Shudras*. The *Brahmins* were priests and thinkers supposed to guide policy and preserve and maintain the ideals of the nation. The *Kshatriyas* were rulers and warriors. The *Vaishyas* were agriculturists, artisans and merchants. The *Shudras* were labourers and unskilled workers other than agriculturists. Many indigenous tribes were gradually assimilated and given a place among the *Shudras*. These castes in the beginning must have been without much rigidity. The ruling class, probably, had great latitude that any ruler, if one so willed, could join the hierarchy as a Kshatriya with the help of priests who would manufacture appropriate genealogy connecting the person with an ancient Aryan hero.<sup>13</sup> The analytical Indian mind had a passion for putting ideas and life’s activities into compartments. The Aryans also divided the individual’s life into four parts: the student period of life, the householder period of life, the statesman period of life, and the recluse period of life.<sup>14</sup>

In India, learning and eruditions have always stood high in public esteem. Before the learned, the rulers and warriors have always bowed. For, learning always implied both

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<sup>10</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985; Eleventh Impression 2000), 84-85.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

superior knowledge and virtue. The old Indian view was that the rulers could not be completely objective since their personal interests and inclinations would conflict with their public duties. Hence the task of determining values and the preservation of ethical standards was allotted to a group of thinkers with a spirit of detachment, known as philosophers. The Brahmin caste, besides being a caste of priests, mainly supplied the thinkers and philosophers. The Brahmins were expected to be representatives of the ideal of profound learning and charity, essentially good, self-disciplined and self-less in their outlook and attitude. Nevertheless, many of them have shown all the vices of a privileged and entrenched class in the past without any significant learning and virtue.<sup>15</sup> The fact that some of the non-Brahmins, like Mahatma Gandhi, became supreme leaders of India shows that these caste definitions have not been hard and fast.<sup>16</sup>

To sum up: The caste-system arose out of the conflict between the Aryans and the Dravidians. It is still a burden and a curse. The Aryans who were mostly agriculturists, who also functioned as priest, soldier, or trader, formed one class without any specialization. The caste divisions were originally intended to separate the Aryans from the non-Aryans. However, in the course of time, it reacted on the Aryans themselves as division of functions increased.

Romila Thapar: The Aryans, when they came to India, were divided into three social classes: the warriors, the priests, and the common people. There was no caste-consciousness among them. The three divisions merely helped social and economic organization of the people. The first step in the direction of caste was taken when the Aryans treated the *Dasas* as socially unacceptable people. It could be due to a fear that assimilation with them would lead to a loss of Aryan identity. The distinction was largely that of colour, the *Dasas* being darker and of alien culture. The Sanskrit word for caste, *varna*, means colour. The colour element of caste was emphasized, and was eventually to become deep-rooted in north-Indian Aryan culture. Thus, initially the division was between the Aryans and the non-Aryans. The Aryans, the *dvija* or twice-born castes, originally consisted of the *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, and the *Vaishyas*. The fourth caste, the Shudras, were the *Dasas* and those of mixed *Aryan-Dasa* origin.<sup>17</sup>

The first three castes were probably a theoretical framework evolved by Brahmins. The fourth caste appears to have been based both on race as well as occupation. Although the Shudras were permitted to cultivate land, they were still excluded from *dvija* status. This exclusion prevented them from participating in Vedic ritual and led them to worship their own gods. This vertical division of society made it easier in later centuries to accept new ethnic groups that arrived in India. Each new group took on the characteristics of a separate sub-caste and was assimilated into the larger caste structure. The position of the new sub-caste was dependent on its occupation and on its social origins.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 86-87.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>17</sup> Romila Thapar, *A History of India*, Vol. I (London: Penguin Books, 1966; reprint 1987), 37-38.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 38-39.

The establishment of caste was promoted by other factors too. With the transition from nomadic pastoralism to a settled agrarian economy, specialization of labour became a need. The clearing of the forests and the establishment of new settlements led to the emergence of a trading community engaged in supplying goods. There was thus a natural separation between the agriculturists and traders. The priests formed a group by themselves. The warriors led by the king believed their function to be solely that of protection. The king and the warriors emerged as the dominant power. The priests came next, followed by landowners and traders (*Vaishyas*), and cultivators (*Shudras*). The priests somehow managed to usurp the first position by claiming that they alone could bestow divinity on the king. They did it by giving religious sanction to caste divisions. A late hymn of the *Rgveda* (*Purushasukta*) provides an illustration of the usurping power of the priests.<sup>19</sup> The continuance of caste was secured by its being made hereditary. The primitive taboo on eating together became a caste law, and this in turn made it necessary to define marriage limits with elaborate rules on endogamy and exogamy. With caste becoming hereditary, there was an automatic check on individuals moving up in the hierarchy of castes.<sup>20</sup> This is also one of the main reasons for its long survival.

The caste system has survived in India for two thousand years despite frequent efforts to break its grip. Its role in determining political institutions, for instance, has been considerable. At the basic level of everyday life interrelationships between the sub-castes within the community were the most influential factor in village life, and this tended to divert attention from political relationships and loyalties to local caste relationships and loyalties. Central political authority became more and more remote.<sup>21</sup>

The origin and development of caste was not controlled by the Brahmins, who were merely shrewd enough to manipulate the existing system to their own advantage. They enunciated laws on caste which were largely observed by the upper castes. Each caste or sub-caste formed its own independent social unit. As long as the Brahmins could maintain their position as the pre-eminent unit, their ascendancy was assured. To perpetuate their ascendancy they worked out the complicated and almost foolproof concept of *dharma*<sup>22</sup> in the sense of a universal law. Thus the *varnadharma* was the attempt to establish a social law which would ensure its well-being. *Varna* assumes the following characteristics: status by birth, a hierarchical ordering of social units and rules of endogamy and ritual purity. There were only two means of improving status: by opting out of society by becoming an ascetic and by ensuring rebirth in a higher social status in one's next life. However, mobility was not totally excluded in this scheme of things. Downward mobility was easy, but upward mobility was far more difficult. *Varna* was based on a number of factors such as the idea of pollution, clearly defined and recognized specialization of labour and differentiation between occupations, and the maintaining of

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-35.

distinctions between ethnic and regional populations.<sup>23</sup> On the basis of *varna* the elite – *Brahmins*, *kshatriya* and *vaisya* – would be a closed group with no upward mobility.

To sum up: Originally the Aryans – who were divided into three social classes: the warriors, the priests, and the common people – had no caste-consciousness among them. The first step in the direction of caste was taken when the Aryans treated the *Dasas*, who were darker and of alien culture, as socially unacceptable people. Thus, initially the division was between the Aryans and the non-Aryans, between the Aryans and the Shudras. The first three castes were an arrangement evolved by Brahmins and the fourth appears to have been based both on race as well as occupation. On the basis of *varna* the castes would be a closed group with no upward mobility.

B. P. Saha and K. S. Behera: Caste is a hereditary grouping that bears a common name acquired through common descent from a mythical ancestor who is human or divine. It claims to be forming a single homogenous community. In the beginning, it was purely based on *Varna* determined by profession or occupation. In course of time, it gradually transformed into a sordid caste system determined by birth.<sup>24</sup> “As a matter of fact, the hydra-headed monster named casteism started from the unknown days is still going strong in many sections of the Indian society.”<sup>25</sup> The original inhabitants of India, the non-Aryans, were dark in complexion; whereas the Aryans were fair. There is a good reason to believe that on the basis of colour the distinction surfaced, which culminated in caste system. The Aryans felt themselves superior to the original tribes and deliberately avoided social intercourse with them, especially in matters of marriage, diet, etc.<sup>26</sup>

Some scholars feel that the caste-division was the result of the divisions of labour. Initially when the Aryans arrived, they had enough time and opportunity to look after their needs. However, when the Aryans embarked upon the venture of conquest and annexation, they hardly had time to look after other duties of life. Then they found it prudent to entrust various responsibilities to different classes of people and thus a system of division of labour emerged.<sup>27</sup> As time passed, detestable casteism gradually raised its ugly head and placed the society in a state of disarray. It cut the very root of equality, unity and solidarity. Its ill-gained dominance and rigidity became severe and put the society in utter confusion.<sup>28</sup>

To sum up: In the beginning, caste was purely based on *Varna* determined by occupation. In course of time, it gradually transformed into a system determined by birth. The original inhabitants of India, the non-Aryans, were dark in complexion and the Aryans, fair. On the basis of colour the distinction surfaced, which culminated in caste system. The Aryans felt themselves superior and deliberately avoided social interaction with non-Aryans.

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>24</sup> B. P. Saha and K. S. Behera, *Ancient History of India* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1994), 103.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 103-104.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

G. S. Ghurye: The Indo-Aryans belong linguistically to Indo-Europeans or Indo-Germans who comprised the Celts, the Anglo-Saxons, the Romans and the Iranians among others. In prehistoric times about 5000 BCE, the ancestors of all these people seem to have been in close cultural contact with one another. One of the branches of these peoples which reached India c. 2500 BCE is called Indo-Aryans. Their favourite word for certain groups of people was '*varna*.' Thus, they spoke of '*dasa varna*.' Ancient Iranian literature has preserved similar expression '*daha*,' which is the Vedic equivalent of '*dasa*.' They spoke of themselves as '*Aira*,' whose identity with '*Arya*' is of high certitude. *Daha* means enemies and robbers who were despised by the respectable Iranians who called themselves *Airans*. The Vedic Indians might well have applied the term to their enemies in India.<sup>29</sup>

We may also understand that the Indo-Europeans, of whom Vedic Aryans were only a branch, had early developed the exclusive spirit in social behaviour and a partiality for ideas of ceremonial purity. When they entered India, they must have made regulations to exclude *shudras* from interactions. The *shudras* formed the lowest class in society. A *shudra* male marrying a Brahmin female was considered to be a sacrilege. It is more than probable that the *shudra* class was largely formed by aborigines who had accepted the lordship of the Indo-Aryans. It is also to be noted that in the earliest literature only the first three classes – the *Brahmins*, the *Kshatriyas*, and the *Vaishyas* – are postulated. It is only in one place, which is regarded by most Vedic scholars to be one of the latest, that the *shudras* are mentioned as one of the four classes.<sup>30</sup> According to Ghurye, "The Brahmins, partly out of their honest desire to preserve the purity of Vedic ritual, partly being the victims of their own ideas of ceremonial purity, and partly also owing to their consciousness of superiority over the aborigines, first enacted rules for the guidance of their own members, which were intended to prevent the possibility of the *shudras* in any way lowering their moral standard and introducing their low blood."<sup>31</sup>

To sum up: Ancient Iranian literature has the expression '*daha*,' which is the Vedic equivalent of '*dasa*.' *Daha* means enemies and robbers who were despised by the respectable Iranians who called themselves *Airans* whose identity with '*Arya*' is of high certitude. The Vedic Indians might well have applied the term '*dasa*' (*daha*) to their enemies in India. They had early developed the exclusive spirit in social behaviour. When they entered India, they must have made regulations to exclude *shudras* who formed the lowest class in society.

Indian secularism is already a critique of the existing religions that tend to be exclusivistic. It is an ideal that has its roots in the perennial ethical ideals of equality, fraternity and liberty on which Indian secularism rests. Hence, Indian secularism is a positive affirmative approach to ensure the welfare of all against fanaticism and fundamentalism that favour and support a particular group to dominate the socio-political life of citizens. Still my contention is that Indian secular historiographies are only partial historiographies, especially written under the influence of Marxian ideology, that have as

<sup>29</sup> G. S. Ghurye, *Caste and Race in India* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1979), 163-164.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 171-173.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 176-177.

their most important agenda of checking and preventing the advancement of communal historiographies.

### 3.2. Sample Communal Historiographies

Here ‘communal’ means justification of the caste-ridden Indian society by playing down the evil effects of caste-system; ‘communal historiographies’ imply the below-mentioned historiographies have been interpreted and utilized by communalists as ammunitions to advance their agenda and propaganda. It does not in any way mean that the historians of these historiographies wrote them with the explicit intention of inciting divisive passions among the people for or against particular communities, but their prejudice in favour of caste-system is obvious to a critical and deconstructive reader. Such an implicit prejudiced approach in writing history is often more dangerous than taking an open position.

A. K. Majumdar: For Majumdar, the caste system is the most distinguishing feature of Hindu society. The system developed into a proliferation of castes and sub-castes. The origin of caste system is unknown and its process of development is obscure.<sup>32</sup> The survival of caste system and its ramifications prove that it benefited the society at some period in its history. Even today it provides job opportunities for certain backward classes. In the words of Majumdar, “Its survival and ramifications prove that it benefited the society at a period when they had different scales of social value. As a parallel it may be pointed out that today the caste barriers are still there, because they provide job opportunities and political advantages to certain backward groups. Formerly the gains were mostly economical. The economic factor almost ceased to operate with the development of modern industry, when political factors intervened. In the process the wheel has turned: the *brahmanas* want to abolish the caste system, while the ‘backward classes’ and the Harijans are giving it a fresh lease of life.”<sup>33</sup>

The word *jati*, found in Pali texts and used occasionally by Manu, means ‘caste.’ The Vedic texts use the word ‘*varna*’ to denote ‘caste.’ In most passages of Rgveda, the word *varna* means ‘colour.’ In some verses the word is associated with groups of people having a dark or light complexion. The phrases used frequently in the Rgveda (II.12:4; III. 34:19) are ‘*aryam varnam* and *dasam varnam*’; ‘Indira helped the former to defeat the latter.’ On the basis of these and similar passages, it has been concluded that *aryas* and *dasas* were two warring groups distinguished on the basis of their *varna*. The word *dasa* means servant or slave and *dasyu* a robber. According to Manu, *Brahmanas* and *kshatriyas*, who are outside the influence of four *varnas* are *dasyus* even if they speak the language of the *aryas*. If this meaning of *dasyu* is accepted as true, then it would appear that the term indicated those who refused to follow the rules of the Vedic society.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> A. K. Majumdar, *Concise History of Ancient India*, Vol. III (New Delhi: Mushiram Manoharlal, 1973), 2-3.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

The *sudra* is said to have been created by God for the service of the *Brahmana*. Hence it is accepted that the *dasas* or *dasyus* conquered by the *aryas* were gradually transformed into *sudras*. The *Brhataranyaka Upanishad* (1.4.11-15) states that ‘at first the Brahman being alone did not prosper, and so He created *ksatriyas*. Still he did not prosper, so he created *vaisyas*. As he did not yet prosper, he created the *sudras*.’ It is evident from these scriptural passages, that the *sudras* had been assigned the lowest rank in the caste hierarchy.<sup>35</sup>

To sum up: For Majumdar, the caste system is the most distinguishing feature of Hindu society. The survival of caste system and its ramifications prove that it benefited the society at some period in its history. Even today it provides job opportunities for certain backward classes. The *sudra* is said to have been created by God for the service of the *Brahmana*.

A. S. Altekar: In the opinion of Altekar, the comparative philology does not indicate the emergence of any class in the Indo-European period. But the *Avesta* has evidence that during the same period the *Aryan* society was divided into four classes: priests, warriors, farmers, and artisans. There was no class corresponding to *Shudras*, instead there were the *Dahes* who were the aborigines of ancient Persia. In the Vedic period, there were the *Aryas* and *Dasas*, sharply distinguished from each other in several respects. They differed in language; the *Aryas* considered the language of the *Dasas* as unintelligible. The *Aryas* were fire-worshippers; whereas the *Dasas* were phallus-worshippers. The *Dasas* had flat noses; their colour was dark, contrasted with *Aryas* who were fair. The *Aryas* were at war with the *Dasas*; the *Rgveda* describes how Indra killed the *Dasas* and protected the *Arya* colour, or the manner by which he trampled down in the caves the *Dasa* colour (RV III. 34:9; II. 12:14).<sup>36</sup>

Many Vedic scholars, according to Altekar, maintained that there was no caste system in the Vedic period. Although the names of the four castes of the later period are mentioned in the *Purusha-sukta* (X. 90), there is hardly any evidence that the classes mentioned there had become hereditary. They appear to be names of professions, which could be followed by any *Aryan*. Had Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, and Sudras developed into castes, they would have been certainly mentioned more than twice.<sup>37</sup>

To sum up: In the Vedic period, there were the *Aryas* and *Dasas*, sharply distinguished from each other in several respects. There was no caste system. Although the names of the four castes of the later period are mentioned in the *Purusha-sukta* (X. 90), there is hardly any evidence that the classes mentioned there had become hereditary. They appear to be names of professions.

#### **4. Conclusion: Towards Philosophical Historiographies and Historical Philographies**

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

<sup>36</sup> A. S. Altekar, “Vedic Society,” in *The Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol.I (Culcutta: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1993), 224-225.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 225-226.

As we have seen, the word ‘history’ comes from the Latin *historia* derived from the Greek root *istorein*, which means to know or investigate. It is the study or science of history, which is different from the German *Geschichte* (historicity), which refers to the event itself. Historiography means writing of history. It is the study of the various approaches to historical method, the actual writing of history, the various interpretations of historical events, and the study of the techniques employed by the individual historians. Indian historiography has mainly been divided into four: nationalist historiography, communal historiography, secular historiography, and subaltern historiography. Nationalist historiography refers to the nationalist schools of history that developed before Independence. The prefix ‘nationalist’ applies to those historians who rejected the British view that the history of the ‘natives’ could not be trusted as one would trust the history of any European people. Communal historiography is a branch of historiography, which is essentially hostile to mainstream nationalism. The Hindu and Muslim communal schools believe in the ‘Two-Nation theory’ assuming an irreconcilable hostility between Hindus and Muslims from the very date that Islam arrived in India. The free invocation of religious beliefs is a common feature among them. Indian secular historiographies are critical of the existing religions that tend to be exclusivistic. They consider secularism as an ideal that has its roots in the perennial ethical ideals of equality, fraternity and liberty on which Indian secularism rests. Hence, Indian secularism is a positive affirmative approach to ensure the welfare of all against fanaticism and fundamentalism that favour and support a particular group to dominate the socio-political life of citizens. Finally, the subaltern historians insist on researches in the conditions of life and thought of the marginalized people.

In India, the secular historiographies (under the influence of Marxian ideology) co-exist with communal historiographies (under the influence of religious fundamentalists). The various accounts on the origin of caste-system by well-known historians of India reflect their prejudice for or against the system. According to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the caste-system arose out of the conflict between the Aryans and the Dravidians. Romila Thapar opines that originally the Aryans had no caste-consciousness among them. The first step in the direction of caste was taken when the Aryans treated the *Dasas* as socially unacceptable people. For B. P. Saha and K. S. Behera, caste was originally based on *Varna* determined by occupation. Later, it was transformed into a system determined by birth. G. S. Ghurye states that ancient Iranian literature has the expression ‘*daha*,’ which is the Vedic equivalent of ‘*dasa*.’ When the Aryans entered India, they must have made regulations to exclude *shudras* (*dasas*) who formed the lowest class in society. A. K. Majumdar holds the view that the survival of caste system proves that it benefited the society at some period in its history. A. S. Altekar believes that in the Vedic period, there was no caste system. There is hardly any evidence that the classes mentioned in the *Purusha Sukta* had become hereditary.

Philosophy, as we have already said at the beginning, aims at a comprehensive, critical investigation into things and events. Philosophy’s goal is nothing less than a systematic and comprehensive worldview. Other fields study particular kinds of things. Philosophy asks how it all fits together. This goal also means that one can study anything under the

name of philosophy. Philosophy encompasses subfields called philosophy of religion, of law, of economics, of biology, of physics, of mathematics, of computers, of psychology, of art, of music, of literature, and so on. Any and all of these topics can be studied in a philosophical way when one asks how they are related to each other in an overall worldview. Whatever be the methods employed by philosophers to achieve their target, one feature is shared by almost all philosophers, i.e., philosophers question authorities. Whereas legislators or judges have the authority to declare what the law is, and specific texts determine what is required by some religions, philosophers do not grant any special authority to anyone or anything. Every claim, no matter where it comes from, is subject to scrutiny.<sup>38</sup> Thus we say philosophy is a critical investigation by which philosophers try to justify their views with critical arguments.

Historians may tend to write partial accounts of events and things; but it is for philosophers to critically examine such accounts and expose the gaps, omissions, commissions, hasty conclusions, prejudiced views under the tyranny of authoritarian scholarship. Hence, any knowledge, especially historiographies, should be subject to serious philosophical scrutiny. Such philosophically scrutinized historiographies cannot but be philosophical historiographies. Thus, what we need today in India is neither secular historiographies nor communal historiographies nor subaltern historiographies, but true historiographies which are essentially philosophical, and thus philosophical historiographies. Does it mean that philosophers should abandon their chosen field and enter into the territory of historians and replace them? Not at all. It means the historians should employ their own philosophical or critical investigative powers, free from prejudice and particular agenda, and examine critically and impartially their own historiographies as true philosophers do. When historians do that, they philosophize history and historize philosophy. True philosophy is historical insofar as it takes into account the concerns of the three ecstatic moments of human – of past, present and future. In the same way, true history is philosophical insofar as historians are sufficiently critical and impartial in their approach to research and presentation of the facts and figures. Such histories will be philosophical histories and historical philosophies, or rather these will be philosophical historiographies and historical *philographies*.

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38 Walter Sinott-Armstrong, "What is Philosophy?" On [www.dartmouth.edu/~phil/whatis/wsa.html](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~phil/whatis/wsa.html), Retrieved on 16-08-2011.

## Historical and A-Historicals: A Postmodern Look

- S. Sekar Sebastin

*Sense of history becomes consciously an inevitable factor for any inquiry. As there is no general consensus about the nature, the possibilities, the limitations and the methods of history, this article tries to look at history from postmodern perspective keeping away ahistorical attitude. It explores how postmodernism promotes the sense of history i.e. historical nature of every inquiry and conclusion as every inquiry is time bound, situated in a particular place, surrounded by different facts. There are not any ahistorical events that are universal in postmodern trend. With the clarification of the notion of postmodernism, this article pictures the concept of history according to the understanding of both the modernism and postmodernism. It is a fact that postmodernism forces historians to interrogate their own methods and procedures as never before, and in the process makes them more self-critical. Postmodern reading of history gives ample possibilities for the diverse groups to affirm their own identities. Hence, we can assert that postmodernism is neither blessing nor threat to historiography but it is a challenge to look at it emphasising the inclusive and all-embracing outlook in the writing of history.*

### Introduction

It is indisputable fact that history plays a major role in understanding the past and in exciting the future. Sense of history is very important for any interrogation and investigation. But it is true that there is no general consensus about the nature, the possibilities, the limitations and the methods of history as intellectual discipline. Unlike the scientist, the historians have not been able to evolve effective and generally acceptable principles of organising and presenting historical data. There are a number of schools to read history different such as Annalists<sup>1</sup>, the Structuralists<sup>2</sup>, the Subalternists<sup>3</sup> and the Postmodernists. Hence our concern in this presentation is to look at history from postmodern perspective keeping away ahistorical attitude.

There are two contradictory views predominant in the study of history. The first view is of historical sense which considers history as describing the reality and the rational form of our understanding of the past. The second view is of ahistorical attitude, which lacks concern related to history, historical development or tradition. A-historicism is frequently used as a criticism, referring to being historically inaccurate or ignorant. It can also describe a person's failure to frame an argument or issue in a historical context or to disregard historical fact or

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<sup>1</sup> Annalists are compilers who list brief chronological events regarded as important in the history of kingdom. Ref. Bernard L. Marthaler (Ed.), *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Second Edition (USA: Thomason Gale, 2003), 459.

<sup>2</sup> Structuralists are those who adopt an approach to the human sciences that attempts to analyse a specific field (for instance, mythology) as a complex system of interrelated parts. They consider language as the appropriate model for understanding all spheres of human activity. Its scientific pretensions were rejected by poststructuralist successors. Ref. Willie Thomson, *Postmodernism and History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 135.

<sup>3</sup> The subalternists are the marginalised and the oppressed people, a group that is politically and socially excluded by hegemonic systemic practices who in turn historically resist against it in order to restore their identity as persons and reclaim a cultural space. Ref. Dr. Lourdunathan, "Philosophy and Formation: The Need for Subaltern Perspective," *Jnanodaya Journal of Philosophy*, Issue 16, June 2009, 89.

implication holding a view that history has no relevance or importance in the decision making of modern life. Postmodernism promotes the sense of history i.e. historical nature of every inquiry and conclusion. Every inquiry is time bound, situated in a particular place, surrounded by different facts. All these contribute to the understanding of the particular inquiry. There are not any *ahistorical* events that are universal in postmodern trend.

In recent decades, postmodernism has become an overriding phenomenon that it has infiltrated almost every sphere of life and influenced almost all fields of study. For those in the field of history, postmodernism gives very ambiguous signs in determining the power of history as constitutive of human life. Despite contrary views, there is an overpowering excitement among the intellectuals who welcome postmodernism as an opportunity and challenge to re-affirm the need and power of history in society.

Postmodern context necessitates a serious study of history and revision of many of our traditional perceptions. In such a situation what keeps on haunting humanity today is not the relevance of history in human life but the question of understanding history as a unified system of narratives, doctrines, possible facts and practices, which keeps and binds people together. By drawing our attention to the multiplicity, diversity and contingency of reality, postmodernism has a profound impact on historical thought as it prescribes a critical outlook of anything which is objective, absolute, universal and foundational.

Postmodernism raises so many disturbing questions about the conceptual foundations of historiography<sup>4</sup> itself that historians can no longer ignore it. Due to the power and influence of the postmodernist critique of history, many historians today give up the search for truth, the belief in objectivity and the quest for a scientific approach to the past.<sup>5</sup>

Postmodern reading of history is not only free from the tyranny of totalising discourses, great truths, great systems and great syntheses but it painstakingly rediscovers struggles and fragmented, subjugated, local and specific knowledge.<sup>6</sup> It is asserted that postmodernist culture has pulled the rug out from beneath a number of complacent certainties, pried upon paranoid totalities, tainted some jealously guarded purities, bent some oppressive norms and shaken some rather solid-looking foundations.<sup>7</sup> It is also proper here to briefly clarify the notion of postmodernism in order to understand how postmodern reading of history stands distinct.

## **1. Preliminary Exposition of Postmodernism**

Our paper attempts to explain what postmodernism is with reference to historical writing or other forms of production. A reference is needed initially regarding the basic presuppositions shared by individuals who would recognise themselves as belonging to the postmodern school of thought, which will lead the discussion of how these concepts bear on the practice of historiography. Postmodernism not only eludes but rejects precise definition or systemisation.<sup>8</sup> An enormous variety of various expressive intellectual trends and historical contexts at the level of theory have helped to constitute what is labelled as postmodernism today. Those who call themselves postmodern define the term variously. Critics cannot agree on a definition and neither can adherents.

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<sup>4</sup> It is the history of historical writing which includes the evolution of the ideas and techniques associated with the writing of history and the changing ideas to the question of the nature of history itself.

<sup>5</sup> Richard J. Evans, *In Defense of History* (London: Granta Books, 2000), 4.

<sup>6</sup> E. Sreedharan, *A Text book of Historiography 500 BC to AD 2000* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2004), 286.

<sup>7</sup> Richard J. Evans, *In Defense of History*, 101.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Sheehan, "Postmodernism and Philosophy," in Steven Connor, Ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 36.

Postmodernism is referred as the intellectual mood and cultural expression that are becoming increasingly dominant in contemporary society. These expressions call into question the ideals, principles and values that lay at the heart of the modern mind set. The postmodern ethos resists unified, all-encompassing and universally valid explanations. It replaces these with a respect for difference and a celebration of the local and particular at the expense of the universal. "Modernism suffers from elitism. Postmodernism is trying to get over that elitism," by reaching out "towards the vernacular and the commercial slang of the street."<sup>9</sup>

Some of the more common characteristics of postmodernism would be:

... a rejection, philosophically, of the self as a knowing subject in the form presented in western philosophical tradition, a rejection of the possibility of finding a singular true picture of the external world, present or past, a concern to decentre and destabilise conventional academic subjects of enquiry, a wish to see canons of authority in reading and writing give way to plural readings and interpretation; a fascination with text itself and its relation to the reality it purports to represent; a drive to amplify previously unheard voices from unprivileged groups and peoples; a pre-occupation with gender as the most immediate generator of under privileged or unempowered status.<sup>10</sup>

## **2. History: The Difference between the Modern and the Postmodern**

The rapid spread of the term postmodern in recent years witnesses to a growing dissatisfaction with modernity and to an increasing sense that the modern age not only had a beginning but can have an end as well. We cannot fully comprehend the features of postmodernism with reference to history until we are clear about what 'modernism means to history'. Modernist views believe in some common features like truth, objectivity, reason and Enlightenment. The modernist historian clearly believes that on the basis of facts, truth and objectivity could be realised and the real past was actually out there.

As it is difficult to underline the characteristic features of postmodernism with particular reference to history, an attempt could be made by contrasting these with those of modernism.

(1) Postmodernism abandons the weakest versions of positivist claim<sup>11</sup> that history was a science and questions the sacred notion of historical truth, in the name either of rhetoric of discourse or of an ethical and cultural relativism.<sup>12</sup> Historiography is the best illustration of the postmodern reading of history. (2) Postmodernism recognises the aesthetic nature of historiography or to say more precisely, the stylistic dimension of historical writing. To the modernists, the content is important and the way, the style in which it is expressed is irrelevant. However, in the postmodernist environment, this distinction between form or style and content can no longer be taken for granted. If various historians are occupied with different aspects of the same research subject, the resulting difference in content can be described as a different style in the treatment of the subject. It is style, not content which is the issue in postmodernist debates on history.<sup>13</sup> (3) The modernist, within the scientific world picture and the view of history initially accepts the evidence as essence happened in the past.

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<sup>9</sup> Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity* (London: Verso Publications, 2002), 22.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>11</sup> A Positivist claim is that a world view is designated in tune with modern science which rejects superstition, religion and metaphysics as pre-scientific forms of thought which will cede to positive science as mankind continues its progress. As far as history is concerned, it made historical knowledge scientific. Ref. Thomas Mauntner (Ed.), *The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 438.

<sup>12</sup> Earlier rhetoric was shunned as a shameful distortion or disguise; modern thinking praises and pursues it as the necessary adornment of an essentially literary genre.

<sup>13</sup> Jaspar Kaur Dhanju, *History and Postmodernism* (Chandigarh: Unistar Books Pvt. 2006), 25.

The modernist historian follows a line of reasoning from his/her sources and evidence to an historical reality hidden behind the sources. On the other hand, in the postmodernist view evidence does not point towards the past, but to other interpretations of the past. To express this by means of imagery; for the modernist, the evidence is a tile which he/she picks up to see what is underneath it; for the postmodernist, on the other hand, it is a tile, which he/she steps on in order to move on to other tiles; horizontally, instead of vertically.<sup>14</sup> To formulate this in the paradoxical manner so popular among postmodernists, essence of the past is not, or does not lie in the essence of the past. It is in the 'scraps', the 'slips of the tongue', the rare moments when the past let itself go, where we discover what is really of importance for us.<sup>15</sup>

(4) Unlike the modernists, the postmodernists believe that human knowledge is limited to human discourse. Multiple and competing truth claims are tolerated with an open mind. As a result there is no way to escape language, no way to stand outside to get at pure raw truth. Consequently 'grand narratives'<sup>16</sup> of modern trend' of any type whether religious, philosophical or scientific are limited and historically conditioned and, therefore incomplete.

(5) The modernist historians read and write history with a scrupulous regard for the historicity, the integrity and the actuality of the past. Thus for them facts are those which provide them evidence that something actually or in reality happened in the past and that reality could be discovered by following a line of reasoning from the sources and evidence. But the postmodern turn within history critically entails a loss of disciplinary innocence, a realisation that historians have always been involved in fabricating subjective ideological constructs, interested representations, rather than neutral constructs of the past.<sup>17</sup>

(6) The postmodernists break down the traditional conventions by which one can distinguish between primary and secondary sources.<sup>18</sup> Objectivity is the charter under which professional history has been inaugurated in the modern times. The historians find objectivity not by virtue of some moral or religious criterion outside history nor by just a strict representation of facts and formulating wide generalisations but by looking for a larger meaning within history itself, a history progressing from past through present to future. But Postmodernists declare that any kind of objective knowledge about the past can never be possible because all knowledge is relative, all theories are equally valid and that a text is but an infinite play of significations. Thus they argue that freeing history from the constructive shackles of objective facts will enable it to become more democratic, more sceptical and more tolerant.<sup>19</sup>

(7) The postmodernists argue against the modernists that documents and sources do not have any fixed meanings, meanings are supplied by the readers as well and consequently as there can be endless possibilities of textual interpretations, therefore, there is no ultimate and objective historical reality.<sup>20</sup>

(8) Postmodernism directs its attack against metanarratives as it transcends cultures, nations and vehemently opposes political ideologies. It also asserts or

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<sup>14</sup> F R Ankersmit, 'Historiography and Postmodernism' in *History and Theory Contemporary Readings*, Brian Fay, Philip Pomper and Richard T. Vann, Eds., (United Kingdom: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 179.

<sup>15</sup> Jaspar Kaur Dhanju, *History and Postmodernism*, 26.

<sup>16</sup> Grand narrative, metanarrative or master narrative is a term coined by Jean--François Lyotard, and originally meaning the accepted narrative of intellectual progress, but now understood as any understanding of historical development, universal or local, based on a major explanatory principle – for example, nationalist mythology or the Marxist conception of development through class struggle. Willie Thomson, *Postmodernism and History*, 132.

<sup>17</sup> Jaspar Kaur Dhanju, *History and Postmodernism*, 50.

<sup>18</sup> Traditionally, primary sources are the lifeblood of history writing. The primary sources are original authorities which denote eye witnesses, or documents and the material remains that are contemporary with the event they attest. By secondary sources which are derivative authorities it is meant as chroniclers who relate and discuss events which they have not witnessed, but which they have heard of or inferred directly or indirectly from original authorities. Cf. Jaspar Kaur Dhanju, *History and Postmodernism*, 52.

<sup>19</sup> Jaspar Kaur Dhanju, *History and Postmodernism*, 58.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

assumes that a “Universal History need not only justify every tyrannical regime and every war to expose a larger meaningful pattern in human evolution”.<sup>21</sup>

There was a time when historians thought they had escaped the merely ‘literary’; when they thought they had established historical studies on the solid foundations of objective methods and rational arguments, distinguishing it from literary studies. However it is this very separation of the literary and the historical that is now being challenged in postmodern theory. Postmodern literary criticism has become powerful and influential across a broad range of disciplines. It has plunged historical studies into an extended epistemological crisis. Therefore, it is the discipline of history that stands to lose the most from the postmodern analysis because it questions the historian’s belief in a fixed and determinable past and the claims about the truth value of historical narration.

At this juncture, a brief survey of the views of important scholar on historical texts shows how postmodern reading of history remains influential and impressive in today’s context. Hence, in the domain of social theory and the history of thought, the writings of Michael Foucault<sup>22</sup> have been a major stimulus. Because of his importance to any discussion of History and Postmodernism, Foucault deserves a separate discussion as he became a major figure in the confrontation of historiography with postmodernist modes of thought.

### 3. Michael Foucault’s Understanding of History

Michael Foucault considers history proceeding discontinuously which comprises a series of *epistemes*,<sup>23</sup> each stretching over centuries, characterised by the fact that the conceptual framework of any one is incommensurable with any of its predecessors or successors.<sup>24</sup> His historical studies are different from a conventional image<sup>25</sup> of an historian as he feels ‘at home’ in the historical era in the process of investigating and recreating. His method of looking at history is intended to influence the lives of present-day readers.<sup>26</sup>

For Foucault, different historical periods have radically different ways of ordering experience and making sense of it. This means that a reader of this century cannot have access to the mind-set and style of sense-making of a person lived in a different historical era. He always insists that rather than thinking of history as a single, fixed entity, complete unto itself, history has to be thought of multiple, overlapping and contesting.<sup>27</sup> Against the synthetic view<sup>28</sup> of history, Foucault conceives history in terms of plurality – a multiple number of events that are as often and as much in conflict with one another as they can be held together.<sup>29</sup> This is the approach of Foucault trying to trace out the multiple beginnings,

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<sup>21</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Penguin Publications, 1992), 128.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Foucault (1926-1984) is a French philosopher, critic, sociologist and historian. He is associated with structuralism and post-structuralism. His contributions in the area of feminist philosophy, gender theory, social, political and legal philosophy, the philosophy of science, aesthetics, theories of knowledge and ethics are praiseworthy. His famous works are: *The History of Madness*, *The Birth of the Clinic*, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, *The History of Sexuality*.

<sup>23</sup> *Episteme* is a term invented by Michael Foucault to refer to his concept of a succession of historical stages, in each of which a range of discourses were connected by shared assumptions into a coherent structure. Ref. George Canguilhem, “The death of man, or exhaustion of the cogito?” in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, Gary Gutting, Ed., 76-88.

<sup>24</sup> Michael Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2002) 6.

<sup>25</sup> Conventional history writing regards history in terms of a single and steady progress unfolding over time.

<sup>26</sup> Michael Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 6.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>28</sup> Synthetic view implies the idea that different events can be synthesized to form a coherent whole.

<sup>29</sup> Michael Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 9.

sudden lurches, forwards, pauses and gaps which comprise of historical events. So history is conceived of in terms of discontinuity rather than continuity.<sup>30</sup>

Foucault's approach to the study of history is archaeological<sup>31</sup> and genealogical<sup>32</sup>. He holds that the archaeological side involves isolating various orders of discourse which lays down the conditions for articulating thoughts and ideas, propositions and statements through which people make sense of their historical time. The genealogical side has more to do with non-discursive mechanisms of power which shapes the way people see the world and act within it.<sup>33</sup> The *Archaeology of Knowledge* furnishes the explanation of his historiographical concepts such as interiority, exteriority, discourse formation and analysis. Though Foucault claims to be a historian, a perusal of his works shows his anti-history stance. Building on Nietzsche's criticism of the traditional historiography, he states that past in its pure form does not exist at all and much of the history is forgotten or lost. Therefore, it is only in the perspective of the present that the past can be explained, and thus past's position of hegemony over the present is dethroned as was contended by the orthodox historians. The 'present historian' embarks on a critical enquiry into the prehistory of the present.<sup>34</sup>

He conceives of history as it cannot reach the 'ultimate truth' of the past, for there are different perspectives of a single historical event by different historians. As theories and interpretations are subjective, therefore, objectivity is a myth in history and instead multiple explanations of the same reality are the result. Therefore, the past is viewed in the interests and needs of the present by the historian. It is a process of demystification of the past.<sup>35</sup>

Foucault considers power as the determinant of truth and knowledge; reason and science are but instruments and tools of the 'will to power'. Similarly, history is no more than a fiction of narrative order imposed on events in the interests of the exercise of power. Thus, Foucault has given 'a special kind of history that focuses on that have made us what we are.

Foucault sees truth and knowledge as the products not of cognition but power and alleges that the main purpose of all historical writing is to gain power. He argues that,

... in every age there was a dominant discourse<sup>36</sup> among the sciences which framed and restricted the possibilities of thought and its expression in such a way as vertically to exclude the possibility of disagreement. Texts, words, histories and so on, were not, the outcomes of individual thought, but ideological products of the dominant discourse. History was a fiction of narrative order imposed on the irreducible chaos of events in the interests of the exercise of power. And if one version of the past was more widely accepted than others, this was not because it was nearer the truth or conformed more closely to the evidence, but because its exponents had more power with the historical professions.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Archaeologies imply that tracing the history of an idea or an institution to reveal its development and the influences upon it, and to dethrone its claim to power and right information. This was begun by Nietzsche's genealogies and developed by Foucault. Ref: Gary Gutting, *Foucault A very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) 35.

<sup>32</sup> Genealogy is Nietzsche's term for the history of an idea or a structure, such as 'genealogy of morals', tracing the different developments and influences through the ages. Ref: Gary Gutting, *Foucault A very Short Introduction*, 32.

<sup>33</sup> Gary Gutting, *Foucault, A Very Short Introduction*, 34.

<sup>34</sup> Michael Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 115.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Discourse is a term popularized by Foucault meaning the forms of linguistic representation peculiar to specific practices or institutions. Representation is the process of bringing to consciousness the concept of any entity. It may be linguistic (oral or written), pictorial or electronic.

Geoff Danaher, Tony Schirato and Jen Webb in their book *Understanding Foucault* brings out the challenge of Foucault against the authority of the historian. According to them, Foucault draws attention to another problem with much conventional historiography – that is, it begins with the notion of the unified subject. This historical view denotes that events in history occur as a consequence of the various motivations and recreate the thought patterns and feelings of the significant figures.<sup>38</sup> Foucault reproaches that this approach misses the point that, rather than people being the originators of their own actions and makers of their meanings, their actions and meanings are shaped by the discursive and non-discursive forces which flow through the positions these figures occupy. It is also noted down that a historiography which takes the founding subject as its basis silences entire categories of people.<sup>39</sup> For instance, women, indigenous and colonised people have all traditionally been marginalised within such historiography as it is complicit with the practices of colonialism which divides people into subjects and objects, active and passive, the colonising people who make history and develop knowledge and the colonised people who are made the object of such history and knowledge.

#### **4. The Effect of Postmodernism on History**

It is true that postmodernism has its own influence and impact on history writing. In fact, postmodernism helps to stimulate some of the best of the on-going work in history. It produces consequences through the opening up of discursive spaces for new subjects like ecological critique, feminism and anti-racist cultural values as well as extending the range of historical writing by breathing new life into some old and rather tired subjects.<sup>40</sup>

Postmodernist theorists state that there are multiple interpretations of the same event, there is no absolute interpretation, no final word and therefore there is no question of literal truth with respect to historical events. The postmodern insights to the understanding of history pay attention not only to what is said in the record, but the manner and form in which it is said and also the silences – the rhetoric and discourse of a speaker, writer, or any user of representation. There are also other aspects like the excavation of previously unheard voices, thereby giving a voice to the hitherto ignored, the identification of instances of previously unrecognised permeation of social consciousness by discriminatory and exclusionary practices.<sup>41</sup>

The postmodern challenge forces the historians to raise complex questions as to how they know things about the past and the conditions under which historical knowledge is created. For example, the ‘master narratives’ are objectionable for the postmodernists. In the wake of these ‘grand narratives’ being discarded because they are bound to be ‘exceptionally power ridden, and epistemologically doubtful ‘local narratives’ have emerged, which are a valorisation of the fragment. These, generally, include accounts of forms of resistance-individual stories told by prisoners, students, peasants and others. They do not lay much claim to objective historical truth or universal validity but are considered as potent ingredients of historical writings by the postmodernists.<sup>42</sup>

Following the footsteps of postmodernists, the Indian historians have started taking on new interest and excitement in topics like army, medicine and even colonial administration and

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>38</sup> Geoff Danaher, Tony Schirato, Jen Webb, *Understanding Foucault* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 2001) 102.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>40</sup> Jaspar Kaur Dhanju, *History and Postmodernism*, 65.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* 66.

education which till recent times had been considered as conventional and boring. A notable gain of postmodernism has been for feminist studies and it deserves a special mention. Feminism has indeed benefited from contemporary postmodernist criticisms of Enlightenment reason, modernity and universalism. As the government archival and other records, being male dominated, have little to say about gender.<sup>43</sup> Feminist historians analyse among other things, the different forms of oppression and suppression of women. They also explore the ways in which women are excluded from the new public spaces in the name of the equal rights of men.<sup>44</sup>

Under the impression of the postmodernists, the historians have taken to the study of 'popular mentalities of memory, of the cultural dimensions and the micro politics of everyday life as well as gender and ethnicity'.<sup>45</sup> The dethronement of the author and the elevation of impersonal discourses to the centre of historical analysis is one of the postmodernity's achievements. Instead of great people it has shifted the attention of the historians to the less privilege; the marginal and even obscure little known individuals. In this way, the human element in history at every level redresses the balance and is a major gain in this respect.<sup>46</sup>

Postmodernism benefits subaltern studies as well. The latter has come to be regarded as the major locus for postmodernism within South Asian history writing which emphasises 'history from below'. It is true that postmodernism also opens our eyes to the limitations and the cultural influences of each era in the arts, science and philosophy. It has made a fundamental paradigm shift in the way we observe things.<sup>47</sup> The postmodernists teach us to pay close attention to the use of language in historical documents, offered ways of listening to voices that have been suppressed and made us even more conscious of the relationship of the historian to his or her sources.

The postmodernist contention is that we need to look at the history with new eyes, and that this new perspective is better than the classical or modern. Postmodern reading of history prefers to break things up, to respect the several parts of social world. When it speaks of history, it prefers to speak of histories. At this juncture, a question arises thus: Is postmodern reading of history a clear and conscious break with the modern? Answer would be both 'Yes' and 'No'. Those who answer 'yes,' hold position of rejecting the grand narratives, dethroning of discursive reason and the rejection of a privileged centre. There are also other thinkers who stress the answer 'no'. According to them, postmodern reading of history can also be seen as a continuation and growth of modern. They point out that postmodern reading of history, for all its strident attacks on the modern, accepts and even deepens some of the central axioms and values of modern culture.<sup>48</sup>

They state that postmodernists cannot do without reason, without notions of life and cannot reject the modern values of freedom, rationality and emancipation. Hence we can draw the distinction between radical postmodernism<sup>49</sup> and strategic postmodernism<sup>50</sup> in history reading.

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<sup>43</sup> Willie Thomson, *Postmodernism and History*, 44.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>45</sup> Richard J. Evans, *In Defense of History*, 184.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>47</sup> Jaspar Kaur Dhanju, *History and Postmodernism*, 76.

<sup>48</sup> Steven Connor, "Introduction" in Steven Connor (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 10.

<sup>49</sup> *Radical postmodernism* tends to believe that modernity is utterly overthrown in history by a new social arrangement in which reality is a virtual reality, in which the differences between fact and fiction no longer apply, and in which there is little basis for defending any specific idea or ideal as more real than any other. Ref. Steven Connor, "Introduction" in Steven Connor (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*, 12.

## 5. Postmodern Reading of History in Indian Intellectual Field

In order to develop true postmodern reading of history, we need to follow certain footsteps in Indian context. They are:

1. We have to look around and see how to integrate the different forms of thinking and the different forms of histories co-existing right around us. We have to be cautious not to make any of them a privileged one, nor excluding any of them.
2. We must foster dialogue with the arts more seriously and earnestly with systematic approach so as to break the barrier between reason and emotion in history writing.
3. We ought to stop looking up to the West or outside India for intellectual authorship on any historical subject whatsoever and truly bring the periphery to the centre.
4. We ought to take various social movements such as feminism, Dalit, Tribal movements, ecological movements more seriously both in our intellectual work and in social organisation for historical study.
5. We should also examine critically the highly unequal power equations hidden behind such trends as globalisation, cultural hegemony, and centralisation of power.
6. We need to examine the role of education in a country hidden by corruption, which was part of pre-modern feudal world and hierarchically organised modern trend.

### Conclusion

The traditional historians do not always approve of all the claims of postmodernism. Postmodernism has extended the scope of history and drawn the attention of historians to hitherto unknown sources of history writing but on the whole its impact on historical theory and practice has been rather marginal. The postmodernist challenge to history writing has become increasingly marked in academic circles. However many voices of dissent can now be heard. For instance, Noël Carroll (1947- ) an American philosopher considered to be one of the leading figures in contemporary philosophy of art argues that even if history is written in a narrative form, it can provide accurate knowledge about the past; this is possible, because these narratives depict the past in terms of background conditions, causes and effects as well as social context, the logic of situations, practical deliberations and ensuing actions.<sup>51</sup> In the same way, Lawrence Stone<sup>52</sup> holds that when postmodernists declare that truth is unknowable and that it is language which creates meaning, it is a threat to history, because if there is nothing outside the text, then history collapses altogether and fact and fiction become indistinguishable.<sup>53</sup>

However, we cannot reject the role of postmodern reading of history as we need to create critical study of the same. It is also true that postmodernism adds to the discipline of history both the potentialities and major limitations. Postmodernism encourages historians to look more closely at documents, to take their surface more seriously, and to think about texts and narratives in new ways. It helps to open up many new subjects and areas for research, while putting back on the agenda many topics which had previously seemed to be exhausted. It

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<sup>50</sup> *Strategic postmodernism* believes that modernity in history is too clever, too subtle in its workings, for anyone able to criticise it from the point of view of its own ideas. Ref. Steven Connor, "Introduction" in Steven Connor (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*, 12.

<sup>51</sup> Noël Carroll, 'Interpretation, history and Narrative' in *History and Theory contemporary Readings*, Brian Fay, Philip Pomper and Richard T. Vann, Eds., (United Kingdom: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 179.

<sup>52</sup> Lawrence Stone (1919 – 1999) was an English historian of early modern Britain.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Jaspar Kaur Dhanju, *History and Postmodernism*, 54.

forces historians to interrogate their own methods and procedures as never before, and in the process makes them more self-critical which is all to the good. It leads to a greater emphasis on open acknowledgement of the historian's own subjectivity which can only help the reader engaged in a critical assessment of historical work. Postmodern reading of history gives ample possibilities for the diverse groups to affirm their own identities and points to the violence inherent in the meta ideologies, for example Hindutva on the one hand and on the other the complexities involved in evolving unitary strategies of liberation. Hence, we can assert that postmodernism is neither blessing nor threat to historiography but it is a challenge to look at it differing from traditional and conventional analysis emphasising the inclusive and all-embracing outlook in the writing of history.

## **Construction and Deconstruction of History: Foucault and Derrida at Crossroads on the History of Madness**

- **Nishant A. Irudayadason**

*The debate between Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida is precisely on the concept of history, though both undertake their project by reading assiduously Descartes' Meditations. While both agree that the history of reason is a construction there is a fundamental difference between the two. Foucault sees the expulsion of madness from reason which characterizes the classical age and the great confinement. Derrida challenges this claim by stating that though Descartes seems to have excluded madness from reason through the hypothesis of the evil genius, he has seated it right at the heart of the intelligible. This paper is an attempt to show how both of them are at crossroads, thanks to two different styles and two different projects. As far the style is concerned, while Foucault adopts a broader perspective of what he calls an episteme within a general framework of the history of knowledge, Derrida engages in a scholarly and deconstructive reading of Descartes' Meditations. As far as the project is concerned, Foucault 'constructs' a history of madness to challenge the constructed history of reason, while Derrida shows how Descartes 'deconstructs' his own text and by implication history itself.*

### **Introduction**

With the publication of his book *The Order of Things* in 1966, which raised a controversy among French intellectuals, Foucault became a prominent figure in the contemporary academia. He announced an "archeology of human sciences," more generally an archeology of human thought. In a certain sense, this book is a book on the history of thought, more precisely, of knowledge. Foucault here makes a periodization: the first period corresponds to Renaissance, the second to the Classical Age and the third to modernity beginning from the 17<sup>th</sup> century (after Kant) extending to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He then tries to identify factors that make knowledge possible in each period, factors that led to the construction of knowledge. The conditions of the possibility that Foucault wants to identify and conceptualize are the structures of thought which articulate from within different types of knowledge in each given period. According to Foucault, these structural elements, such conditions of possibility define an order or a virtual space (not empirical) in the heart of which different types of knowledge coexist, are held together and set out. These conditions of possibility are not empirical, they are considered to be a-priori, and can be seen as the kinds of rules that govern the development or production of various sciences or knowledge.

The peculiarity of the a-priori or the conditions of possibility in question here is that they are by no means universal or timeless: they are not the conditions of possibility knowledge in general. The space of order which the knowledge and rules of construction Foucault tells us that knowledge is not worth at all to know everything, but for the knowledge to this particular time. This "space of order" and the "rules of construction," Foucault's designates the name: it is the "episteme." It will therefore be in accordance with the periodization proposed by Foucault, of epistemes separate the Renaissance to the Classical Age and for post-Kantian modernity.

The first major controversy raised by this book comes from Foucault's statements concerning the modern episteme. It shows that the figure of human person shaped by the humanities is affected by an intrinsic fragility and the emergence of new discourses such as ethnology, psychoanalysis and linguistics the condemned the figure of human person before long. Through his limited analysis of the conditions of possibility of the human sciences, Foucault settled scores with of humanism and by the way with phenomenology and other philosophies related to humanities in one way or another. But this was not the only challenge launched by Foucault.

Another related controversy raised by Foucault is concerning history. Critics of Foucault including Sartre observed that instead of history, drama is really staged. The controversy soon became a misunderstanding to which Foucault himself contributed. It did not take too long for the critics of Foucault to label his book as structuralist and positivist incapable of grasping history, despite its ambition to delve into the past (Renaissance) and to move towards the present. Sartre, whom Foucault had bluntly criticized in some interviews, accused Foucault clearly of missing history and privileging a structural and synchronic point of view to the detriment of any authentic diachronic perspective. In dramatizing the break-off and discontinuity between different epistemes, by refusing to make attempts to explain the changes or movement between different periods, critics thought that Foucault, in principle ruined any history. According to Sartre, Foucault denied or ignores the real conditions of the historical process and the purpose of *The Order of Things* was to undermine Marxism and that its way of achieving its purpose was to remove from history any reference to the dynamic forces that shaped it. In an interview shortly after its publication he said, "Foucault does not say what would be most interesting: namely how each thought system (*pensée*) is constructed starting with certain conditions, nor how people pass from one thought system to another. For that it would be necessary to make reference to the role of praxis, therefore of history, and that is precisely what he refuses to do. Certainly his perspective remains historical. He distinguishes epochs, a before and an after. But he replaces the cinema with the magic lantern, movement with a series of immobilities."<sup>1</sup> What Foucault was really trying to do, according to Sartre, was to constitute "a new ideology, the last rampart that the bourgeoisie can still erect against Marx."<sup>2</sup>

Of course, Sartre's pronouncements caused considerable comment, since Foucault was generally seen to be the most likely candidate to succeed him as the star philosopher in France. The irony was, as Foucault himself pointed out, that it was not so long ago that Sartre had himself been defined by the Communists as the "last rampart of bourgeois imperialism." This did not prevent a host of critics (especially Marxist critics) from rushing forward to repeat Sartre's remarks in order to give the weight of authority to their own arguments. Finally, in a masterful summing up of Foucault's crimes one critic indignantly remarked that not only did Foucault "totally reject Marxism" but also "proclaim[ed] the death of man and the end of history." In other words, Foucault's philosophy was of bourgeois philosophy, precisely because it favored the theoretical structures (abstract) by neglecting the actual conditions and practical knowledge, thus ignoring the concrete history of mankind. It must be noted here that Sartre had written *Critique of Dialectical Reason* six years ago, in which he developed a new dialectical rationality of history, based on concrete human praxis.

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, "Jean-Paul Sartre Répond," interview in *L'Arc*, no. 30 (October 1966), 87, quoted by Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, trans. Wing (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 191.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 87-88.

The controversial opposition between the ‘static’ thinking of abstract structures and the dynamic thinking of concrete historical transformation may appear very surprising to us today. In hindsight, we can take a global view on the work of Foucault, and see that Foucault did not however stop thinking historically. In fact, in two of his important works *Birth of the Clinic* and *The History of Madness*, he shows a constant concern for history and for historical transformations. He has also sought in *Discipline and Punish* to show that prison, for example, far from being a historical invariant, is a political system with its emerging conditions. Further, in *History of Sexuality*, he has highlighted and deepened historicity of sexuality that is considered to be the most natural. In his later years, he worked as a historian concerned with the detail to go back as far as to antiquity to find the sources of modes of constitution of the Western subjectivity? It is no longer conceivable today to deny Foucault of the title “a concerned thinker of history.” In an article written towards 1980 to *Dictionnaire des philosophes* by Huisman, Foucault, by taking a retrospective overview of his works, said that he could best describe his philosophical enterprise as a “Critical History of thought.”<sup>3</sup> In order to make sense of the polemic between Foucault and Sartre in the sixties we must ask what the singularity of this philosophy of history is. What does Foucault understand by the term “history” and how different is his understanding of this term from that of other philosophers? How and why Foucault broke away from other philosophies of history or from the classical thoughts of history by constituting a “critical history of thought” to invent a new way of writing history?

To clarify this problem, we can refer to a later text of Foucault (the last published) in which he identifies two traditions in French thought. There is a dividing line “that separates a philosophy of experience, of meaning, of the subject, and a philosophy of knowledge, of rationality, and of concept. On one side, a filiation which is that of Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty; and then another, which is that of Jean Cavaillès, Gaston Bachelard, Alexandre Koyré and Canguilhem.”<sup>4</sup> From his other texts and interviews, it is not difficult to see that Foucault readily recognizes himself as an heir of the second. Broadly, we can characterize this tradition as heterogeneous tradition of history of sciences and epistemology. In this history of sciences, we question the historicity of reason to constitute a real historical epistemology. In particular, Gaston Bachelard who argued forcefully in favor of historical (not trans-historical) and discontinuous rationality, linked to this topic to a radical critique of the philosophies of subject and experience. The same line of thought is also found in Foucault. For him thought is itself envisaged from a discontinuous perspective.<sup>5</sup> And this perspective leads to a radical transformation of place of the subject and the role or meaning of what is called experience. I will try to determine the meaning of discontinuity in Foucault (by clarifying it from a few elements of this historical epistemology) and to show how it implies a relativisation of “experience” and a reassessment of the place and function of the subject. I would focus specifically on Foucaultian analysis of knowledge. I would also try to outline the reason for the study of knowledge remains crucial for Foucault to probe into the question of power and the constitution of the subject.

## 1. Discontinuity in the History of knowledge

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<sup>3</sup> See James D. Faubion, “Introduction,” in *Michel Foucault, Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, vol. 2, ed. Rabinow and Faubion (New York: New Press, 1998), xiv.

<sup>4</sup> Michel Foucault, “Life: Experience and Science,” in *Michel Foucault, Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, vol. 2, ed. Rabinow and Faubion (New York: New Press, 1998), 466.

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed discussion on this see Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Hand (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

We have already said that in *The Order of Things*, Foucault argued that the *epistemes*, the conditions for the possibility of knowledge are radically different, according to different periods of history. The transition from the Classical Age to modernity, for example, should be seen as a sudden mutation, a break. Thus, even though his book is titled *Archaeology of Human Sciences*, we cannot trace the origin of Human Sciences outside of the post-Kantian modern era. Human Sciences are not progressively constituted by means of a continuous succession but emerge almost without any reason in the modern thought and appear between the discourse of transcendental philosophy of Kant and positive sciences focused on work, life and language. Human sciences have no forerunner, if we may say, in ancient knowledge. It comes from a sudden unpredictable reorganization of the order of knowledge.

With a thesis like this, Foucault breaks away from the traditional history of science and from its philosophical assumptions. This traditional history presupposes a scientific rationality that would be progressively and continuously constituted through the accumulation of data, through the unveiling of the truth of the object. Thus the history of science is traditionally presented as a gradual conquest through knowledge and its scientific character.

August Comte, the founder of positivism, asserted that knowledge went through various stages, from the most primitive to the most advanced thought (from theology to science). Subscribing to this optimistic progression, Bachelard tries to show that the history of knowledge can only assume one single scientific method but the conquest of the scientific rationality has nothing to do with the harmonious and continuous development and of a single seed. The novelty in knowledge comes from a break off from the old episteme.

Foucault deepened this idea. Considering the history of knowledge in terms of episteme, Foucault argues for a narrative “which is not that of its growing perfection, but rather that of its conditions of possibility.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, instead of using linear history, Foucault uses archaeology as a methodology that “defines systems of simultaneity, as well as the series of mutations necessary and sufficient to circumscribe the threshold of a new positivity.”<sup>7</sup> In other words, knowledge is by no means partial manifestations of a unique and profound rationality that would develop in history.

But Foucault’s approach is still discontinuous in another profound sense. The episteme is not at all a “spirit of the age” (*Zeitgeist*). It does not presuppose a larger historical experience in which it is rooted. If knowledge does not depend on historical experience, they do not depend on an original experience or transcendental phenomenology as some thinkers might suggest. Foucault is clearly opposed to the position adopted by Merleau-Ponty who says that the phenomenologist returns “to that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always speaks, and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language, as is geography in relation to the country-side in which we have learnt beforehand what a forest, a prairie or a river is.”<sup>8</sup>

Knowledge is not reduced or returned to its empirical, social, economic or psychological conditions. From this point of view, it expresses nothing else not even the first or foundational

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<sup>6</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of things* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971), xxi-xxii.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, xxii.

<sup>8</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Smith (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), x.

experience: language, life, work are domains of knowledge, not just domains of experience that becomes object of knowledge. The way in which knowledge is presented here prevents us from conceiving it either as a representation of an experience or as a detailed expression of a given. Life, work and language are domains of knowledge and are as such only for archeology of *The Order of Things*.

All these elements allow us to understand as to why Foucault, with his Archaeology, undertakes a real destitution of the subject. The empirical or the psychological subject is not certainly referred to the origin of knowledge.

The Archaeology of Knowledge which Foucault published in 1969 is a methodological clarification of the technique deployed in *The Order of Things*. Foucault distinguishes discourse as the proper object of archeology. Discourses henceforth are not to be treated “as groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representations) but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak. Of course, discourses are composed of signs; but what they do is more than the use of signs to designate things. It is this *more* that renders them irreducible to the language (*langue*) and to speech; it is this ‘more’ that we must reveal and describe.”<sup>9</sup> Hence the elements of a discourse are to be envisaged for themselves without consideration for their communicative value, without any reference to the meaning it vehicles: “In the analysis proposed here, the rules of formation operate not only in the mind or consciousness of individuals, but in discourse itself; they operate therefore, according to a sort uniform anonymity on all individuals who undertake to speak in this discursive field.”<sup>10</sup>

Taken positively, discourses become a new type of document for historians. We no longer go through these discourses to find out what men and have done or said in order to define new coherence of unity or to trace relationships among multiple discourses, at the level of “documentary materiality.” The consequences are “the proliferation of discontinuities in the history of ideas,”<sup>11</sup> “the notion of discontinuity [assuming] a major role in historical disciplines,”<sup>12</sup> the effacement of the theme and the possibility of a global history, in favor of “a general history, [which] on the contrary, would deploy the space of a dispersion.”<sup>13</sup>

## **2. History as a Principle of Dispersion**

For all these reasons, we can say that Foucault’s undertaking is at odds with speculative philosophies including modern phenomenological or onto-phenomenological approaches to historicity. The dissolution of the subject in the study of anonymous conditions of knowledge and the absence of reference to anything contested to be the first experience – be it the antepredicative unity of Merleau-Ponty or human praxis of Sartre) – allows for a radical thought of historicity in Foucault, according to which history can no longer be seen as a unifying process of universalization, but as the principle of dispersion. What Foucault rejects is the pattern of all or aggregation and therefore unification found both in the traditional history of knowledge and the history of the Philosophy of History.

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<sup>9</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. Smith (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), 54.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 69-70.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

Foucault breaks away from what he calls global history: “the project of total history is one that seeks to reconstitute the overall form of a civilization, the principle – material or spiritual – of a society, the significance common to all the phenomena of a period, the law that accounts for their cohesion – what is called metaphorically the ‘Face’ of a period.”<sup>14</sup> Thus the order of discourse is not an expression of first experience or the antepredicative unity. Knowledge therefore does not reflect or translate a common historical experience. Knowledge can no more be reduced to the unity of a (trans-historical) subject, or a spirit (even if this is deployed by many philosophers). Foucault therefore confronts history by neutralizing the singular unity, bypassing the strategies that reduce knowledge to a singular unity in favor of multiplicity.

Foucault is not contented with the subject and the primacy of historical experience. The study of discourse would be characterized as a study of discursive practices, wherein the question of subjectivity would be an object of a new critical approach. Discourse as we have already evoked earlier is not groups of signs but practices. Knowledge that Foucault studies in *The Order of Things* belongs to the order of discursive practices.

[A]rchaeological descriptions are articulated upon other disciplines; in seeking to define, outside all reference to a psychological or constituent subjectivity, the different positions of the subject that may be involved in statements, archaeology touches on a question that is being posed today by psychoanalysis; in trying to reveal the rules of formation of concepts, the modes of succession, connexion, [sic!] and coexistence of statements, it touches on the problem of epistemological structures; in studying the formation of objects, the fields in which they emerge are specified, in studying too the conditions of appropriation of discourses, it touches on the analysis of social formations.”<sup>15</sup>

Recognizing knowledge as practice is to recognize it in its creative character of objects, subjects and concepts. This practice is a particular “way of acting and of thinking” that provides “the intelligibility key for the correlative constitution of the subject and the object.”<sup>16</sup>

This method of defining practices allows Foucault to get out the only approach to the study of knowledge without changing the historical perspective that the study of knowledge has enabled him to construct. Challenging the notion of historical rupture no longer occupies the center stage though discontinuity retains its rights. When Foucault turns to non-discursive practices, when considering the practices of power, it would neither be as part of a general unifying theory or power nor as part of a continuous history, but as a careful study of the technical subjugation of non-discursive practices. We can thus describe Foucault’s research as a study of multiple rationalities at work in the techniques of domination. But again, it is not to determine how individuals enter into the process of domination. The perspective is just the opposite, that is, to see how such techniques (or practices) produce subjects, in other words, what types of “subjectifications” they determine. This analysis of practices is what Foucault calls genealogy. We can say that with genealogy Foucault attempts to identify techniques and the contingent provisions that define us as subjects.

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

<sup>16</sup> Michel Foucault, “Foucault,” in *Michel Foucault, Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, vol. 2, ed. Rabinow and Faubion (New York: New Press, 1998), 463.

Although it is conceivable that certain practices of knowledge aggregate with techniques of power (hospital for example, means both), the relationship they eventually form assumes no identity, no isomorphism of the two. Discursive practices in this case do not maintain a rapport of expression with the techniques of power that they accompany. Thus Foucault always avoids to restore the idea of a “unique mentality” of a “historical experience” that would be the common ground of all practices.

### **3. Descartes’ Cogito and Foucault’s Madness**

After his study of knowledge and of power (which is a central issue in *The History of Sexuality I*), Foucault reorients his research work. Thanks to his interest (though late) in the question of the care of the self, Foucault seeks to identify the different techniques relating to pleasure, sexuality, knowledge. Then he identifies a particular technique called the “art of the self.” This particular technique is still a subjectification, but it has this feature to distance from domination unlike the normative systems of domination that Foucault has so far encountered. Thus Foucault comes back to the free subject which he wanted to annihilate in *The Order of Things*. But it is no longer the subject of classical philosophy: the historical discontinuity of Foucault shows that the subject is derived from a subjectification, and the modalities of subjectification depend on practices (discursive and non-discursive) whose terms vary historically and have nothing universal.

However, the starting point of discussion between Foucault and Derrida was provided by the publication of the major work of Foucault in 1961 titled *History of Madness* commencing a trajectory years that has contributed significantly over the next twenty years to the shift in the theoretical debates of the epoch, intersecting science, history and philosophy. In *History of Madness* Foucault argues that an epistemological break occurred between the medieval and classical periods: while in the medieval era, reason and madness were not considered mutually exclusive and there was a free exchange between both, but the inauguration of the Age of Reason was predicated upon the silencing and banishment of madness. According to Foucault two exemplary and complementary instances of this historical shift can be found in the thesis of the Cartesian Cogito and the redeployment of the asylums for the incarceration of the insane. Foucault’s project in his book is to write a history of madness by constructing archaeology of its silence since the medieval period.

By history of madness, Foucault meant his decision to remove madness, or what he called “the experience of madness,” from the supposedly natural status that had assigned psychiatric medicine, which with his spontaneous and naive positivism, had identified madness with an organic fatality defined once and for all by its immutable traits. The original idea of Foucault was basically very simple: to reanimate the thesis of Nietzsche according to which there are no facts but only interpretations, thus rejecting the hypothesis that madness is an objective fact given prior to interpretations, which led to the explanation based on perspectives that are necessarily historical and therefore subject to the conditions of a certain state of civilization and culture, and are inherently transformable in another civilization and culture.

However, according to Foucault, an important moment of the history when the experiences of madness take place is when the system of classical rationality gets developed. Hence the perspective on madness takes the form of an unprecedented approach of exclusion concretely materialized through the confinement of the mad in a new institution as a visible landmark where the order of reason is restored. What we understand by reason when we read Descartes is a

historical formation, particularly unique despite its claim to universality. This formation is characterized specifically by the way it defines itself as reason as opposed to its other, the unreason, the singular figure of madness.

The second chapter of the first part of the *History of Madness* entitled “The great confinement,” begins with a paragraph on Descartes, taken as an exemplary witness of the movement of thought that justified the exclusion of madness from the domain of the unified reason and caused its expulsion. Foucault offers his reading of the passage of the first Meditation where Descartes encounters madness alongside dreams and all forms of sensory error, which should be disqualified for reason to assert its dominance. Descartes asks, “Again, how could it be denied that these hands or this whole body are mine? Unless perhaps I were to liken myself to madmen, whose brains are so damaged by the persistent vapours of melancholia that they firmly maintain they are kings when they are paupers, or say they are dressed in purple when they are naked, or that their heads are made of earthenware, or that they are pumpkins or made of glass.”<sup>17</sup>

This suggests that madness is a physical determinism: the moods that invade the brain of individuals through this phenomenon literally make them lose their reason of which they are henceforth deprived, and they relegate them outside reason in the sense of true extraterritoriality. As a result, if those who are plagued by madness are wrong, as in the case of those who dream or commonly fall into error, it is an unparalleled way. “Descartes does not evade the danger of madness in the same way he sidesteps the possibility of dream or error.”<sup>18</sup>

This statement of Foucault must be taken literally: from the perspective of Foucault’s reading of Descartes, madness is a danger to be avoided while dreams and error are eventualities to be circumvented. We circumvent the risk of error and dreams because they do not go against reason in principle though may at most adversely affect our thinking. Whether we dream or not, whether we are sufficiently aware of our senses or not, we are still thinking things even if our thinking may not enable us to form clear and distinct ideas on which is established the certainty of our representations. But it is quite different with madness that really puts the existence of reason in danger; that is why the problem is not only to circumvent the eventuality, but to avoid it and to eliminate it, because of the radical risk it presents: in the mad, the mind does not work badly, but stops working. Foucault makes this clear when he says, “neither sleep peopled with images nor the clear consciousness that the senses are deceived can lead doubt to its most universal point: we might admit that our eyes can deceive us, and ‘suppose that we are asleep,’ but the truth will never slip away entirely into darkness.”<sup>19</sup>

Therefore the assumption that, while I believe to be awake, I could well be dreaming, is not without meaning and it is perfectly permissible to consider this possibility. While the assumption that I am mad, even though I think myself being reasonable is not only unlikely, but totally unacceptable and unthinkable since it amounts to wiping out the very possibility of think, whether right or wrong. Therefore madness cannot simply be represented as an error or a defect of reason.

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<sup>17</sup> Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy: With Selections from the Objections and Replies*, trans. Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1996, 13.

<sup>18</sup> Michel Foucault, *History of Madness*, trans. Jean Khalfa (London: Routledge, 2006), 44.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

Madness is an altogether different affair. If its dangers compromise neither the enterprise nor the essential truth that is found, this is not because this thing, even in the thoughts of a madman, cannot be untrue, but rather because I, when I think, cannot be considered insane. When I think I have a body, can I be certain that my grasp on the truth is stronger than that of a man who believes his body to be made of glass? Assuredly, says Descartes, “such people are insane, and I would be thought equally mad if I took anything from them as a model for myself.” It is not the permanence of truth that ensures that thought is not madness, in the way that it freed it from an error of perception or a dream; it is an impossibility of being mad which is inherent in the thinking subject rather than the object of his thoughts. If one admits the possibility that one might be dreaming, and one identifies with that dreaming subject to find “some grounds for doubt,” truth still appears, as one of the conditions of possibility for the dream. By contrast, one cannot suppose that one is mad, even in thought, for madness is precisely a condition of impossibility for thought: “I would be thought equally mad.”<sup>20</sup>

Believing to be awake while one is in deep sleep is to deviate from the truth and to be in error. But to be mad is to escape completely from the scope of reason, deprive oneself of any means of thinking. He who dreams can come back to the state of wakefulness, but he who is mad cannot get out of his madness. This is why madness is to be contained as it is the condition of being excluded from thinking itself. Hence the need for setting aside madness, a programmed necessity in so far as a decision is made, says Foucault: “Descartes by contrast has now acquired that certainty, and he grasps it firmly: madness, quite simply is no longer his concern. It would be an eccentricity for him to suppose that he were eccentric: as a way of thinking, madness implies itself, and thus excludes itself from his project. The perils of madness have been quashed by the exercise of Reason...”<sup>21</sup>

However, this rejection of madness is unthought-of in the classical age: “A new dividing line has appeared, rendering that experience so familiar to the Renaissance – unreasonable Reason, or reasoned Unreason – impossible. Between Montaigne and Descartes an event has taken place, which concerns the advent of a ratio. But the advent of a ratio in the Western world meant far more than the appearance of a ‘rationalism.’ More strictly, but in equal measure, it also meant the movement whereby Unreason was driven underground, to disappear, indeed, but also take root.”<sup>22</sup>

#### **4. Madness as Hyperbolic Exasperation of Dream**

In his “Cogito and the History of Madness,” Derrida offers his own commentary on the text of Descartes, the conclusions of which clearly differ from those of Foucault and even contradict them. Derrida begins with the consideration of the Cartesian cogito as immediate seizure of thought itself, which leads him to “an experience which, at its furthest reaches, is perhaps no less adventurous, perilous, nocturnal, and pathetic than the experience of madness, and is, I believe, much less adverse to and accusatory of madness, that is, accusative and objectifying of it, than Foucault seems to think.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 46

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

In a fragment of Pascal's *Pensées* quoted by Foucault at the beginning of the Preface to the *History of Madness*, Pascal had argued that "men are so necessarily mad, that not to be mad would amount to another form of madness,"<sup>24</sup> which he credited as 'semi-skilled' along with Descartes' unique model of abstract rationality. It is somewhat from the perspective of Pascal that Derrida reads Descartes between lines, so as to bring out what lies between what he says by way of asserting the purity of reason and what he does; through an experience that is far from being clear and marked by ambiguity, even by a certain form of madness, gets installed a 'difference,' which goes deeply into his text, the surface of which was held by Foucault focusing on the fact that "a certain decision was made" as if we were always absolutely master of our decisions.

Not without malice, perhaps even with a certain degree of malignancy, Derrida states that he intends to read Descartes 'naively,' while he does everything he can to free himself from fantasies attached to a reading of the first degree, which takes literally what the author seems to say instead of being attentive to the fact that in reality he can say anything other than what he says, this difference being recorded somewhere in the letter, which is in no way transparent and is always in excess to speech: this is what Derrida elsewhere calls grammatology. "To say is to do" is a well-known dictum since Austin. But what if it were to do anything other than what it says? The discussion that has later arisen between Derrida and Searle about the correct reading of Austin's thesis perhaps originated in this question. What interests us here is not so much what is said as what is written, which is something entirely different. From what is written by Descartes in his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, it is inappropriate to argue that Descartes 'said' it; such an argument lends itself to confusion.

We can legitimately ask what would be a naïve reading of a philosopher, the notion of naivety calling for a critical analysis, perhaps calling for "deconstruction." In fact, Derrida's reading of Descartes is scholarly, which follows step by step the text of the First Meditation, while Foucault, anxious to go straight to the point, did not take a rigorous academic pathway to understand Descartes. By a careful rereading of the text in its entirety without isolating some excerpts from the context, Derrida succeeds in showing that the relationship between the two arguments concerning dreams and madness is exactly the reverse of what Foucault had suggested. "The reference to dreams is therefore not put off to one side – quite the contrary – in relation to a madness potentially respected or even excluded by Descartes. It constitutes, in the methodical order which here is ours, the hyperbolical exasperation of the hypothesis of madness [...] what must be grasped here is that *from this point of view* the sleeper, or the dreamer, is madder than the madman."<sup>25</sup>

The real danger for reason is not the empirical given constituted by madness, but the phantomlike reality of dream, whose potential is consubstantial because, unlike madness, it is an experience universally known and practiced, which neither the great scholars nor the great sages have preserved, and whose threat is constantly weighing on reason that can at least in appearance free itself easily from the charge of being a mad reason cannot be easily exempted from being a

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<sup>23</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Cogito and the History of Madness," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Blas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 39.

<sup>24</sup> Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. Trotter (Section 4, § 414, 2011), 49.

<sup>25</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Cogito and the History of Madness," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Blas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 61.

dreaming reason. We can make a decision to confine the insane, but we can not escape the fatality which defines the condition of the dreamer to dwell in his dream.

And if Derrida's reading is right, Cartesian reason is not sure of itself from the moment when "a certain decision has been made" and has completely rejected this Other – madness or unreason – as an anxious thought, corroded from within by doubt, haunted by the desire not to establish a clear boundary between sleeping and being awake, which calls into question the certainty of all its representations, and makes it extremely difficult to make any decision whatsoever. This is what Derrida means when he speaks of the hypothesis of dream as "hyperbolic exasperation" of that of madness. And by hyperbole, he means going to the limit, the violence done to the natural dispositions of thought, which characterize the trajectory followed in the First Meditation in which the errors of the senses that lead to assume that, "if I am wrong sometimes, I can always be wrong," goes further to a point where we become "hyperbolic" in so far as we do not merely remain in a doubt derived from experience but in an artificially contrived doubt whose consequences unfold beyond measure. It is this logic of hyperbole what finally led Descartes to assume that there could well be an Evil Genius who manipulates all my thoughts even when I form of clear and distinct ideas of objects existing outside my thought as – in the absence of an evidence to the contrary – it is always possible to assume that nothing exists outside of my thought and life is a pure dream assignable without a reality content. And we know that this problem continued in classical thought throughout history, and found some sort of resolution with Kant and his notion that, if the thought is a dream, it is a dream that is normally structured and ordered and its forms of manifestation maintain the right to universality, which must suffice to restore some surety to dream.

If the argument of dream consists of hyperbolic exasperation of the argument of madness, it is in the possibility of dream survives the trace of madness in a modified and amplified form. And in the practice of the hyperbolic doubt something does not work without a certain measure of madness; the singularity Descartes' undertaking consists in this: to save reason, we must get rid of all certainties to the point of challenging our own existence. This would prove that Descartes, far from having expelled the madness from the order of reason, has instead somehow integrated, assimilated, and turning it in his quest for certainty, an instrument, an ambivalent *pharmakon*:

Now, the recourse to the fiction of the evil genius will evoke, conjure up, the possibility of a *total madness*, a total derangement over which I could have no control because it is inflicted upon me – hypothetically – leaving me no responsibility for it. Total derangement is the possibility of a madness that is no longer a disorder of the body, of the object, the body-object outside the boundaries of the *res cogitans*, outside the boundaries of the policed city, secure in its existence as thinking subjectivity, but is a madness that will bring subversion to pure thought and to its purely intelligible objects, to the field of its clear and distinct ideas, to the realm of mathematical truths which escape natural doubt.<sup>26</sup>

Hence there would be some kind of contamination of rationality by madness that literally subverts it, thus madness, far being definitively rejected as impossible, becomes possible. Derrida underscores this paradoxical approach of Descartes: "the cogito escapes madness only because at its own moment, under its own authority, it is valid *even if I am mad*, even if my

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 63-64.

thoughts are completely mad. There is a value and a meaning of the cogito, as of existence, which escape the alternative of a determined madness or a determined reason.” Reason can exercise mastery over madness only when only when it ceases to hold on to it. “Thought no longer fears madness: ‘...remarking that this truth *I think, therefore I am* was so certain and so assured that all the most extravagant suppositions brought forward by the skeptics were incapable of shaking it.’ The certainty thus attained need not be sheltered from an imprisoned madness, for it is attained and ascertained within madness itself.”<sup>27</sup>

Madness, instead of being excluded, is tamed: it can do nothing against reason which, by engaging in the movement of hyperbolic doubt and by building on the ambivalence of the *pharmakon* that is both evil and its remedy, has played madness against itself, so that it can begin all over again from the inaugural moment of the cogito. But to enable this new beginning, it is necessary to use violence, the excess of hyperbolic hubris, which helped make the break because of which reason is returned to its starting point or absolute origin. But this extreme act has nothing to do with the historic step of confinement mentioned by Foucault. To put it briefly, it is necessary not to chain madness but instead to unleash it. Therefore there is nothing crazier than this reason, precisely to save itself, has come to commit itself openly to madness.

From this, Derrida draws a lesson that does not concern only Descartes, but his approach gives an example for all philosophy: as long as it gives way to hyperbolic excess, just as Plato does in a key passage of Book VI of *The Republic*, this approach can not be reduced within the framework established by a defined historic structure, but refers to a trans-historical dimension of the philosophy, which that by its radicalism, escapes temporality. It is this idea that concludes Derrida’s analysis of reason and madness: “this crisis in which reason is madder than madness – for reason is nonmeaning and oblivion – and in which madness is more rational than reason, for it is closer to the wellspring of sense, however silent or murmuring – this crisis has always begun and is interminable. It suffices to say that, if it is classic, it is not so in the sense of the *classical age* but in the sense of external and essential classicism, and is also historical in an unexpected sense.”<sup>28</sup>

This unusual historicity, which knows no boundaries of time and recognizes only the essential and eternal ‘classic,’ is actually specific to another in-depth history that ignores the temporal succession of ages and the constraints attached to its periodicity. The word ‘historicity’ is also incorrect to describe this other history: it is rather ‘historicality’ in the Heideggerian sense that we should use here. Behind both Foucault’s and Derrida’s readings of Descartes, there lie two readings of Heidegger: both readings take place from the point of view of the forgetfulness, one takes place somewhere in the process of history; the other is a return to the original ideal as its ultimate condition of possibility. Hence the following conclusion: the experience of madness can not be included as part of a history where its place would once and for all fixed. Contrary to what Foucault claims, there is no history of madness.

## 5. Cartesian Meditation and the Subject of Truth

In response to the analysis of Derrida, Foucault wrote an essay, “My body, this paper, this fire,” in 1972 which is published as an appendix to his book *History of Madness*. In this essay he

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

begins by stating what the central issue of the debate seems to him this: “is it possible that there might be something anterior or exterior to philosophical discourse? Could it have its condition in an exclusion, a refusal, a risk eluded, and, why not, in a fear? A suspicion that Derrida rejects with passion. *Pudenda origo* (shameful origin!), said Nietzsche of religious people and their religion.”<sup>29</sup>

Foucault means that, by asserting that the classical reason is developed from the gesture through which madness in theory is excluded from the order of reason and in practice is confined within the walls of the institution General Hospital, reason has deliberately sought to attempt to tamper the alleged purity like that of philosophical act. This is precisely what would have made Derrida to make a halt as Foucault settles in the posture of an inglorious guardian of the temple by presenting philosophical act as a religious spirit deeply shocked and outraged by the suspicion raised against the integrity of philosophical discourse, integrity that he would have conversely sought to restore. In other words, the criticism that is made to historicize philosophical thought by rejecting it outside of history, Foucault suggests that Derrida remains camped in traditional positions of the *philosophia perennis*: What should normally make reluctant both in respect to a renewed perspective of historical arguments of the philosophers and of their assimilation of gestures associated to with decisive postures whose consequences are not only theoretical but also practical, as they are engraved on the walls of the institution that embodies these postures.

Having said this, Foucault, stung by the criticism made by Derrida on his negligence, returns to the text of Descartes, even refers to the original Latin text he had earlier ignored first reading and offers a detailed analysis to substantiate his claim of relationship between the argument of dream and that of madness. In passing he also remarks that Derrida, while having carried away by his desire to speak of the integrality of Descartes’ text, has not paid attention to the fact that some of his interpretations involve the additions of the French translation by the Duke of Luynes.

Derrida had opposed the habitual and the universal nature of the experience of dream to the exceptional and particular nature of madness. But Foucault observes that, the problem is not to measure this difference in terms of statistical frequency or intensity, as if it was enough to give it an objective value, for we take the risk of missing out what makes the uniqueness of the experience of madness. Undoubtedly, the experience of the dream has an ‘intimate’ character as everyone acknowledges that he or she can dream. But precisely this proximity to dream confirms its belonging to the same order of reason. Thus “I think, therefore I am” can as well be said as “I dream, therefore I am”: “However much it [dream] modifies the meditating subject on this matter, it does not prevent him, at the very heart of this stupor, from continuing to mediate, and to mediate in a valid fashion, and to see clearly a certain number of things or principles despite the indistinction, however profound it might be, between sleeping and wakefulness.”<sup>30</sup>

This is what distinguishes the madman’s dream: the dreamer continues to doubt, or at least can doubt, while the madman is permanently prevented from doubting; the former therefore thinks and the latter does not. That is why I can always doubt if I dream or not, but I cannot doubt if I am mad or not, for to be mad is being is to be deprived of the means to doubt and, accordingly, if I cannot be mad, I am necessarily led to conceive the experience of madness as something unthinkable and strange unless my nature as thinking being is radically challenged. It is

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<sup>29</sup> Michel Foucault, *History of Madness*, trans. Jean Khalfa (London: Routledge, 2006), 552.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 555.

impossible to say “I am mad,” for madness would prevent me from thinking in any form. This is the philosophical position in which Descartes can be placed, as it serves as example par excellence of the position advocated by the classical rationalism.

This is why it is not permissible to place the experience of dream and that of madness on the same plane and to pretend – as does Derrida – that the former is the hyperbole of the latter, suggesting that dream is a kind of madness incorporated into the order of reason and challenges that order from within. Both experiences are in fact irreducible to each other.

Foucault remarks that when he wants to characterize madness that is in fact unthinkable, not only in the sense of what we cannot think of, but also in the sense that such thought is forbidden in order to ensure the power of thinking. This explains why Descartes moves away from an explanatory terminology in terms of medical science, which presents the mad as insane to a regulatory terminology, prescriptive and legal in nature, which presents them as demented and deprived of reasoning for which they are found incompetent: “But when Descartes wants no longer to characterize madness but to affirm that I ought not to follow the example of madmen, he uses the terms *demens* and *amens*: terms that are in the first place juridical, before being medical, and which designate a whole category of people incapable of certain religious, civil, and judicial acts.”<sup>31</sup> Hence we are dealing with a legal and institutional disqualification that forbids madness, while it does not or cannot forbid dream. This once again affirms that exclusion is attached to madness: “madness is excluded by the doubting subject itself.”

We see that the new reading of Descartes’ text by Foucault confirms and reinforces his earlier conclusions, namely madness in the Classical age reason excluded madness, hence it is reasonable to conclude that the General Hospital is the visible image, institutional representation, the material symbol of a certain kind of rationality. Apprehended in this way, the text of Descartes is no longer seen as an academic paper, a simple review of ideas and arguments, but presents itself as the place where produce “discursive events” take place, an idea that Foucault emphasizes and develops further its implications in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.

How does meditation as mode of discourse become an event? It does so by articulating two kinds of enunciations: first, specific to a demonstrative procedure whose rigor depends on the observation of a number of formal rules, as in the case of any sort of reasoning insofar as it refers to certainty – this was the scheme to which belongs Gueroult’s reading; secondly, to a whole new level, as Alquié had conceived, the one corresponding to a practical tendency, which pursues the goal, not to produce truths, but to induce on the side of the subject for whom these truths are destined for a number of transformations; these transformations make of him, by way of meditation, a subject of truth, that is a subject fully invested in the reality of what he thinks, reality that he has come to assimilate with what constitutes him in his being as thinking and meditating.

Ten years later, in the course of hermeneutics delivered on March 3, 1982, Foucault would show how the Cartesian practice of meditation makes a resurgence of ancient wisdom and its “spiritual exercises”:

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 559.

Moreover, you see that this idea of meditation, not as the game the subject plays with his thought but as the game thought plays on the subject, is basically what Descartes was still doing in the *Meditations*, and is indeed precisely the meaning he gave to ‘meditation.’ So, a history of this practice of meditation should be undertaken: meditation in Antiquity; meditation in early Christianity; its resurgence, and anyway its new importance and dramatic rise in the seventeenth century, he does so in this sense. It does not involve a game the subject plays with his thoughts. Descartes is not thinking about everything in the world that could be doubtful. Neither is he thinking about what could not be doubted. Let’s say that this is the usual skeptical exercise. Descartes puts himself in the position of the subject who doubts everything, without even wondering about everything that could be doubtful or what could be doubted. And he puts himself in the situation of someone setting out in search of the indubitable. This, then is not at all an exercise carried out on thought and its content. It is an exercise by which, through thought, the subject puts himself in a certain situation.<sup>32</sup>

In other words, meditation is an exercise of thought which requires the bracketing of any content of thought, that is to stop thinking of thought as having a content, and to discuss it in its very form of thought, as thought relates not to an object but to a subject who thinks, and that this return to the self through meditation leads a situation of becoming subject of truth.

To account for the difference between these two kinds of enunciation, the demonstrative procedure and the practical tendency, we can borrow a term from the work of Austin and Searle, and say that the former is descriptive while the latter is performative: In the first level, we give an intellectual meaning to the statement “I am a thinking thing,” and at the second level, we actualize this statement in a practical and existential way. Thus, the cogito is not only a theoretical revelation by which I know myself as a thinking thing, but also I make of me a thinking thing. By proposing this interpretation, Foucault goes along with the performative reading of the Cartesian cogito made by Hintikka.

Descartes attributed a number of prerequisites that make meditation possible: having a mind mature enough to be free of passion, ensuring a peaceful retreat, etc. Now among these prerequisites, one thing is essential: to be sane, reasonable, that is not being mad. A madman therefore cannot meditate, because he lacks the qualification to become a subject of truth. While the experience of dream is perfectly integrated into the initiatory path of meditation in which it can even be a driving force. Dream has a role to play in meditation, while madness must necessarily be excluded from it.

According to Foucault, by reinstating the madness in the domain of meditation through dream, interpreted as hyperbolic exasperation of madness, Derrida does not see what is outside this domain and in some ways brings back all discourses of Descartes to one kind of enunciation, the demonstrative procedure, without paying attention to the practical tendency utterance, without which becoming the subject of truth is not possible. Descartes thus fails to understand that if dream is consubstantial with doubt and determines its path, it is equally consubstantial with the rejection of madness whose effects do not occur in the order of thought, but outside of that order. And to interpret the episode of the evil genius as a trait of rational madness, therefore consubstantial with the order of reason and which borders it to the inside is “to remove from

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<sup>32</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, trans. Burchell, ed. Davidson (New York: Picador, 2006), 358.

Descartes' texts themselves everything which shows that the episode of the evil genius is a voluntary exercise, controlled, mastered, and carried out from beginning to end by a meditating subject who never allows himself to be surprised."<sup>33</sup>

We can admit that the meditating subject who associated himself with the hypothesis of the evil genius is someone who acts as if he were mad, by implication of this 'as if' he is really not mad but only pretends to be; but the mad is incapable of any such pretense not because he does not have natural means but he has been historically deprived of any such possibility as he is enclosed in a place where there is no room for pretense. This is why "If the evil genius takes on the powers of madness, this is only after the exercise of meditation has excluded the risk of being mad."<sup>34</sup>

In other words, as stated at the outset of *The History of Madness*, it is necessary that a certain decision was made and was put into practice, that of excluding the mad, and thus to exclude those who, not affected by this exclusion, are not exposed to the risk of being mad so that discourse of meditation may be made possible, with its two kinds of enunciation which, somehow, are complementary albeit in two different languages.

Derrida did not want to reply Foucault, but several years after his death in 1991 when he agreed to participate in a commemoration of the publication of *The History of Madness* in a session organized by the International Society for the History of psychiatry and psychoanalysis held at the Sainte-Anne Hospital, he spoke on a different topic. It is not hard to imagine what kind of response he could have given to Foucault, had he agreed to continue this discussion. He would have refused as logocentric, logocratic, even perhaps phallogocratic, the clear-cut separation of inside and outside, be it through history; they must remain forever as two kinds of enunciation, inextricably intertwined. Foucault was undoubtedly right to point out the practical dimension of philosophical discourse that does not boil down to the abundant exposition of theoretical arguments. However, he yields to the temptation of a naive positivism in interpreting this practical dimension in terms of a radical exteriority, institutionally produced, which amounts to reanimate the duality of mind and body, idea and matter. Thus writing a history of madness amounts to objectifying it and is therefore archaeology of silence, for archaeology reproduces the conditions for objectification. Hence, "is not an archaeology, even of silence, a logic, that is, an organized language, a project, an order, a sentence, a syntax, a work?"<sup>35</sup> Without addressing this question, historicizing can be dangerously naïve.

It becomes then clear that the problem is centred on the assumptions of history. What needs to be questioned first is therefore the very concept of history or origin (*archia*). Such questioning then obviously, Derrida claims cannot be contained within the metaphysical closure of archaeology: "A history, that is, an archaeology against reason doubtless cannot be written, for, despite all appearances to the contrary, the concept of history has always been a rational one. It is the meaning of 'history' or *archia* that should have been questioned first, perhaps. A writing that exceeds, by questioning them, the values 'origin,' 'reason,' and 'history' could not be contained within the metaphysical closure of an archaeology."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Michel Foucault, *History of Madness*, trans. Jean Khalfa (London: Routledge, 2006), 571.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 572.

<sup>35</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Cogito and the History of Madness," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Blas (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 35.

## Conclusion

The projects of Foucault and Derrida are different from each other. For the former, the history of madness should have a place in the historical ensemble, but for the latter this very project itself subscribes to a metaphysical terrain of history inscribed within the binary opposition reason and unreason, which he is engaged to deconstruct. In other words, construction of a history of madness is indispensable for Foucault to challenge the construction of the history of reason. But Derrida seeks to displace the construction of history itself in terms of reason or unreason and thus taken from its archaeology, silence, for instance, will have different effects: “within the dimension of historicity in general, which is to be confused neither with some ahistorical eternity, nor with an empirically determined moment of the history of facts, silence plays the irreducible role of that which bears and haunts language, outside and *against* which alone language can emerge.”<sup>37</sup>

Derrida identifies two important aspects in Foucault’s project of archaeology. First, Foucault has the need to speak of madness in “a language without support” and secondly his affirmation of the very possibility of history in which madness is historically constituted. Derrida tries to show how Foucault’s project of archeology is marked by a certain philosophical heritage of reason more ancient than that of the enlightenment. He proceeds through the Cogito whose “mad audacity consists in a return to an original point which no longer belongs to either a *determined* reason or a *determined* unreason, no longer belongs to them as opposition or alternative. . . It is therefore a question of drawing back towards a point at which all determined contradictions, in the form of given, factual historical structures, can appear, and appear as relative to this zero point at which determined meaning and nonmeaning come together in their common origin.”<sup>38</sup>

Within the Cogito, two separate tendencies are at work: limit and hyperbole. It is in the movement between the two – the closed totality and what exceeds totality – says Derrida, that the historicity of philosophy can be situated.

The historicity proper to philosophy is located and constituted in the transition, the dialogue between hyperbole and the finite structure, between that which exceeds the totality and the closed totality, in the difference between history and historicity; that is, in the place where, or rather at the moment when, the Cogito and all that it symbolizes here (madness, derangement, hyperboles, etc.) pronounce and reassure themselves then to fall, necessarily forgetting themselves until their reactivation, their reawakening in another statement of the excess which also later will become another decline and another crisis.<sup>39</sup>

The Cogito does not inaugurate a new era in which madness is excluded; the Cogito is inhabited by the structure of writing: “The relationship between reason, madness, and death is an economy, a structure of deferral whose irreducible originality must be respected. . . It is more written than said, it is *economized*. The economy of this writing is a regulated relationship between that which exceeds and the exceeded totality: the *différance* of the absolute excess.”<sup>40</sup> Madness is therefore inscribed in discourse of reason so excessively that it includes its outside in its inside.

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

And philosophers, who by a certain measure of madness typically theirs, are in a continual state of denial of their folly by saddling it on others and write about them these very words: “But what? They are mad!”

## History as Narrative

- Keith D'Souza

*History shares a number of features in common with other forms of narrative in terms of the nature and purpose of composition, the manner in which agency or human action is understood and evaluated by both composers and receivers of narrative texts, etc. However, history is also a unique genre of narrative, as it is primarily based on a depiction of past events. It is on account of this feature that history possesses specific constraints unlike other forms of narrative such as purely fictive works. These constraints are primarily of an epistemological nature, as historical representation is expected to be a reliable portrayal of past events. Other constraints involve attention to present and future concerns, specifically the moral and social sensitivities of potential readers and their communities. While there may be sufficient license for personal genius, creativity and skill in historical presentation and argumentation, these constraints need to be kept in mind if one is to compose a wholesome historical text.*

### Introduction

The writing of history is a special case of the writing of narratives in general. In this essay I wish to explore significant themes within narrative theory in order to examine how they apply to historiography in particular. I will first focus upon the nature and purpose of narrative and historical composition. I will then examine the way agency is understood in narrative and historical composition, both in terms of creation and reception. Finally, I will propose specific normative principles governing narrative and historical composition. I wish to especially indicate the main constraints operative within the field of historiography which may not be as applicable to other forms of literary and narrative composition.

### 1. The nature of narrative and historical composition

The word 'narrative' comes from the Latin '*narrare*,' which means "to relate, recount, explain, from a possible pre-Latin word *gnanare*, related to Old Latin *gnarus* knowing, skilled . . . further related to *gnoscere*, *noscere*,"<sup>1</sup> to come to know. A narrative is a story which has a beginning, a middle and an end. Narrative is one of the four primary modes of discourse, the others being exposition (presenting information), argumentation (demonstrating validity) and description (prosaic representation).

A typical narrative asks the following types of questions: "in what order did the represented events occur; what changes did they cause in the depicted world; what do the events (and their results) mean for the characters; what motivates actions and how does the outcome of these actions compare to the intent of the agent?"<sup>2</sup> There is a wide spectrum of narrative *content*, from the religious and the mythical—which deal with significant transcendent and metaphysical themes—at one end of the spectrum, to fictional narratives—which deal with purely imaginary themes—at the other end.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Barnhart, ed., *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology* (New York: Chambers, 1988), 694.

<sup>2</sup> Marie-Laure Ryan, "Toward a Definition of Narrative," in *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, ed. David Herman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 33.

Historical narratives—which deal with socio-temporal themes—fall somewhere in between this wide spectrum of narrative content. Similarly, there is a wide spectrum when it comes to narrative *form*, from ideological and religious grand narratives on the one hand to postmodern and relativistic micro narratives on the other.

There are many definitions of narrative, each one depending on the emphasis different theorists place on specific aspects of narrative. According to Gerard Genette, narrative is “the representation of an event or of a sequence of events.”<sup>3</sup> Ricoeur gives more importance to the linking between time and narrative: “I take temporality to be that structure of existence that reaches language in narrativity, and narrativity to be the language structure that has temporality as its ultimate reference.”<sup>4</sup> Mieke Bal introduces the element of causal structures and relationships within narratives. Hence for him, narratives would indicate, “the transition from one state to another state, caused or experienced by actors.”<sup>5</sup> It is because such definitions often seem reductionist that Marie-Laure Ryan provides a more comprehensive and detailed definition of narrative which she labels a ‘fuzzy-set definition,’ based on a set of narrative conditions.<sup>6</sup> This set of conditions first includes a spatial dimension: “narrative must be about a world populated by individuated existents.” There are two temporal dimensions: “this world must be situated in time and undergo significant transformations,” and “the transformations must be caused by non-habitual physical events.” There are two ‘mental’ dimensions: “some of the participants in the events must be intelligent agents who have a mental life and react emotionally to the states of the world,” and “some of the events must be purposeful actions by these agents.” Finally, there are three formal and pragmatic dimensions: “the sequence of events must form a unified causal chain and lead to closure,” “the occurrence of at least some of the events must be asserted as fact for the storyworld,” and “the story must communicate something meaningful to the audience.”

Most, if not all of the dimensions that form the conditions for narratives are applicable to the specific genre of narrative which we are concerned, viz., historical narratives. A likely exception is the condition of ‘closure,’ which is not so faithfully adhered to in history as it may be in other forms of narrative. This is because many of the causal chains of events as depicted in the narrative continue to have an operative effect on the lives and communities of the historian and his or her readers. The word ‘history’ originally meant story, as it is derived from the Latin ‘*historia*,’ which is the cognate of the Greek ‘*istoria*,’ both meaning a narrative or story. The Greek word has its roots in ‘*istor*,’ meaning wise man or judge. This word is further derived from the Indo-European ‘*wid-tor*,’ whose root is ‘*weid*’ or ‘*wid*,’ which is “related to *idein* to see, *eidenai* to know.”<sup>7</sup> The Indo-European root is likely related to the Sanskrit ‘*vaidya*,’ meaning scholar or physician, which comes from the root ‘*vid*,’ to know or to see (the origin of the word ‘*Veda*’ in Sanskrit and related to ‘*video*’ in English). From all of this it may be gleaned that history is a kind of knowledge provided by wise persons

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<sup>3</sup> Gerard Genette, *Figures of Literary Discourse*, trans. Marie-Rose Logan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 127.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Ricoeur, “NarrativeTime,” in *On Narrative*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 165.

<sup>5</sup> Mieke Bal, *Narratology: An Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 182.

<sup>6</sup> See Marie-Laure Ryan, “Toward a Definition of Narrative,” 28-31, for an explanation of these narrative conditions.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Barnhart, ed., *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology*, 483.

who enable us to know something about the past by means of relevant narratives. In order to provide adequate knowledge about the past, according to Robert Piercey,

One must select a number of historical figures with whom one wishes to engage. One must argue for a certain way of viewing these figures, and convince one's audience to see them as representatives of a certain picture, not just isolated thinkers. One must engage critically with these figures, in order to demonstrate something about their version of the picture in question... Finally, on the basis of these engagements with particular figures, one draws a conclusion about the picture as a whole.<sup>8</sup>

Not all scholars are sufficiently appreciative of the narrative form through which the past is mediated. For some a discipline involving storytelling indicates its “proto-scientific, not to mention its manifestly mythical or ideological, nature. Getting the ‘story’ out of ‘history’ was therefore a first step in the transformation of historical studies into a science.”<sup>9</sup> However, in opposition to this view, most people would accept that, “It is their narrative structure that distinguishes historical events from natural events (which lack such a structure)... [Thus] historians are justified in regarding stories as valid representations of such events and treating such representations as explanations of them.”<sup>10</sup> Indeed, one of the central claims of Ricoeur's three-volume *Time and Narrative* is that history involves fictional construction and fiction involves historical construction. History involves fiction because of the necessity of creative imagination in the construction of the historical plot. Fiction involves history because a fictional work is often narrated as if it is temporally real, i.e., in past, present and future tenses. Also, the contents of a fictional work have to be based on our experience of social and historical existence. Both fictional and historical narratives entail a composition or configuration of events, or in Ricoeur's terms, both of them entail a process of ‘emplotment,’ which entails a composition of “a meaningful story from a diversity of events or incidents ... emplotment is the operation that draws a configuration out of a simple succession ... [Emplotment] brings together factors as heterogeneous as agents, goals, means, interactions, circumstances, unexpected results.”<sup>11</sup> These heterogeneous factors represent the opposite of concordance, viz., discordance. It is this feature of discordance that demonstrates the creativity of the author in presenting the narrative material. While concordance provides unity and rationality to the narrative, discordance provides variety and creativity on the part of the composer, and enhances the possibility of pleasure in the act of reading, because of the surprises the plot has in store for the reader. Emplotment results in the construction of *temporal* concordance out of apparently discordant events. For Ricoeur, *discordant concordance* constitutes “the formal principle” or “formal paradigm” of narrative theory.<sup>12</sup> Hayden White concurs with this understanding:

The meaning of real human lives, whether of individuals or collectivities, is the

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<sup>8</sup> Robert Piercey, *The Uses of the Past from Heidegger to Rorty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 34.

<sup>9</sup> Hayden White, “The Metaphysics of Narrativity: Time and Symbol in Ricoeur's Philosophy of History,” in *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, ed. David Wood (London: Routledge, 1991), 140.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 140-142.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol.1, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 65.

<sup>12</sup> See Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol.1, 70.

meaning of the plots, quasiplots, paraplots or failed plots by which the events that those lives comprise are endowed with the aspect of stories having a discernible beginning, middle and end . . . By discerning the plots ‘prefigured’ in historical actions by the agents that produced them and ‘configuring’ them as sequences of events having the coherency of stories with a beginning, middle and end, historians make explicit the meaning implicit in historical events themselves.<sup>13</sup>

White opposes those of the *Annales* school<sup>14</sup> and others like Roland Barthes—famous for his postmodern ‘death of the author’ thesis—who want to work out a non-subjective or non-personal theory of history. White argues that, “The historical past is populated above all by human beings, who, besides being acted on by ‘forces’, are acting with or against such forces for the realization of life projects that have all the drama and fascination, but also the meaning (*Sinn*), of the kinds of stories we encounter in myth, religious parable and literary fiction.”<sup>15</sup>

There are many schools within narratology in particular and narrative and literary theory in general, each of which has its own set of presuppositions and assumptions and operating procedures of analysis.<sup>16</sup> These approaches either focus on the original intention of the author, such as in Romanticism,<sup>17</sup> or on the text itself, such as in structuralism, or in the way the text is received, such as in reader-response criticism and post-structuralist or postmodern approaches. Similarly, in the literary world of history, there are representatives of each of these positions, with arguably David Carr on the one hand and Hayden White on the other representing opposing ends of a spectrum of belief with respect to historical narratives. David Carr and others of his ilk subscribe to the desirability of maintaining an isomorphic equivalence or a parallelism between the causal connections presented within the text and the actual or real causal connections between historical events. On the other hand, for Hayden White, history is “a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse that *purports* to be a model, or icon, of past structures and processes in the interest of explaining what they were by representing them.”<sup>18</sup> The key word here is ‘purports,’ which signifies a spurious intention or action, i.e., one that is not intended to actually achieve its goal. The position of E. H. Carr seems to be even more radical than that of White. According to Carr, “if, standing Sir George Clark on his head, I were to call history “a hard core of interpretation surrounded by a pulp of disputable facts”, my statement would, no doubt, be one-sided and misleading, but no more so, I venture to think, than the original dictum.”<sup>19</sup> At the same time, E. H. Carr argued that the study

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<sup>13</sup> Hayden White, “The Metaphysics of Narrativity: Time and Symbol in Ricoeur’s Philosophy of History,” 144-145.

<sup>14</sup> The French *Annales* school has constructed accounts of history that focus on cultural and sociological processes which bring about historical progress, rather than on great personalities, their specific intentions and momentous events, which traditional historical narratives tend to accentuate. These accounts typically entail the application of a *longue durée* approach, with a focus on the effect of historical structures in the long run or long term, rather than on specific events within history.

<sup>15</sup> Hayden White, “The Metaphysics of Narrativity: Time and Symbol in Ricoeur’s Philosophy of History,” 146.

<sup>16</sup> See Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), for a good overview of these different schools.

<sup>17</sup> E. D. Hirsch and Emilio Betti are twentieth century hermeneutical theorists who continue to give importance to this Romantic concern—emphasized by Schleiermacher and Dilthey—about ‘author intention.’

<sup>18</sup> Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 2, italics added.

of the facts may lead the historian to change his or her views. In this way, Carr argued that history was "an unending dialogue between the past and present."<sup>20</sup> That is why, in spite of the radical differences between historical theorists like David Carr and Hayden White, Alun Munslow claims that, "both, as narrativists, insist that narrative and explanation are coincident. For Carr this is because narrative and real life are coterminous; for White it is because it is the preference of the historian to view them as such."<sup>21</sup>

## 2. The purpose of narrative and historical composition

In the *Poetics*, Aristotle links *mimesis* with the construction of a *muthos* or plot of a narrative (especially a tragic narrative).<sup>22</sup> Ricoeur adopts this development of Aristotle in the *Poetics* as a basic element of his narrative theory in his three-volume *Time and Narrative*. Ricoeur's narrative hermeneutics develops from a creative synthesis of this Aristotelian understanding of the plot (*muthos*) in the construction of narratives with the Augustinian understanding of the subjective distention of the soul (*distentio animi*) to account for the paradoxes (*aporias*) of temporal understanding. It is this synthesis that leads Ricoeur to conclude:

Between the activity of narrating a story and the temporal character of human experience there exists a correlation that is not merely accidental but that presents a transcultural form of necessity. To put it another way, *time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence.*<sup>23</sup>

In other words, there is an in-built affinity between human beings and narratives, because human beings are project-driven agents who live in time, which is necessarily structured along the lines of a multitude of conscious and unconscious narratives. In a similar vein, David Carr asserts that life itself is composed of a matrix of narratives: "for the individual, his or her own narrative, whether of work or other particular projects or of life, exists within a larger temporal context which is itself narrative in character and which involves other people in a predecessor-successor relation."<sup>24</sup> In this sense, Carr echoes Ricoeur in subscribing to the notion of formal narratives being 'prefigured' by a complex set of narratives which govern different human projects.<sup>25</sup>

The fact that human beings love narratives is well known by the vast amount of mythical and historical literature that is available to us from ancient times. Furthermore, this love for narratives has been corroborated by the tremendous success of the novella over the past few centuries, and ever since the birth of the 'movie' fiction industry. The film 'stars' and 'celebrities' of today are precisely those who lead us into worlds of fantasy which serve to take us beyond our own personal

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<sup>19</sup> Edward Hallett Carr, *What is History?* (London: Penguin, 1961), 23-24.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>21</sup> Alun Munslow, *The Routledge Companion to Historical Studies*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Routledge, 2006), 182.

<sup>22</sup> Aristotle, "Poetics," in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Vol 1, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

<sup>23</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol.1, 52, original italics.

<sup>24</sup> David Carr, *Time, Narrative, and History* (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), 114.

<sup>25</sup> See Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol.1, where Ricoeur describes this notion of 'prefiguration,' as well as the notions of 'configuration' (historical and fictional narrative compositions) and 'refiguration' (the transformational influence that narratives bear upon life).

narratives into flights of fancy. However, the narrative mode of representation does not only contain merely aesthetic (poetic and mimetic) dimensions, but also pragmatic and ethical ones. This pragmatic and ethical function of narratives has been borne by various fictional and mythical modes of representation, and also by the historical mode of representation. This is because some narratives like myth and history serve to answer questions of a specific order (explaining why certain things happened in the past), a general and perennial order (having relevance to a number of people and perhaps all peoples), and of particular contemporary significance (how we may learn from the past for the present).<sup>26</sup> The ethical and social significance of historical narratives is borne out by David Carr's claim that, "historians are often among those who challenge some of the basic assumptions of their communities, up to and including even the basic story which constitutes the community as a community in the first place."<sup>27</sup>

There are many reasons why history is written, some of which are particularly applicable to the discipline of history, while others may pertain to narratives in general.<sup>28</sup> A common reason is that history is written to preserve and celebrate the memory of great events and personalities. It helps us to understand how we have come to be in our time and place, as a result of the flow of past events. In doing so, it helps to provide human communities with a sense of cultural identity. Historical knowledge helps us to arrive at judgements about past events and to hold people accountable for their actions. It also helps us to expand our horizon of meaning by embracing values from other cultural groups. History also teaches us common truths about human nature and behaviour. It helps us to learn about past mistakes in terms of human decisions and actions. This is important, because in the famous words of George Santayana, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."<sup>29</sup>

Peter Stearns presents a few additional reasons for the significance of historical narratives, more from the point of view of why history should be read or studied.<sup>30</sup> First of all, Stearns claims that history is a useful addition to our general sociological knowledge, as "it offers the only extensive evidential base for the contemplation and analysis of how societies function, and people need to have some sense of how societies function simply to run their own lives." In a similar vein history is good for social analysis, because "only through studying history can we grasp how things change; only through history can we begin to comprehend the factors that cause change; and only through history can we understand what elements of an institution or a society persist despite change." Secondly, history is also useful to inspire and cultivate moral propriety: "Studying the stories of individuals and situations in the

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<sup>26</sup> In contrast to Aristotle's preference for myth as a bearer of universal truths in the *Poetics*, it may be affirmed that in some cases history too serves this function of enabling the dynamics of particular narratives to give rise to more universal applications.

<sup>27</sup> David Carr, *Time, Narrative, and History*, 170.

<sup>28</sup> See Robert Brown, "Why Study or Write History?," in <http://www.uncp.edu/home/rwb/history.htm> (accessed on September 1, 2011), from where the reasons stated in this paragraph are listed.

<sup>29</sup> George Santayana, *The Life of Reason*, Vol.1 (New York: Dover, 1905), 92. Santayana made this comment in the context of human development or progress in general, not specifically with regard to historical knowledge.

<sup>30</sup> For the reasons why history should be read or studied presented in this paragraph, see Peter Stearns, "Why Study History?," in <http://www.historians.org/pubs/free/WhyStudyHistory.htm> (accessed on Sept 5, 2011). This webpage is part of a site maintained by the American Historical Association.

past allows a student of history to test his or her own moral sense . . . People who have weathered adversity not just in some work of fiction, but in real, historical circumstances can provide inspiration.” Thirdly, history helps create a sense of identity, community and civic responsibility: “Histories that tell the national story . . . are meant to drive home an understanding of national values and a commitment to national loyalty . . . studying history encourages habits of mind that are vital for responsible public behavior, whether as a national or community leader, an informed voter, a petitioner, or a simple observer.” Besides all of these reasons, Stearns argues that history helps develop important skills. First of all, it develops the ability to assess evidence: “Learning how to combine different kinds of evidence—public statements, private records, numerical data, visual materials—develops the ability to make coherent arguments based on a variety of data.” Secondly, it helps develop the ability to assess conflicting interpretations: “The study of history in no sense undermines loyalty or commitment, but it does teach the need for assessing arguments, and it provides opportunities to engage in debate and achieve perspective.” Finally, it helps to gain experience in assessing past examples of change: “The ability to identify the continuities that always accompany even the most dramatic changes also comes from studying history, as does the skill to determine probable causes of change.”

Given all of these reasons, it is no wonder that the field of narrative production has always had a rich output, and has spawned a great number of theories both in the fields of narrative in general and history in particular, especially over the last century. Narratives in general and history in particular help satisfy a felt common and personal need that cannot be compromised even in the most scientifically and technologically driven communities. Even the materially poorest of human communities and individuals desire to hear, see, tell and compose mythological, fictional and historical stories.

### **3. Agency involved in narrative and historical composition and reception**

In the *Republic*, Plato referred to the process of recounting or narrating an author’s story as *diegesis*, while the process of acting out or imitating or creatively representing the author’s story or part of it was termed *mimesis*.<sup>31</sup> The diegetic mode was used in lyrics, whereas the mimetic mode was used in dramatics. This ancient division roughly corresponds to the distinction in twentieth century narrative theory between telling (corresponding to *diegesis*) and showing (corresponding to *mimesis*). Influenced by structuralism and poststructuralism, today more attention is paid to showing rather than telling. This is because showing places the emphasis on the objective text or enactment and how it may be appropriated, whereas telling places the emphasis on a subjective author or narrator or story-teller.

A typical narrative has three narrators: one is the narrator or *sutradhar* within the narrative itself, who guides the unfolding of the story; another is the flesh and blood narrator who conceives, edits and finally composes the narrative (what we refer to as the ‘author’ of the narrative); and finally there is the ‘implied author’ or ‘implied narrator’ whose identity is constructed or posited on the basis of the form and matter of the story. James Phelan, Peter Rabinowitz and Wayne Booth all give importance to the necessity of projecting the implied author in the construction of the narrative.

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<sup>31</sup> Plato, “Republic,” Book III, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961).

Three primary reasons motivated Booth to argue for the recognition of the implied author of the narrative.<sup>32</sup> One was a misplaced overemphasis on a subject-free or author-independent ‘objectivity’ in fiction, influenced by structuralism, and later, poststructuralism, which held that “defensible novelists . . . must engage in showing, not telling, thus leaving it to the reader to perform all judgments. Praiseworthy novelists must kill off all open signs of the author’s opinions. Authorial commentary is not just frequently dull; it is always a violation of true “poetic” quality.”<sup>33</sup> Another reason was his annoyance over students’ misreadings of narratives, in which they could not distinguish between the three types of narrators mentioned above. As a result, “words were taken as if the author wanted everything he said to be read as straight.”<sup>34</sup> A third reason was “a “moralistic” distress about how critics ignored the value of rhetorical ethical effects.”<sup>35</sup> In recent times, though, Booth feels assured that more literary critics recognize this last element, so that some works, “laden as they are with depressing episodes, have improved our ways of responding to the floods of cruelty and suffering that we encounter in the shit-laden world.”<sup>36</sup> A fourth reason—which does not feature in his seminal *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, but which Booth now adds—is a more complex one, related to the recognition that,

In every corner of our lives, whenever we speak or write, we imply a version of our character that we know is quite different from many other selves that are exhibited in our flesh-and-blood world. Sometimes the created versions of our selves are superior to the selves we live with day by day; sometimes they turn out to be lamentably inferior to the selves we present, or hope to present, on other occasions. A major challenge to all of us is thus to distinguish between beneficial and harmful masking. And that challenge is especially strong in literary criticism.<sup>37</sup>

If we can change our personalities (or the types of *persona*—originally an actor’s mask, in Latin—we wear or present) so often, then would not the nature of the ‘implied author’ also change during the composition of the narrative work? This is a complex issue, but Booth rightly assigns a cognitive status to the work of the implied author at the time of the composition of the final version of the text: “It’s true that the text is always in one sense “out there,” divorced from the creator, subject to innumerable readings and misreadings. But *at the time of creation* . . . the two have been identical.”<sup>38</sup>

When it comes to both the unfolding and the representation of history, we see examples of extreme and reductionist approaches. An example of such an approach is one “for which Collingwood and sometimes Hegel are often reproached. These philosophers are often caricatured as believing that history is nothing *but* thought or that there is no difference between what people were doing and what they thought they were doing.”<sup>39</sup> Another depersonalized approach, but at the other extreme of the metaphysical spectrum, is one “which [sees] no connection at all between action and

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<sup>32</sup> These, and other reasons, are proposed in Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 1983.

<sup>33</sup> Wayne Booth, “Resurrection of the Implied Author: Why Bother?,” in *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, ed. James Phelan and Peter Rabinowitz (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 75.

<sup>34</sup> Wayne Booth, “Resurrection of the Implied Author: Why Bother?,” 76.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* Booth here is specifically referring to the response to J. M. Coetzee’s prize-winning work, but this comment could as well apply to narratives with a similar style and content.

<sup>37</sup> Wayne Booth, “Resurrection of the Implied Author: Why Bother?,” 77.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 86, original italics.

the agent's intentions, memories, and reflections.”<sup>40</sup> These two extreme approaches of modern philosophical idealism on the one hand and postmodern relativism on the other are impervious to author intention, or the role and function of the ‘implied author’ of the historical text. If one employs these types of approaches, however, then one risks neglecting the power of specific forces which influence historical agents as well as historical authors, such as specific interests, an overt or covert agenda, assumed roles and responsibilities, influence of social pressure, etc.

When it comes to the reading or *reception* of narratives, contemporary scholarship largely accepts the fact that the reader, far from being a passive receptor, instead enjoys a participatory and interactive relationship with the narrative. This is primarily because of a ‘surplus of meaning’ which a literary text possesses, often leading to a variety of interpretations of the same text.<sup>41</sup> A specific application of hermeneutical and poststructuralist theory as applied to literary texts is the field of ‘reader response criticism’ and ‘reception theory’ proposed by literary scholars such as Roland Barthes, Wolfgang Iser, Roman Ingarden, Hans Robert Jauss and Stanley Fish. The basic premise that all of these theorists uphold is the dynamic and interactive relationship between text and reader, so that much beyond the limited meaning the author confers upon the text, the act of reading is a comparatively far more inventive and constructive process in terms of the attribution of meaning to the text and from the text. In the words of Terry Eagleton,

Although we rarely notice it, we are all the time engaged in constructing hypotheses about the meaning of the text. The reader makes implicit connections, fills in gaps, draws inferences and tests out hunches; and to do this means drawing on a tacit knowledge of the world in general and of literary conventions in particular. The text itself is no more than a series of ‘cues’ to the reader, invitations to construct a piece of language into meaning.<sup>42</sup>

Perhaps the most well known and controversial figures who stress the fluid and reader-dependent nature of textual meaning are Roland Barthes, who proposed the ‘death of the author’ thesis and Stanley Fish, for whom the text has no rational identity apart from the various identities bestowed upon it by its readers. These authors, however, risk erring on the side of exaggeration and radicalism. For, rather than being driven by random and relativistic features which could distort the identity and meaning of the text, the reader is in fact constrained by a specific range of underlying social customs and forces—besides the structure and content of the text itself. That is why such theoretically relativistic approaches towards textual appropriation need to be checked in the light of actual readings or interpretations. Terry Eagleton accordingly asserts that, “there is no such thing as a ‘literary’ response: all such responses, not least those to literary *form*, to the aspects of a work which are sometimes jealously reserved to the ‘aesthetic’, are deeply imbricated with the kind of social and historical individuals we are.”<sup>43</sup> Beyond these social and historical forces there are also significant epistemological and ethical considerations associated with the act of reading. One may not simply assert, e.g., that “my reading

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<sup>39</sup> David Carr, *Time, Narrative, and History*, 178, original italics.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> See Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), for an explanation of how texts possess a surplus of meaning.

<sup>42</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 66.

<sup>43</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 78.

of what Henry James's characters are doing is much more important than James' intention, so what do I have to learn from him? Nothing."<sup>44</sup> There are distinctively practical implications of the act of reading, which impose epistemological, social and ethical obligations on the authors of texts and narratives—especially historical narratives—a subject to which we will now turn our attention.

#### 4. Normative principles governing narrative and historical composition

Fictional and historical narratives invite us to enter into the 'kingdom of the *as if*,' in the words of Ricoeur.<sup>45</sup> By doing so, narrative 'configurations' have the power to 'refigure' or transform our lives in a certain direction, manner and intensity. That is why it is important for normative considerations to govern the composition of narratives, and especially historical narratives. For, in the words of Robert Piercey, "In composing a narrative, I do not relate facts neutrally. I argue for a certain way of seeing the facts, and the way I argue is by laying out the facts as they appear to me. In a narrative, description and justification are inseparable. I urge others to see the facts as I do by relating how I see them."<sup>46</sup>

In comparison to historical works, the works of fiction allow us to 'see as' or to 'see as if' with more liberty and imagination. Fiction is largely meant to entertain, but to the extent it is intended to illumine and inspire, it will need to relate itself to life and its many vagaries more realistically, as well as to propose both idealistic and realistic ways of responding to the vagaries we face in our own existential situations. Historical narratives in general are more constrained, as they are based upon traces of the past that are represented in the present. However, there is a range of beliefs about how processes of description on the one hand and justification or explanation on the other need to be executed. For Gadamer, historical truth need not—and in fact cannot—aspire towards an absolutely correct representation of facts: "Reconstructing the original circumstances, like all restoration, is a futile undertaking in view of the historicity of our being. What is reconstructed, a life brought back from the lone past, is not the original."<sup>47</sup> Similarly, in his three volume *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur argues that while history is an attempt to 'reenact' the past, this process may not be understood as a one-to-one correspondence with an original or real process of historical development. This is because history does not deal with just the 'what' (the facts) but rather the 'why' (the explanation) of what happened. However, causal connections in history (dealing with the 'why' question) are different from that found in the natural sciences, because what needs to be factored into the equation is not only the human freedom of historical agents but also a subjective evaluation of causal links between related events on the part of the narrator.<sup>48</sup> On account of these factors, not only does one event not necessarily entail the development of another event (in a causal sense), but there is also the possibility that the same events may be strung

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<sup>44</sup> Wayne Booth, "Resurrection of the Implied Author: Why Bother?," 77. Booth, as pointed out, is against such postmodern attitudes and approaches.

<sup>45</sup> Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol.1, 64, original italics.

<sup>46</sup> Robert Piercey, *The Uses of the Past from Heidegger to Rorty*, 37.

<sup>47</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed. (1965), trans. rev. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2000), 167. Gadamer is against the Romantic ideal of arriving at the original intention of the author in the process of interpretation. Similarly, he is against depicting the past in terms of an original and objective causal chain of events.

<sup>48</sup> For causal connectedness in historiography, see John Lewis Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), especially Ch.6., "Causation, Contingency, and Counterfactuals."

together in quite different narrative forms. It is this element of ambiguity that introduces a fictive dimension into the narrating of historical events. That is why Ricoeur does not refer to past events as ‘events,’ but rather as ‘quasi-events.’ Similarly, he refers to historical plots as ‘quasi-plots,’ and to historical characters as ‘quasi-characters,’ because while these events, plots and characters may indeed fit into a rationally coherent explanation, there may be another way of linking these events, narrating these plots and depicting these characters. History, after all, is not a mere presentation of raw ‘facts’ (*Historie*) but a stringing together of these facts into a coherent and meaningful narrative (*Geschichte*).<sup>49</sup>

However, in his later works such as *Oneself as Another* and *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Ricoeur emphasizes the explanatory and ethical dimensions of narrative construction and appropriation.<sup>50</sup> This is because the process of narration falls in between that of description and *prescription*. According to Ricoeur, in a typical narrative,

Actions are always subject to approval or disapproval and agents to praise or blame . . . the thought experiments we conduct in the great laboratory of the imaginary are also explorations in the realm of good and evil. Transvaluing, even devaluing is still evaluating. Moral judgement has not been abolished; it is rather itself subjected to the imaginative variations proper to fiction . . . the historian brings back to life ways of evaluating which continue to belong to our deepest humanity. In this, history is reminded of its indebtedness to people of the past. And in certain circumstances—in particular when the historian is confronted with the horrible, the extreme figure of the history of victims—the relation of debt is transformed into the duty never to forget.<sup>51</sup>

This sense of indebtedness of the historian towards persons of the past—and indeed, towards persons of the present—by means of providing a responsible historical narrative is often not fulfilled by those who have a vested ideological or political agenda. In this regard, Romila Thapar has strong words for Indian historians who have purposefully attempted a distorted and communally based historical interpretation on account of certain vested interests:

Communal interpretation is based on the notion that for the last thousand years Indian history has been dominated by a society which consists of a monolithic Muslim community and a monolithic Hindu community. And that these two communities have always been in a state of conflict. Therefore every historical event that takes place is to be explained by this conflict. This I think is absolutely primitive history. This is worse than colonial history. Because historical interpretation has now moved on to a position where we analyse an event in a multi-causal way. The cause of an event is explained through a range of explanations which we then arrange in order of priority. So none of us as self respecting historians say that an event has only a single cause. Nor would we say that all these events are determined by that single cause. This is making a mockery of history. This is a way of trying to destroy the discipline of history.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ricoeur *Time and Narrative*, Vol.3, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 209.

<sup>50</sup> See Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 152ff. Also see Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2004), especially Parts Two (‘History, Epistemology’) and Three (‘The Historical Condition’).

<sup>51</sup> Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 164.

Objectivity in history may not be entirely possible, but it is a desideratum or a regulative ideal that should guide historical composition, especially with regard to more significant and controversial events and their unfolding. That is why David Carr asserts that, “the past may be variously interpreted but it cannot be wished away or forcibly altered by an inventive narrative imagination . . . Far from dealing with past events which are fixed and whose consequences are clear, historians deal with events whose consequences are still being felt and are operative in the present.”<sup>53</sup>

In general, but especially keeping the possibility of historiographical aberrations in mind, any work of history would profitably keep in mind the four regulatory criteria proposed by Apel and Habermas with regard to communication in general.<sup>54</sup> These criteria are especially relevant when it comes to historical communication dealing with potentially controversial and explosive issues. Accordingly, any historical assertion or presentation would need to be (1) meaningful (understandable and coherent); (2) truthful (without a desire to misinform or mislead); (3) true (objective and non-biased); and (4) right (ethically and socially appropriate). The third criterion has to do with epistemological or objective argumentation and validity, while the fourth criterion has to do with respecting the moral and social sensitivities of present and future readers. Both of these normative criteria are important in the construction of historical narratives.

Another regulatory transcendental schema, viz. that proposed by Bernard Lonergan, may also usefully be invoked here. In *Insight*, Lonergan outlines a transcendental method which involves the cognitive hierarchy of *experience* (governed by the mandate to ‘be attentive’), *understanding* (governed by the mandate to ‘be intelligent’), *judgment* (governed by the mandate to ‘be reasonable’) and *decision* (governed by the mandate to ‘be responsible’).<sup>55</sup> While ‘judgement’ has to do with the criterion of ‘truth’ in Apel and Habermas’ schema, ‘decision’ would have to do with the criterion of ‘rightness’ in their schema. In the context of the composition of historical texts, ‘rightness’ would apply to the manner in which the text is finally composed, keeping in mind contextual moral and social sensitivities. In *Method in Theology*, Lonergan further elucidates and incorporates his cognitive transcendental schema within a series of theological ‘functional specialties.’<sup>56</sup> In the process of the formation of historically-based theological texts—a process which is similar to the formation of purely historical texts—one would need to begin by doing adequate *research* (corresponding to the level of *experience*), then subject this research to adequate *interpretation* (corresponding to the level of *understanding*), and only then commit to the formulation of an adequate *historical* text (corresponding to the level of *judgement*). However, this formulation would need to be governed by *dialectic*

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<sup>52</sup> From <http://www.rediff.com/news/1999/feb/04thapar.htm> (accessed on Sept 5, 2011).

<sup>53</sup> David Carr, *Time, Narrative, and History*, 171-173.

<sup>54</sup> See Karl-Otto Apel, “Regulative Ideas or Truth-Happening?: An Attempt to Answer the Question of the Conditions of the Possibility of Valid Understanding,” in *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn (Chicago: Open Court, 1997). See also Juergen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, Vol. 1, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 99.

<sup>55</sup> See Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, ed. Frederick Crowe and Robert Doran, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., rev. and augmented (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

<sup>56</sup> See Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Darton Longman and Todd, 1973), for a description of these functional specialties.

(corresponding to the level of *decision*). Commenting on Lonergan's notion of 'dialectic,' Matthew Ogilvie states,

Beyond its role of comparing, dialectic has a critical function of evaluating the relative values of contradictory movements. Dialectic thus decides which movements are worthwhile and coherent and which movements should be, as Lonergan charitably writes, invited to a more coherent position. He later puts this point more bluntly. Dialectic, he writes, adds to history an evaluation of achievements, and discerns within them, either good or evil . . . Dialectic thus fills, within theological method, the need for responsibility. It aims to purge viewpoints based on unsound reasons, *ad hoc* explanations, suspicions, resentments or malice.<sup>57</sup>

This purgation applies not only to the past, but even to the present, so that the historian would need to overcome his or her own biases and prejudices in the composition of the text, while at the same time keeping in mind the potential consequences the text could bear in social circumstances. Thus, the historian would need to compose and communicate the final historical text in a manner which meets the fourth criterion of Apel and Habermas (the criterion of moral and social 'rightness') and the fourth mandate of Lonergan ('be responsible'), viz., demonstrating appropriate moral and social sensitivity. The task of a historian faced with the evidence he has about the past, then, is similar to that of a judge who has to decide which narrative construction would best meet these rigorous literary, epistemological, moral and socio-cultural standards. However, the final verdict of the historian in terms of the historical composition itself cannot be placed on the same plane as that of a definitive judicial verdict, among other reasons, because historical works can always be revised, in some cases even by the author himself or herself!<sup>58</sup>

Besides abiding by these criteria of communicative rationality in general, narratives would also more specifically need to be constructed keeping in mind key dimensions fundamental to hermeneutics—or the art and science of interpretation—as narration is fundamentally a process of *mimesis* or creative reproduction. The four basic aspects or dimensions of hermeneutical theory are understanding, explanation, critique and application. A healthy narrative construction would accordingly need to: (1) arise from a cultured *understanding* about life, and about how fictional or historical events need to be represented or interpreted; (2) entail an *explanation* of the dynamics of, and causal connections within social life; (3) include an explicit or oblique evaluation or *critique* of these dynamics; and finally (4) intend a relevant *application* for a specific purpose or audience. While understanding and application apply to all types of narrative composition, the criteria of explanation and critique are especially desirable within historical compositions. A good work of history is expected to provide adequate justificatory or explanatory mechanisms,<sup>59</sup> as well as insights into the nature and dynamics of dysfunctional social relations which run through the narrative. In this regard, critical theory and deconstruction are helpful analytical tools which may help unearth and illustrate subliminal or conscious historical forces which

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<sup>57</sup> Matthew Ogilvie, *Faith Seeking Understanding* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001), 124.

<sup>58</sup> See Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Part Three, 314ff., where he compares and contrasts the roles of historian and judge in the composition of the historical text.

<sup>59</sup> See Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Part Two, where he examines the nature and function of evidential and explanatory devices in historical composition.

are exploitative in nature and often lead to conflicts between individuals and communities.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this essay was to explore significant aspects of narrative theory, especially as applied to historical composition. Different approaches of narrative theory and historiography with regard to the nature, purpose and agents of narrative and historical composition were outlined and briefly discussed. Finally, normative criteria that need to govern narrative and historical composition were proposed. While historical works share many features of narrative composition in general—history being a species of narrative—it was argued that there are also significant differences which come into play because of the unique nature of history. These differences arise primarily on account of the presupposition of some form of temporal fixity within the past, as well as social consequences of historical interpretation within the present and future. While it may neither be possible nor desirable to have a complete and detailed access to the past and to illustrate it via a perfect literary form of historical representation, a historian is generally expected to compose a faithful as well as responsible representation of the past. In providing a faithful representation of the past, the historian does requisite justice to the figures, peoples and issues of the past. In providing a morally and socially responsible representation, the historian also does requisite justice to the rights and sensitivities of the readers in the present and the future, and their communities. For it is the readers and listeners of historical narratives in the present and the future who ultimately have to live with the legacy of the past bestowed upon them by their ancestors, for better or for worse.

## **History, Reality and the Myth:**

### **Unraveling the Interplay of History and Histories**

- **Victor Ferrao**

*The Past is a preface to the Future and a necessity of the Present. Hence, how the Past is perceived, remembered, interpreted, written and finally pressed into service of a particular cause. Certainties, objectivities and unbiased truths have given way to readings, positioning, perspectives, constructions and verisimilitudes. The collapse of 'history' can be discerned with clarity in our days. An understanding of history as the progressive march of humanity has lost its significance. History as objective study of events has already been rethought. Today we begin with a scrutiny of the dependence of humanity on narrative in its understanding of time. The exposition of the narrative dependence of history is followed by a demonstration of the possibility of an ideological underpinning of history, which exposes its amenability to the agendas of power regimes. Next we focus our attention on the communicative impasse triggered by traumatic events of the past, and demonstrate how history fails to capture the same. Finally, we come to understand how the unbridgeable gap between the Past and its construction in the narratives of the historian becomes a fertile ground for mythicization, historicization of myth and demythologization of history.*

## **Introduction**

The Twentieth Century dismantled the objective edifice of History. The increased awareness of the link between history and narrative, as well as the manifestation of the possibility of various economic, political, historical and social factors conditioning the intentionality of a historian, has dispelled the myth that history is an objective science. It is well established in the light of Postmodernism that knowledge, when linked to power, not only assumes the authority of truth but also apparently receives the power to make itself true. The possibility of the omission and suppression of information in the construction of the narratives of history only indicates that the Grand narrative about the objectivity of history has fallen out of favour.

History is no longer a given. It no longer has absolute claims on the truth. Postmodern history has become what its readers have made it. With the waning power of the meta-narratives of the Modernists, Postmodernism triggered a splintering of knowledge that allowed scholars to creatively leap from one knowledge domain to another, only to come up with radically different ideas and theories. The net result of these developments brought about the collapse of the binary opposition between fact and fiction, thereby blurring the dividing line between history, Myth and Reality.

The Past is a preface to the Future and a necessity of the Present. We require understanding the Past to face the exigencies of the Present, and to visualize the Future. The imperative to come to terms with the Past is felt by all humans. Hence, how the Past is perceived, remembered,

interpreted, written and finally pressed into service of a particular cause indicates the complexity of the issue narrowing the distance between fact and fiction and widening the gulf between perception and description. This means that certainties, objectivities and unbiased truths have given way to readings, positioning, perspectives, constructions and verisimilitudes. All this has banished history, which had positioned itself as an immanent movement going purposefully to its ultimate crowning destination under an essentialist dynamism (charismatic heroism of some individual/group, class struggle, etc.) which is deemed to have the power to get it there.

The collapse of 'history' can be discerned with clarity in our days. Along with it we can notice the funeral of an understanding of history as the progressive march of humanity. History that was only teleology has lost its foothold. History that apparently hid its intentions under the noble objective of studying events for their own sake has already been rethought. Today history calls to attention its own process of production, openly flags its own assumptions and indicates explicitly the constituted rather than found nature of their referent, 'the historical Past.'

In the present study I propose to examine how the reality of the Past resists assimilation into the constructs of history. Hence, we begin with a scrutiny of the dependence of humanity on narrative in its understanding of time. The exposition of the narrative dependence of history is followed by a demonstration of the possibility of an ideological underpinning of history, which exposes its amenability to the agendas of power regimes. Next we focus our attention on the communicative impasse triggered by traumatic events of the past, and demonstrate how history fails to capture the same. Finally, we come to understand how the unbridgeable gap between the Past and its construction in the narratives of the historian becomes a fertile ground for mythicization, historicization of myth and demythologization of history.

## **1. The Narrativist turn in Historical Theory**

Narrative is a human strategy to come to terms with time, process and change.<sup>1</sup> As a strategy it contrasts with the scientific mode of explanation, but is in no way inferior to it. Narrative inquiry has gained currency among contemporary scholars. Narrative theory was one of the central achievements of structuralism through the pioneering work of Roland Barthes, Tezevatan Todorov and Gennette.<sup>2</sup> With regard to its relationship with history, the work of Paul Ricoeur and that of Hayden White are very important.

### **1.1 History and Narrative**

Paul Ricoeur holds that there is a deep relationship between narrativity and temporality. He teaches that temporality is the structure of existence that reaches language in narrativity, and narrativity is the language structure that has temporality as its ultimate referent. This means that the relationship between Time and narrative is reciprocal. The world unfolded by every narrative is a temporal world, and narrative is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience. Narrative somehow unites time as passage and time as duration.

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<sup>1</sup> See David Herman, 'Introduction' in David Herman, *Cambridge Companion to Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 3.

<sup>2</sup> See Jonathan Culler, "Forward", in Gerard Gennette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, Trans. Jane E. Lewin (New York: Cornell University Press, 1983), 8.

History is not simply a list of events. “The man drank poison. The man died,” is not a narrative. But, “The man drank poison and then he died,” is a narrative. A list of events is merely a chronology. What makes a series of events history is the causal connection that we make between the events. The ordering of events in history is imposed by the happenings in context while in a work of fiction it is left to the manipulative skill of the author. But there is common ground between Fiction and history.<sup>3</sup> Both Fiction and history require the narrative competence of the audience. A narrative is an integrating process, which is brought to completion by the reader or the receiver of the narrative. That is why Ricoeur speaks of “narrative Emplotment,” where the plot mediates between multiple incidents and unified story. But Ricoeur seems to regard the process of emplotment and representation in the writing of history as natural and limited only by the rules of evidence that history shares with other empirical sciences. In doing so, Ricoeur is said to have kept the political dimension that can illumine how the influence of gender, race, interest, and/or class shapes the construction of his/story.<sup>4</sup>

Ricoeur views the problem of representation of the past as the problem of fidelity. History is in some way a philosophy of remembering, wherein the intention of the author is to search for truth as a faithful testimony. Truth is essentially based on a hermeneutics of trust. He presents remembering as an act of ascription, an act directed to oneself, one’s neighbor and others. Within this train of thought, Ricoeur emphasizes the fact that history is not merely a representation of events. He identifies stages in the epistemology of history encompassing a range of actions from the primary stage of documentation to a phase of documentation in writing and reading. The writing of history for Ricoeur is like Plato’s *Pharmakon*, of which it is difficult to establish whether it is a poison or medicine. The representation in history is an outcome of a narrative act, which releases a certain force of representation. This narrative force of representation makes us rethink our simplistic notions of representation and history operated through an irreducible course of reconstruction, which is its only instrument for seeking the truth. Hence, the historical condition has a fundamental vulnerability. That is why a historian cannot have a distanced approach because of the need of expressing the truth of the extremes of history. It demands a special mode of speaking at the limits of philosophy. Thus, Ricoeur forcefully presents the incompleteness of all history.

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<sup>3</sup> See Paul Ricoeur, “Can Fictional Narratives be True?” *Analecta Husserliana*, 14, Ed. A. Tymieniecka (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1983), 3-19. Also see Paul Ricoeur, “The Function of Fiction in Shaping Reality”, in Mario. J. Valdes, *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 117-137.

<sup>4</sup> Ricoeur’s position on history and its link with fiction is laudable but his faith in the neutrality of the reasoned judgment and in the scientific objectivity is said to portray a position of power firmly associated with a western modernist tradition of thought. Although, Ricoeur opens the possibilities of destabilization and innovation, yet he seems to fail to fully make use of its potentialities as he only connects the work and the world of the work but surprisingly excludes the world outside. Using the phenomenological ‘*epoche*’, Ricoeur brackets the world of the text from the ordinary world and advocates a passive reading of it. Such a position only limits the possibilities of contesting it for its politics of gender, race, caste, class and other forms of oppressions. Yet Ricoeur seems to reinvent himself through his theory of metaphor and the semantic clash it brings in. Hence, we can read the metaphoric process as a luminal space that challenges metaphoric closure, imposes doubts, variants, shifts, fostering play and subversion. See C. Bryn Pinchin, “Essay/ing Ricoeur: A Challenge To Ricoeur’s Construction of Historical and Fictional (and Metaphorical) Truth” in Morny Joy, *Paul Ricoeur and Narrative: Context and Contestation* (Calgary: University Calgary Press, 1997), 141-151.

## 1.2 Towards a Metahistorical Approach to History

Hayden White with his book, *Metahistory* is said to have brought about a linguistic turn in historical theory. His contribution brought about a narrative turn in humanities. It more correct to regard White as responsible for the narrativist understanding of history. It exposed the metahistorical assumptions of the historian and hollowness of the objectivist stance on history. It blurred the distinction between history and literature.

White further elaborated his novel ideas in his two books *Tropics of Discourse*<sup>5</sup> and *Content of the form*<sup>6</sup> in which he explored the notion of discourse and gave clear illustrations of the narrativist analysis and attempted to define the complex relationship of fact and fiction. These two books sounded his clarion call to treat historical narratives as verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much invented as found. His works further established that ‘narrative, far from being merely a form of discourse that can be filled with different contents, real or imaginary as the case may be, already possesses a content prior to any actualization of it in speech or writing.’<sup>7</sup>

White developed his own argument through a critical study of four historians (Michelet, Ranke, Tocqueville, Burckhardt) and four philosophers of history (Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Croce).<sup>8</sup> He indicated that the authors presented their interpretations through four rhetorical styles<sup>9</sup>: metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony<sup>10</sup> – and four literary genres<sup>11</sup> by which the historians figured the historical processes in their work as stories of a particular kind: romance, tragedy, comedy and satire.<sup>12</sup> All this blurred the distinction between history and narrative. This demonstrated that the historical past was the medium rather than the message of their historical work.<sup>13</sup> White manifests further that the narrative embedding of history leads the reader directly to the conclusions that the author had in mind.<sup>14</sup> These perspectives call into question the claims of truth<sup>15</sup> and objectivity<sup>16</sup> in the historical work. White describes historical narratives as verbal fictions, whose contents are as much invented as found, and whose forms share commonality

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<sup>5</sup> See Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978).

<sup>6</sup> See Hayden White, *Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987).

<sup>7</sup> See Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, xi.

<sup>8</sup> Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1973), x.

<sup>9</sup> White calls them tropes. Tropes are originally grammatical terms, but employed by White “to refer to the alleged poetic strategies historians use to construct their texts. The supposed tropes are metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony.” Willie Thomson, *Postmodernism and History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 135.

<sup>10</sup> A metaphor is a “representational figure of speech characterizing phenomena in terms of their similarities”. A metonymy is a “reductive figure of speech in which the name of a part of a thing is substituted for the name of the whole while keeping the two conceptually separate”. A synecdoche is an “integrative figure of speech using the part to symbolize an aspect of totality”. And an irony is a “negational figure of speech denying on one level what is affirmed on another”. Patrick Manning, *Navigating world history: historians create a global Past*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 310.

<sup>11</sup> White calls them “emplotment,” following the theory of fictions of Northrop Frye. See Willie Thomson, *Postmodernism and history*, 130.

<sup>12</sup> Hayden White, *Metahistory*, 426.

<sup>13</sup> Patrick Manning, *Navigating world history*, 310.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 309.

with their counterparts in literature.<sup>17</sup> This means that although historical narratives proceed from empirically validated facts and events, they somehow require imaginative steps to place them into a coherent story.<sup>18</sup> They also depend on the selection of only some of the historical events. Thus somehow truth becomes limited as the historian<sup>19</sup> makes use of rhetorical, metaphorical and ideological strategies of explanation. Thus, treating a historical work as a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse that purports to be the icon or model of the past structures and processes in the interest of explaining what they were by representing them, White successfully demonstrates that there are metahistorical elements in the construction of history.

This metahistorical dimension unearthed by White leads him to postulate a deep level of historical consciousness on which the historical thinker chooses his conceptual strategies by which he attempts to explain and represent his data. On this level, he teaches that the historian essentially performs a poetic act in which he/she prefigures a historical field and constitutes it as a domain upon which he brings to bear the specific theories he/she will use to explain ‘what is really happening’.<sup>20</sup> Thus, White taught that ‘metahistory’ referred to the ‘pre-critically accepted paradigm of what a distinctively “historical” explanation should be’.<sup>21</sup> He called this level prefiguration. It is a level at which historians, consciously or not, make assumptions on the nature of reality, the nature of causality, the nature of human behavior, etc. With the disclosure of the linguistic ground on which a given idea of history is constituted, he ineluctably establishes the poetic nature of a historical work. Thus, thought remains the captive of the linguistic mode in which it seeks to grasp as well as casts the outline of the objects and events inhabiting its field of consciousness. This means there is no proper history which is not at the same time a Philosophy of history.

## 2. History and White Mythology

The Western myth of one history of humanity received a great jolt at the hands of Postcolonial criticism. One overarching totalizing narrative of history lost its dominant position in the face of multitudinous histories of various peoples. This brought the political question of history to the center stage and exposed the imperialistic face of history that masked itself in a single universalizing narrative of an unfolding of the history of humanity. Thanks to Postcolonial studies the imperial intent (creation, subjection, and appropriation of Europe’s other) of such historiographies now stand exposed. Postcolonial historicists attempt to manifest how we have no one single master history. What we have is many competing histories evolved and churned out of the power differentials that exist in our society.

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<sup>15</sup> White calls “nondisconfirmability,” the fact that all historical narratives are equally plausible, or equally untrue. Mary Fulbrook, *historical Theory*, (London: Routledge, 2002), 29.

<sup>16</sup> Norman J. Wilson, *history in crisis?: Recent Directions in historiography* ( Upper Saddle River NJ USA: Prentice-Hall), 111.

<sup>17</sup> Hayden White , *Tropics of discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, 82

<sup>18</sup> Georg G.Iggers, *historiography in the Twentieth Century: from Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge*, (Hanover NH USA: University Press of New England, 1997), 2.

<sup>19</sup> Mark T.Gilderhus, *history and historians: a historiographical Introduction* (Upper Saddle River NJ USA: Prentice-Hall, 2000), 130

<sup>20</sup> Hayden White, *Metahistory*, x.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

## 2.1 Postcolonial Studies and history

The emergence of Postcolonial Criticism brought about the unhyphenated term Postcolonialism as a historical marker. The second half of the Twentieth Century came to be viewed as Postcolonial. It brought the relationship between colonialism and nationalism in the politics of culture in the societies of both the ex-colonizers and the ex-colonized into the limelight. Within this framework, scholars began to study how colonial domination was manufactured, and soon by late 1970s an academic field named 'Postcolonial Studies' was born.<sup>22</sup> The work of Edward W. Said, Homi K. Bhabha, Benedict Anderson, V. Y. Mudimbe, Peter Hulme, and Chakravorty Spivak has led to the growth of this critical field in the academic arena. The term 'Postcolonial' has ceased to be a historical category. It no longer refers to the time after colonialism. It has become concerned with the unearthing of social pathologies, and, as Bhabha asserts, it has become a fighting term, a theoretical weapon that deconstructs the Euro-centrism and cultural racism of the west. Hence, the objects of postcolonial deconstruction become literature, history, paintings, photography, film, video, television etc. Thus there came about the subalternizing and silencing of the colonialist apparatus of domination and knowledge production and recovery of varieties of indigenous knowledge forms.

Within the context of writing history, a variety of 'histories from below' sprang up. These new works exposed the Eurocentric face of history. They demonstrated how history becomes a European technology destined for the creation, subjection and domination of Europe's 'other'. The assertion of the meta-historical and non-historical character of the East constituted the eastern people and their territories as ontological essences rather than historical entities.<sup>23</sup> Said argued that Orientalism deployed a mythic discourse that concealed its own origin and those of what it describes.<sup>24</sup> Thus, we can see how under the weight of Orientalism of the West, Hegel declared that Africa had no history, and Karl Marx, though critical of British imperialism, conceded that British colonization of India was best because it brought India into the evolutionary narrative of western history thus creating a condition for a future class struggle there.

The reduction of Europe's other to the status of a '*tabula rasa*' or an ahistorical entity legitimated and even hid the imperial intent which thereafter put on a mask of a civilizing mission. Thanks to Postcolonial studies, it has become clear that the relation of domination and exploitation reproduced and maintained itself through the engagement of complex technologies like the historiography of imperial standing, cultural technologies, military technologies,

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<sup>22</sup> This does not mean that there were no works that can be regarded as postcolonial before the institutionalization of the postcolonial studies as an academic field of specialization before the late 1970s. there was a large amount of work, much of it was of abiding significance. There came up political studies of the state-formation in the newly decolonized countries of Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean; economic and sociological studies of development and underdevelopment and historical accounts of anti-colonial nationalism. The word 'postcolonial' occasionally appeared in these studies, but it did not come to mean the way we use it today in the context of postcolonial studies. See Niel Lazarus, 'Introducing Postcolonial Studies' in Niel Lazarus, Ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1-16.

<sup>23</sup> See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1979), 97.

<sup>24</sup> Nicolas B. Dirks, "Colonial histories: and Native Informant: Biography and Archive," in Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer, ed., *Orientalism and Post-colonial Predicament* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1993), 280.

administrative technologies etc. Thus, the Eurocentric master narrative stands discredited and contested and its stereotypes questioned resulting in the manifestation of its rootedness in the power/knowledge paradigm of imperialism.

## 2.2 History and Historicism

Historicism is a critical movement that has existed in some form from ancient times. Historicists insist on the importance of the historical context for the interpretation of texts of all kinds. This movement emerged as a reaction to the practice of deducing from first principles truths about how people are organized to organize themselves socially and politically. Historicists reject this essentialist and positivist tradition which is primarily associated with the Enlightenment, and which distilled itself in different forms, from the seventeenth century natural-law theorists to the sophisticated speculations of Kant and Hegel. They oppose such universalization and affirm social and cultural diversity different from the scientific, law-governed Enlightenment paradigm.

Romantic aesthetics that holds that human richness is unmeasured by scientific calculation and is best equated with natural grandeur similarly exceeding computation, immediately became a natural ally of the historicists. From Schleiermacher to Gadamer, the hermeneutic tradition has struggled to recast this aesthetic heritage in order to show that history is a kind of knowledge that complements the natural sciences. Thus, it came to be accepted that all experience not coming under scientific jurisdiction need not be confined to a non-cognitive aesthetic which lays no claim to be true. This means the anti-Enlightenment historicism situates any statement, philosophical, historical, aesthetic or whatever in its historical context and examines how it reflects the interest and bias of its author and period.

Historicists invite us to interpret the Past as we interpret a text. Hermeneutics teaches us that a text has meaning within the economy of other texts which both limit their possibilities and facilitate their distinctive utterances. This means that the meaning of a text is limited by the value accorded to its discourse within the culture of its first audience. Historicists strive to unearth how the construction of the historical text has been influenced by the world of its first audience, and at the same time the text exhibits openness to new meanings that might evolve in subsequent historical periods. This means that society somehow tailors the criteria of objectivity to fit its own interests from time to time, and as a result meaning economies shift to suit the said interest.

As regards history, historicists attempt to use their knowledge of the Past to illuminate the problems of the Presents as well as to project the course of the Future.<sup>25</sup> Friedrich Meinecke's great book, *Die Entstehung des Historismus*, in reaction to the Enlightenment, had progressively relativized all historical truths, making them a function of the group or particular culture to which they belonged. Meinecke represented a growing resistance in Europe to a strongly influential idea that human beings observe laws of their own nature that are everywhere constant and invariable. His view totally contradicted the natural law tradition which held that all human societies were ruled by the same rationality by which they had formed themselves to escape the perils of the lawless state of nature.

By the time of Hegel and Marx, the idea that the fundamental ways of human thinking about and acting within the world are different from culture to culture and change from one historical era to

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<sup>25</sup> This what Karl Popper call the poverty of historicism. See Karl R. Popper, *The Poverty of historicism* (London, 1961), 143-152.

another had become commonplace.<sup>26</sup> This means that historicism taught that every human being is historically conditioned, and humanity did not share one single universal history. This does not mean that the reason-based historical universalism of the Enlightenment was progressively superseded by historicism. Rather, it was slowly dislodged by a severe attack on the myth of continuities in history based on a radical dialectic of the Past and the Present. With the work of Michel Foucault, the continuities between the Past and the Present were shown to be a deception. This means that we have many histories both globally as well as locally. This led historicists to unearth the counter-memories within a given society, which show that there are indeed many histories in most radical sense. Moreover the Foucaultian reduction of truth to power exposed how we not only have many histories: we have many competing histories. This radicalization of historicism renders the narrativisation of history open to the entry of fiction and myth, leading to the acceptance of the narrative of the winners. This radicalization of historicism is called New Historicism.

### **3. History and Discursive Trauma**

Jean Francois Lyotard has cited the atrocity of the Holocaust as a point where we reach a discursive deadlock in language and narrative representation. He states that the trauma of the event is such that we are no longer able to express it in our discourse. His view opens up the psychic dimension of textuality – the domain of the unexpressed and the inexpressible that refuses to grant us full mastery over it. A traumatic event resists its narrative materialization and any attempt to do so takes us to a point where language, narrative and history break down.

#### **3.1 Uttering the Unutterable**

Discursive trauma does not merely refer to the presence of the unarticulated story but the unarticulatable story. Adorno teaches that as long as the Past does not live in the Present we can be said to have come terms with Past. The fact that the spell of the Past somehow remains active in our Present only goes to show that the trauma of the Past continues to affect us and it will continue to afflict us until we heal it through mourning. (p. 10)

We experience the Past as an anteriority that continuously introduces an otherness or alterity within the Present. It makes the Present as a form of contemporaneity that is always belated. The traumatic tension undergirds all that is articulated about the wounded Past and somehow converts its text into testimonies to the unspeakable moments of pain and the wounds of the Past. Thus, the text of history that seeks to articulate the trauma of the Past can only say that something went tragically wrong in the Past. This means the intensity and terribleness of Past traumatic events places both narrative and linguistic limitations on their articulations.

Lyotard states that Auschwitz, the concentration camp in which many thousands of Jews were slaughtered during the Second World War, marks a moment in which much of the history and thought of Western civilization collapses. The historian account of the terrible tragedy remains incomplete as the trauma resists all linguistic articulation. As there are no eye-witnesses other than the dead the event builds an impasse for its accurate articulation. Moreover, even if one finds a survivor of the deadly gas chambers it somehow cancels of his ability to be a witness as it point out that the chambers could not have been as murderous as popularly supposed.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> See ----‘historicism and Human Diversity’ in <http://people.whiteman.edu> accessed on 2/8/2011.

Tragic events like the Holocaust, the Partition of India, the Gujarat Riots etc., will always remain in the realm of discursive trauma. They will always appear to be incomplete because so many of the documents and witnesses remain deliberately and systematically destroyed. Besides the partial historical evidence, the sheer tragic character of these events resists their narrative as well as linguistic articulation. This means that somehow we are left with a sense of wrong, coupled with a lack of means to prove it. These events not only impose injury on their victims but also employ an apparatus of power that successfully silences any possibility of the victims testifying to the injuries they suffered. But this silence imposed on the possibility of testifying cannot impose the silence of forgetting, and these events transcend the genre of history and enter the social memory of the people as icons of great moral degradation. Thus for instance, according to Lyotard, the Holocaust has a feeling attached to it – a feeling arising from the wrong. This feeling becomes a ‘sign’ which explodes the empirical historical account by transforming Auschwitz from being just one more event in the continuity of history into something that calls the thinker to venture forth, by lending his or her ear to what is not presentable under the laws of history.<sup>28</sup> Hence, these events become symbols that somehow operate as an ethical call addressed to us to understand, discuss and work to bring about sense of closure through justice and forgiveness.

### 3.2 Figuring the Non-figural

The non-figural is what is present as an absence. It invites us to focus our attention not so much on what is said but on its “How” and “To What Effect”. As meaning is inter-subjectively produced, a significant part of the meaning resides in the fusion of horizons between the text of history and its readers. This means that the reader is challenged to figure out what lies behind, between and beyond the text, and thus to strive to reach the domain of the inexpressible. This takes us to the Presence that exceeds the narrative discourse.

Perhaps Lacan’s notion of ‘real’ might bring to light how the non-figural operates in our lives. He teaches that the ‘real’ refers to that which cannot be directly inscribed or experienced, such as death or sexual difference but which keeps insisting and manifesting its presence through repetition. Žižek clarifies it further when he says that it is something that persists as failed, missed, a shadow that dissolves as soon as we try to grasp it in its positive nature. In this light he elaborates that it is precisely what defines the traumatic event: a point of failure of symbolization, but at the same time never given in its positivity. It can only be construed backwards, from its structural effects.<sup>29</sup>

Trauma becomes a paradoxical structure because it works by means of indirectness. It manifests itself through and as its consequences, its aftermaths and effects and is not itself directly accessible to the consciousness or memory. Thus, Trauma breaks up the forward movement of time and becomes like an experience of death-in-life. It can be seen as a story of the wound that cries out, that addresses us in its attempt to tell us the reality of the truth that is not otherwise available. Hence, the articulation of a traumatic event in the narration of history attempts to tell the tragic story of something that resists our fuller comprehension. It can be only figured out

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<sup>27</sup> See Simon Malpas, *Jean-Francois Lyotard* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 69-70.

<sup>28</sup> See Simon Malpas, *Jean-Francois Lyotard*, 72-73.

<sup>29</sup> See Christine Van Boheemen-Saaf, *Joyce, Derrida and Lacan and the Trauma of history: Reading , narrative and Postcolonialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 19.

from its effects in ‘another place’ and in ‘another time’. In other words, the temporal logic of past trauma effectively remains in the horizon of our consciousness and profoundly influences it. Thus traumatic events belong to the non-figural as we can only know them on the basis of their effects.<sup>30</sup>

These effects can be traced in the historiographical approaches that seek to narrate various traumatic events. This means that the historical narrations of traumatic events bestow an intense traumatic textuality to these texts. Scholars point out that literary works of the Irish writer James Joyce exhibit such a traumatic textuality. I have also found that the works of Hindu historians on the colonial past of Goa also exhibit it very significantly. Traumatic textuality is an indicator of the performative effect of the presence of the ‘real’ on the text.

#### **4. Problematizing History**

From our discussion we have understood that there is a radical distinction between ‘history’ and ‘the past’. From this point of view history or rather histories become various accounts of ‘the past’. Scholars like Tony Bennett subsume the above notion of history into historiography as it somehow theorizes both the notion of ‘the Past’ and ‘writing-up’ of it. There is an inherent incongruence between correspondence and coherence as historical representation depends on the representability of events and not on their reality as such.

History in its various forms involves an engagement with past realities which are believed to have had existence outside our representation of them. Hence, one might say that the past inevitably escapes us, that words, names, signs, functions – our fragile instruments of research and scholarship – are only monetarily empowered to capture the reality of the past. The knowledge of the lived experience, understood repository of life is always slipping away. We can only be satisfied with imperfect histories. The question of representability has made the practice of engaging the past more one of humility than one of mastery.

##### **4.1 Representability and History**

Representability involves the capacity to synthesize information in such a way as to produce a meaningful discourse on the past. There is a void that needs to be bridged between information available on the past and the conceptual and discursive models we have to talk about the past. Writing history inevitably brings about a threefold distantiation from the past. We have already seen that narrative dependence in our understanding of time brings the limitations of the narrative schemes into the writing of history. This means that the past to a large extent refuses to close into our narrative schemes. Let us call this the first distantiation. This narrative dependence of history creates an illusion of continuity and a progressive march. The postulate of continuity hides the ordering of the narrative in the hands of the historians. There is a strong link between narrativity, continuity and teleology. The continuity and telic characterization of history linearizes it and to a large extent serves the empire by constructing an impression of totalization of history as having a progressive goal. Almost all narratives of history are trapped in the logic of continuity and teleology.

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 20.

Our discussion has manifested with great clarity the possibility of ideological frameworks and power regimes influencing or even distorting the narration of Past. Indeed no historical narrative is ideologically free. Different power regimes attempt to promote their agenda through the use of ideology to control history. History is not neutral. It has always been on the side of the victors. History names, defines and assigns the space of its other and organizes it under its rule. The same/other dialectic is operative in the construction of history. The other is first constituted by the same (by its negation as the other) before being incorporated within it. It is ideology that creates and sustains the same other dialectics. This openness to be manipulated by ideological frameworks can be seen as the second distantiation. This is why there is no room for women in history. All history is patriarchal. 'Her'story' is not part of 'His'-story'.

'Millions of people still live outside history' says Ashis Nandy. These people do have an idea of their Past. They do somehow understand that understanding of the Past shapes their Present and the Future and yet they live with a Past that is different from the one that is constructed and Presented by the so-called historian. Historians of all colors and hues may denigrate such people as ahistoricals and use their historiography to ignite a historical consciousness and thus bring the ahistoricals into history.

Some may even acknowledge the sense of the past exhibited by ahistoricals, giving it the status of a quasi-history, and in the same breath delude themselves into believing that they have liberated the historical selves of the ahistoricals. These historians of imperial standing (my way of describing them) seem to have a totalizing historical consciousness that seems to prove the truth of the dictum: 'once you own history, it also begins to own you'. The conquest of the past through history ends up in the enslavement of the self to that past. That is why all history is political. It produces power equations and almost always serves the rulers. George Orwell is said to have pointedly articulated the same when he said 'those who own the past own the present' That is, why those who lay a claim over part of our past also attempt shape a part of our present.

The third distantiation is brought about by traumatic events. A traumatic event escapes conscious articulation and it is only through repetition and replay that the event may crystallize into a narrative. Thus, the writing of history can become an acting out or a performative speech act of the trauma rather than a constative speech act which portrays it. Thus, the writing of history opens itself to the psychic process in the narration of a traumatic event. In this context, somehow, writing history becomes co-extensive with life, which means that writing becomes living. This makes the text both presentational as well as representational. This means the narratives of traumatic events become substitutes for what cannot be told because it cannot be remembered. Thus history provides an embodied location to the inexpressible trauma of the past but keeps it open and undecided. This can further generate performative actions whereby the trauma remains liminal. Thus, in the text of the history we can read the 'real'.<sup>31</sup> This converts both the writing and the reading of the history of traumatic events into a therapeutic exercise.

## 4.2 History and the Past

The three levels of distantiation of a text of history open the possibility of a surplus dimension being embedded. This renders the text double-voiced. This means the triple distantiation that we

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<sup>31</sup> Christine Van Boheemen-Saaf, Joyce, Derrida and Lacan and the Trauma of history: Reading, narrative and Postcolonialism, 27

discussed renders the narrative of history heteroglot, and it can be shown to possess a multiplicity of meanings. But before the three distantiations that we have considered above, we have one foundational distinction, the distantiation between the past and our construction of it in the narratives of history. It is this basic inability of representation that becomes the germinating ground for the entry of myth into our understanding of the past.

The gap between the past and our attempt to capture it through our historical constructs can be seen as the fourth distantiation. This fourth distantiation makes our past polysemous and as such resists its assimilation into the monosemy of our narratives of history. The resistance of the assimilation of the past into the categories of history makes it clear that it is laden with surplus meaning. It shows that the past is characterized by its otherness. This allows for the interpretation and re-interpretation of history.

Thus, history itself being an interpretation becomes polysemous and renders itself open to multiple interpretation. The polysemous dimension of history is not its weakness but its strength as it provides opportunity for its deconstruction and re-interpretation. Although the power regimes often use this dimension of history to suit their purposes, it makes room for an alternative interpretation that might dismantle the oppressive agenda of those power regimes. This means that history allows both its mythologization and demythologization

## **5. Interpreting History**

History itself is an interpretation of the past and as such already becomes an acting out or a performative act of interpretation. That is why, we might say that although history is a representation of the past, it is simultaneously a performative act of interpretation and as such becomes a presentation of the hermeneutical process. This means history becomes simultaneously presentation of the hermeneutical process as well as a representation of the past.

### **5.1 History and the Performative Act of Interpretation**

After Michel Foucault it has become clear that all our thinking is rooted in the knowledge matrix that he christens as episteme. Within his dialogic discursive system that shapes knowledge episteme connotes a set of total relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to different constellations of knowledge. This means episteme operates as an ordering principle that sets the discursive practices into motion while at the same time delineating their boundaries. So the episteme becomes a strategic apparatus that constrains and filters, and provides the epistemic underpinnings of what passes off as knowledge in a given society. Hence, what we understand as Past and discursively construe as history is undergirded by the episteme of that era. Foucault has further shown that there have been epistemic shifts in the course of the history of the European society.

Foucault's concept of episteme is shown to exhibit remarkable similarity with Thomas Kuhn's concept of paradigm in the context of science. Besides Kuhn, one might say that episteme also shares common territory with Raimundo Panikkar's concept of Mythos / Myth. Myth provides the horizon for one's understanding and orientation towards existence as such. Myth is like experience, and as such it is both immediate and ultimately real – and beyond it none can go. Thus myth is that which is taken for granted or remains unquestioned because de facto it is not seen as questionable. The moment we question our mythos we enter a different

realm of consciousness, the domain of logos, and the realm of language, reasoning and knowledge. This means that mythos remains as the realm of the unthought and logos becomes the realm of the thought. In this sense myth exists as an unarticulated experience, a perspective or a horizon through which we see and experience our world. The moment myth becomes an object of discourse it is transformed into a mythology.

The logos is deeply embedded in the mythos and the two are inseparable. But we can distinguish one from the other. The mythos expresses itself as myths. Although myths are the logos of the mythos they cannot exhaust the mythos. To reduce mythos only to the logos is to reduce it to mythology. This means that there is a distance between the mythos and the logos. We need to realize that our understanding of the Past and its subsequent articulation in the categories of history is profoundly animated by mythos. Thus, we can understand that we have arrived at the fifth distantiation – which characterizes the distance between mythos and the logos of history. Thus, the writing of history becomes a performative act which draws its understanding of the past from the mythos of the society in which history is written. This distantiation allows among other things allows the mythicization of history<sup>32</sup> and historicization of myth.<sup>33</sup>

## 5.2 History and the Discursive Dis-stability

The fivefold distantiations that we have studied in this paper manifest the existence of an unbridgeable gap between the construction of history and the reality of the past. Although the five distantiations in this study may overlap to a large extent, they together indicate loudly the presence of this void that seems to become what, for want of a better word, we may term as discursive dis-stability. Discursive dis-stability is a condition that attempts to capture the Zizekian thesis that the truth of something is elsewhere. The identity of something is outside of itself. There is as it were, a hole in everything, a little piece missing that exists beyond itself, revealing the truth of that thing. (p. 6)

Although a historian is embedded in a discursive dis-stability, he or she somehow articulates what might otherwise be regarded based the logic of the five distantiations as un-sayable. This means that the construction of history is impeded by the presence of a gap,<sup>34</sup> a lack that seems to transform that construction into a performative act or the acting out of discursive dis-stability. In some way a historian is saying something that he/she should not have said. This awareness leads

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<sup>32</sup> Peter Berger teaches that the mythicization of the socially constructed , precarious ‘nomos’ (the social order) in the sacred mode (cosmisation) is required for its stability. This means ‘seeing’ a transcendental dimension in a historical event. The cosmisation of history may be induced by a genuine experience of the numinous or simply by a deliberate interest to control the social order. In both the cases it is difficult for an outsider to discern authenticity of the process accurately. But the test of time can reveal it as the lack of the experience of the numinous and dismantle those processes of mythicization that put on the mask of authenticity. Usually the mythicization of history is an etiological strategy as it performs only an explanatory function. See Joseph Lobo. “mythicization of history and historicization of the Myth and mythologies : Interplay of religion and politics and its significance for a Liberative Religious Discourse and Praxis in Asia “ *Vidyajoyti Journal of Theological Reflection*, Vol.72/1 January 2008, 22-37.

<sup>33</sup> There is another process whereby in the articulation of myth into mythology, historical persons, places and events are referred to then we have the process of historicization of the myth. But if on the other hand an already existing mythic narrative is spatio-temporally localized or re-localized we notice a historicization of mythology. See *Ibid.*, 24-25.

<sup>34</sup> Gaps have as much signifying power as plenitudes and neither has the power without the other.

us to the revelatory dimension of history. It takes us to the realm of the unsaid and the un-sayable in the said. The unsaid stands in the said. This means that history mediates the unsaid along with the said. There is a gravitational pull between the said and the unsaid and the relation remains unstable. Hence, the unsaid will spill out from the said as the said gives the feeling that something is left out (unsaid).

This means we have reached a fundamental irreducible limit which clearly makes us aware that our past cannot be fully closed into a constructed version of history. The past resists fuller mediation. But this limit is not a limitation, as the very mediation of the past houses the other representations of the past. Hence it is for us to discern the unsaid in the said, think of the unthought in the thought and the forgotten in the remembered. It is a challenge to us to move to a different position and arrive at a different eye line of our past, thus de-mythologizing and deconstructing the oppressive constructions of our past.

## Conclusion

Our study has manifested that there is a big gap between the reality of the past and its representation as history. History takes us to the reality of the past but in an interpretive mode. The study brings about an humbling of a triumphalist versions of history and allows us to make room for histories rather than history.

From an Indian Christian perspective we have the challenge of overcoming the academic neglect of the study of Indian Christianity. The academic space of the study of Christianity is indeed very small. The Christians along with many non-Hindu communities share a tremendous fate of academic neglect. It is only recently that anthropological, historical and sociological materials are beginning to accumulate in the field. Currently new steps are being taken to rectify the situation<sup>35</sup>. This marginalization of the Christian community and its complex history becomes an imperative to restore the academic imbalance. It offers us an opportunity to interrogate the interplay of history and histories in the academic discourse in our country.

We need to examine how the euro-centrism of the west, blinded by its orientalism initiated a process of de-recognition of the pre-colonial roots of Christianity in India. Besides this, it can also expose how the western scholars created the Aryan Myth and how the discovery of the pre-Vedic Indus Valley Civilization did a little to dislodge the Aryan theory<sup>36</sup>. The social engineering through which the caste hierarchy is maintained can also be exposed while we pay attention to the unsaid and forgotten in the history.

This attention to the unsaid and the forgotten in the remembered can also bring to light how Christianization and sanskritization were concomitant.<sup>37</sup> It can illumine how the indigenous communities, readily accept those aspects of Christianity that provided them a sense of upward

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<sup>35</sup> Rowena Robinson, *Christians of India*. (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003), 11-12.

<sup>36</sup> Romila Thapar teaches that, besides the Aryan Theory, the western scholars gave another theory known as theory of Oriental Despotism. It is surprising that references to lack of ownership of private property is conveniently forgotten by the Indian intelligencia. This only exposes the selective Brahminical bias of Indian history.

Romila Thapar, *History and Beyond*. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1-22.

<sup>37</sup> See Chad M. Bauman, *Christian Identity and Dalit Religion in India* (Cambridge: Wm B Eerdmans, 2008), 53-57, 187-188.

mobility. It might manifest how the embracing of Christianity might be only a way of re-enacting the trauma of caste oppression and challenge Indian Christians find ways and means to seek healing and therapy.

## Two World Views: The Archaic Vis-à-vis The Historical<sup>0</sup>

- **Falcao Nelson**

*Every world view is a product of experience and interpretation. There is no world-view which is a purely objective. Every world-view is a combination of both the subjective and the objective; it affects the whole being, namely, knowing, willing, action and passion. It is holistic, and has a thrust that manifests a historical consciousness or a cosmic perspective. The two world views, Archaic and Historical are basic to religious encounters. In communicating Christian Historical message to the Indian Archaic world brings about several challenges in understanding the worldviews, which would pave way for the give and take and the enrichment-correction dynamics of the Christian-Hindu encounter. The paper explains the concepts of these two world views and their cross-fertilization, the mythical and ontological realms of understanding besides a discussion on the salient features of the two world views of the Historical and the Archaic. The Archaic Hindu and the Historic Christian perspective, are simply two ways of experiencing our Being in the world. East and West, the myth of the Archaic and the myth of History, Myth and Logos, have to meet within oneself; and only then can we hope for not just a dawn but a sunrise and flowering of the budding encounter.*

### Introduction

Any attempt at communication of the Christian Historical message to the Indian Archaic world<sup>1</sup> brings about several Christian-Hindu encounters. One can explore the give and take and the enrichment-correction dynamics of the Christian-Hindu encounter that takes place. We will prepare the background for such an encounter by explaining the following concepts: i) The two world views - West and East - and their cross-fertilization. The Christian-Hindu views are not isolated but rather are based of West-East world views. The myth of History and the myth of the Archaic. ii) The mythical realm in the context of the human, ontological understanding. iii) The mythical realm and the universe of meaning. There can be more than one 'universe of meaning', different approaches and viewpoints. We are focusing on two dominant viewpoints, viz., the Historical and the Archaic, on which are based the Christian and the Hindu world. iv) Salient features of the two world-views of the Historical and the Archaic. More specifically, we should know what is meant by the Christian-Hindu view. Leaving aside themes like the centuries old, traditional cultural divide between East and

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<sup>0</sup> Cf Nelson Falcao, *Kristapurāṇa: A Christian-Hindu Encounter – A Study of Inculturation in the Kristapurāṇa of Thomas Stephens, S.J. (1549-1619)* (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2003), 45-70. This whole article is practically taken from the above doctoral thesis of Dr. Falcao Nelson.

<sup>1</sup> Archaic comes from the word *arche*, which means the origin, the trans-historical which is eternally present. The Archaic world is that which concentrates on happening and change; it is trans-historical and beyond space-time. The myth of the Archaic deals with founding events which belong to 'time before all history', the time of ancient origins and figures.

West,<sup>2</sup> their increasing confluence, globalization, etc., we come straight to the two world views and the two Myths.

### 1. East and West

How would one meaningfully define entities such as the “East” and the “West”?<sup>3</sup> Is it possible to systematically compare the basic differences and similarities between the two? It is almost five centuries since Europe discovered Asia. And it seems that despite all the give and take, Europeans and Asians have learnt very little from each other since then.<sup>4</sup> After centuries of contact between Japan, India, China and other Asian countries, Western industrialism and Capitalism preserved their traditional ways, verbal expressions, beliefs and ritual practices. The answer to the East-West question has to be sought in the cultural characteristics and traditional ways of the people and not in socio-economic factors alone.<sup>5</sup>

False antitheses and monolithic comparisons have persisted from one generation to the next; knowledge is difficult to attain, understanding is more so, and resort to

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<sup>2</sup> Before exploring the Christian-Hindu Encounter it is indispensable to penetrate into the centuries old, traditional cultural divide between East and West. It has been a subject of discussion, debate, comment and controversy through the ages. It is a subject of scholarly research on which many volumes have been written. However, the East-West schism is not pre-dominantly historical or geographical. Nor is it philosophical. History and events affect broader spectrums of people – not pockets compartmentalized by different understandings of these categories. The philosophical East has traditionally been wary and distrustful of the materialistic West, leading to a grand, notional Wall of Divide, with each clinging to their associated values, to keep their ethnicity and their identity alive. And so the task before us is clear. We have to construct two strong pillars ‘East-West’ or ‘Archiac-History’ on which the Christian-Hindu Temple of Encounter could be constructed. For such a Temple to stand, it is inevitable that it rests on strong ‘East-West’ Archaic-History’ pillars.

<sup>3</sup> The tableland of Iran geographically divides the Oriental from the Occidental; the East from the West. The east comprises India and the Far East; the West, Europe and the Levant. The Levant consists of the eastern part of Mediterranean with its islands and neighbouring countries. In fact, however, East and West are relative to one’s perspective, since the earth is round. For long East and West have been separated and between the two there has been misunderstanding. The geographical differences are minimal. Even in a country one speaks of east and west. East and West are not Historical concepts. The History of the people over the world has increasingly ceased to be compartmentalized. From the earliest times, East and West have confronted each other and have mutually influenced and determined each other’s destinies and policies. The Western spirit is found in the East and Eastern ways are on the increase in the West. No cultural difference today is the monopoly only of the East or of the West. Even the philosophical differences cannot be compartmentalized as Eastern and Western. There is an increasing blend of East and West, with harmonious overtones; a curiosity to learn and imbibe; to explore and enrich. In this seeking, the two philosophies show points of confluence. The same is true of religions too. Today we have world Religions that are not confined to a particular nation or continent, but are international, inter-continental and universal.

Therefore, East and West are not Historical, philosophical or religious entities but rather anthropological categories. In every human being, there is East and West. One has within oneself the East, i.e., the sun-rise, the unreachable horizon, self-transcendence, self-realization, self-fulfilment, a sense of hope; so also each one has within oneself the West, i.e. the reaching, the materialization, the concretization, the arrival, the sun-set. Consequently, for any inter-cultural, inter-religious and inter-human dialogue a personal conversion or a change of heart is indispensable. East and West have to first meet in the individual. As the globe becomes a village, isolation, individualism and ghettoism are inevitable eroded. “It is clear that no people in the world today is isolated from those world-wide movements of thought and belief that everywhere tend to transform men’s lives and the values they live by. Yet each people is engages, consciously and unconsciously, in selecting among the manifold influences which reach them and then o adapting and modifying those elements which they select. What governs this process and how does it come about that out of it cultures emerge which are amalgams – certain elements of them being native and distinctive, others clearly derived from one another world-wide movement?” [Hajime Nakamura, *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples: India-China-Tibet-Japan* (Hawaii: East-West Center Press), vi].

<sup>4</sup>Cf Hajime Nakamura, *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples: India-China-Tibet-Japan* (Hawaii: East-West Center Press), v.

<sup>5</sup> Hajime Nakamura, *Ways of Thinking of Eastern People*, 3.

cliché generalization proves irresistible. In recent times some of these clichés have been dressed up in new jargon, so that thousands of unwary readers have been led to believe that they were being given a new magic keys that would open the door to the “Oriental mind,” “Oriental logic” or what-not. But the keys opened doors into dream worlds inhabited only by clichés and phantasies.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, we still speak of Eastern and Western ways. In spite of the growing give-and-take, confrontation, meeting, symbiosis, mutual correction, globalization<sup>7</sup> and exchange between East and West, there still remains a certain gap, a gulf, a chasm, a split.<sup>8</sup> There are particular and specific characteristics which are dominantly identified as Eastern and Western. East and West are often dichotomized and labelled as “Oriental” and “Occidental”. The oriental is characterized as spiritual, introverted, synthetic and subjective, which the occidental as materialist, extroverted, analytic and objective. Such characterizing through opposites is too simplistic, since the Orient and the Occident are extremely diversified<sup>9</sup> and complex within themselves.<sup>10</sup>

In this study, among many differentiating characteristics, I would like to single out one comparative quality for both East and West, namely, Archaic for the East and Historical for the West; the myth of the Archaic vis-à-vis the myth of History. These two world views could be labelled as: i) the Archaic Hindu, and ii) the Historical Christian. I do not claim that these two world views are exclusively compartmentalized into Eastern and Western. No! far from that! There is a lot of confrontation, meeting, overlapping and a give-and-take among the two world views.<sup>11</sup> However, the purpose of the study here is to investigate, analyze and examine the two world views separately, in the hope of hastening an encounter between the two. In fact, one can feel and already experience the dawn of such a rendezvous looming large on the horizon.

The east stands for the Orient, the horizon, the domain of the Archaic. In the Eastern world, it is predominantly accepted by many scholars that being transcends thought, imagination and definition. It is not possible to qualify it. The various anthropomorphic predications about God, Man and the World, conceal or camouflage the Mystery which is transcendent and beyond human reason. This Mystery is the ultimate ground of everything and of all things. The aim of Oriental mythology is not to validate or verify myths, divinities and rites as significant but rather to experience and identify oneself with the Being of beings which is both immanent and transcendent. There are several means such as prayer, *bhajans*, temples, gods, sages, image and cosmologies which take human beings to the shore of experience

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, v.

<sup>7</sup> Paradoxically however, globalization and localization seem to go hand in hand. Even as the world is becoming more and more a village with cross-cultural, inter-cultural and intra-cultural exchanges, local cultures characterize a strong search for one's ethnicity and identity; a seeking for recognition and self-affirmation. “Our sense of belonging to one world has never been keener than at preset. Yet the emphasis today on this evident fact itself implies that while every individual is affected by the quickening flow of world events, he is still strongly influenced by the ways of living and thinking in his own nation and culture.” (H. Nakamura, *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples*, 3).

<sup>8</sup> We have the current example of Germany. Even though the wall dividing East and West Germany has fallen in 1989, till today we still witness the gap and the diversity between the East and the West. A real unity has not as yet come about.

<sup>9</sup> West is not without its multiplicity of traditions which have contributed to western civilization. The East is obviously even more pluralistic.

<sup>10</sup> H. Nakamura, *Ways of Thinking of Eastern People*, 3.

<sup>11</sup> R. Panikkar, “The Supreme Experience: The Ways of East and West”, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1983), 309-310.

which is beyond the categories of thought. These means are later to be abandoned on arrival at the shore. The Kena Upaniṣad affirms: “To know is not to know, not to know is to know” (2.3). Further a Chinese Tao Te Ching states: “Those who know are still” (Tao Te Ching, 56).

The West is characterized by maturity and concreteness. Western man is steeped in his own consciousness. History is a myth of the West. The development of apprehension (anxiety, fear, comprehension) is necessary for mythical awareness. Unfortunately, in the West, apprehension has been neglected and has declined, degenerated and deteriorated during the course of the centuries, except in poets and artists.<sup>12</sup> The Ultimate Being is personified as a Creator in Western mythological thought and imagery. Man is the creature created by the Creator out of nothing and the two are different. The aim of Occidental myth and ritual is to build a relationship between God and Man. Institutions and rules are aids in enhancing such a relationship. The rules are believed to be supernaturally revealed and are executed and governed by the clergy, in the spirit of the myth of each institution and society.

**Aim of Cross-Cultural Dialogue:** This study is an attempt at a cross-cultural dialogue between the two world views. It is an encounter between two major ways of experiencing the ‘way we are in this world’, i.e., the Historical and the Archaic. There is a great difference between the two when it comes to the understanding of the real. The aim is not to seek justification nor to have a debate as to which of the two is right; rather it is to go deeper into the meaning of the Historical and the Archaic and further into their universes of meaning. We need to discern whether the two world views are exclusively compartmentalized into East and West; or whether the two are complementary, overlapping, mutually correcting and enriching each other.

## **2. Process of Understanding the Real**

Before we proceed, it would be important to see what we mean by understanding. In all our understanding there is a common space between a speaker and a listener during a dialogue. The common ground forms the basis of understanding, not understanding or misunderstanding.<sup>13</sup>

### **2.1 Presuppositions**

There are three common factors that make every discourse possible: i) the common visible world; ii) the other person; iii) the common ground of understanding. The Christians and the Hindus stand in the same world, with the same people and share a common universe of understanding, even though each of the groups has its own separate ‘universe of meaning’, through which it interprets differently the common world, and its people. From such a particular universe of meaning the real and unreal are understood and interpreted. The understanding of truth and falsity depends on one’s particular universe of meaning. No one can experience the physical world in its pure form. One experiences the physical world from

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<sup>12</sup> R. Panikkar, “Education Religieuse dans une Perspective Interreligieuse”, *Monchanin* 8 (June-December 1975), 67-68.

<sup>13</sup> Francis X. D’Sa, “The Reality of the Archaic and the Historical: Tentative Reflections on the Myth of the Archaic and the Myth of History,” Unpublished article by the Professor (Presented at IRFWP Congress on the *Founders and Shaper of the World’s Religions, Committee Six: The Significance of Historical Founders as Contrasted with Ancient Origins and Figures*, Washington, D.C., Nov. 25-30 1997, 1-2. [This paper was also presented at the Conference organized by the Institute for the Study of Religion, Pune and Theologie Interkulturell, University of Frankfurt, Germany, on The Role of Time and History in Religion, Ishwani Kendra, Pune, August 5-9, 1999, 1-14. All our future references to this Paper will be according to the Washington version].

within a specific universe of meaning. Thus, different approaches and viewpoints emerge. We are focusing on two such world-views, namely, the Hindu or Archaic and the Christian or Historical.<sup>14</sup>

## 2.2 Understanding

Understanding takes place at the level of being. The ‘universe of meaning’ is primarily ontological in character and not epistemological. Our being consists of understanding and our understanding is of being we understand at the level of being and we exist at the level of understanding. Our knowing-activity does not make the world its object; the world is rather the space in which our being understands. Our being is not a knowing-subject that studies the world as an object; our being floods the world like a light.<sup>15</sup>

Understanding Ontological: According to Martin Heidegger, understanding is not a way of knowing but a mode of being (*I-am-aware-of-being-in-the-world*). There is no subject-object dichotomy. Understanding is not psychological and epistemological, i.e., it is less on the level of the psychological process of knowledge, but more on the ontological level. This is an ontological understanding of understanding; it is an ontological understanding of truth as the disclosure of being and its priority over logical truth; it is the discovery of the anticipatory structure of understanding.<sup>16</sup>

## 2.3 The Mythical Realm and the Universe of Meaning

The Universe of Meaning: There are as many universes of meaning as individuals, groups, nations, cultures, institutions, societies, congregations and others.<sup>17</sup> We are concerned here with two of these meanings, namely, the Archaic and the Historical. The universe of meaning is a background which is always presupposed in one’s consciousness. It can be compared to a prism through which we grasp whatever we can. Whatever makes sense is due to this background. It is against this background that questions are understood and become meaningful, everything makes sense and becomes significant. But this background itself can never be fully objectified, questioned. Thus, truth in the Archaic universe of meaning is that which makes sense, and is significant. That which does not make sense and is insignificant is false. The Archaic universe of meaning determines the understanding of the real, which in turn determines the understanding of truth. Similarly, this could be applied to the Historical universe of meaning. By meaning we refer to the meaning of a situation. Universe of meaning is the deepest level where certain values make sense and others do not. From this deepest level, the Historical and the Archaic perspectives take their respective direction of meaning. Universe of meaning is not a dictionary, not a lexicon nor an encyclopedia. It belongs to the realm of the mythical. It is an objectified aspect of the mythical realm to a certain extent. In the context of the two world views, our understanding of the myth of the Archaic, comes from its universe of meaning that looks at truth, as something that never changes. So also for the myth of History, its universe of meaning looks at truth, as something that has really happened.

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<sup>14</sup> Francis X. D’Sa, “The Reality of the Archaic and the Historical: Tentative Reflections on the Myth of the Archaic and the Myth of History,” 1-4.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Francis X. D’Sa, “Introduction to Hermeneutics,” Unpublished Notes of the Professor (Pune: Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth, 1990/Revised 1994), 42.

<sup>17</sup> The universe of meaning is called differently by different authors: thus we have, the anticipatory structure of understanding (Heidegger), the horizon of understanding (Gadamer), the mythos (Panikkar) and the pre-understanding (Ricoeur).

Mythical Realm: By 'mythical' is meant, all that we take for granted in our knowing and on which our behaviour and values are based. The mythical realm is that through we understand but not that which we understand. It determines not only what we understand but also how we understand. It forms and shapes a universe of meaning. As regards the two world views, the real and the true are understood only from within the myth (mythos) of the Archaic and the myth of the Historical, and not independently of the myth. What is outside the mythical realm is not intelligible to us, it is a dynamic realm, constantly changing, producing change and being changed in the process. It can never be objectified. We can know of it only indirectly from its effects.<sup>18</sup> Our spontaneous behaviour is guided not only by what is outside but also by our beliefs about the outside. Fact and interpretation, both go together to make an event. To see is to interpret; to experience is to interpret. Mythos is the total view or horizon of our understanding; the nature of our beliefs depends on mythos. Mythos is not something static. All knowing is subjective. Subjectivity is reality conscious of itself; it is a way in which an individual or a whole group of people who share in a community of common beliefs experience reality.<sup>19</sup> Thus, each of the myths of the Archaic and of History has its own mythos, its own horizon of understanding.

Myths: From the beginning of History till the present day, we come across many different definitions and meanings of myths.<sup>20</sup> Till recently most of the definitions have been more or less epistemologico-objective,<sup>21</sup> i.e., they have presented myths as traditional narratives,

<sup>18</sup> R. Panikkar, "Introduction", *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, 4-5.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

<sup>20</sup> In the oldest Greek texts the word *μῦθος*, was used to mean narrative, story or the traditional stories about the gods. The Greek term *μῦθος*, means 'word'; it is derived from the Indo-European root *meudh* or *mudh*, which means, to reflect, to think over, to consider. Sophists gave a somewhat pejorative connotation to *μῦθος*, because they did not believe in the stories of the gods. Xenophanes radically criticized the mythologies narrated by Homer, and Hesiod. Theagenes of Thegion gave an allegorical interpretation of myths; Euhemerus, a Sicilian author of the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C., interpreted them pseudo-historically and his interpretation of the myths is called after his name as 'euhemerism', which means, explanation of myths on Historical basis. Plato used myths to convey a mystery but defined them as legends or fairy tales. For Aristotle myths were products of fancy and fabulation. Most of these authors knew of myths through literature and elements of causation (etiological elements).

According to the Hellenistic conception, *μύθολογεῖν*, means to lie or to tell tall stories. The Judeo-Christian understanding is close to the Hellenistic one. The Judeo-Christian tradition considers myths as discredited fictional narratives, absurdities, falsehoods, abominations and diabolical inventions.

<sup>21</sup> The renaissance period (14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) which revived art and letters under the influence of classical models. There was also a revitalization of interest in myths. According to Natalis Comes, myths were symbolical or allegorical expressions of philosophical speculation. During rationalism, Vico understood myths as spontaneous reactions of primitive human beings to natural phenomena and also as historical events in poetry. His conception of myths combined allegorical explanation and historical reductionism.

The religious connotation factor in myths was underscored during the Romantic movement. According to J.G. Herder and Schelling, myths were a necessary stage in the self-revelation of the Absolute. Around 1850 a new science of systematic and comparative study of religions was established, which had obvious interest in myths; but it still kept to the biases of the Enlightened period (18<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) regarding myths. Max Müller (1823-1900) presented myths as a disease of language. For Frazer, myths were mistaken explanations of human or natural phenomena. According to rationalism, all that did not agree with its idea of reality was considered myth. W. Wundt (1832-1920) defined myths as products of the imagination, while L. Lévy-Bruhl (1857-1939) considered them a prelogic, a primitive mentality. Cassirer, rejecting the allegorical interpretation, accepted myths symbolic form and as an interpretation of reality, a primitive intuition of the cosmic solidarity of life. Freud, Jung and their psychoanalytical schools, showed the striking similarities between the content of myths and the universe of the unconscious. In this way they gave a new turn to the study of myths. Reducing myths totally to the dynamics of the unconscious was their mistake.

A new and positive understanding of myths came about due to the study of anthropology, ethnology, phenomenology, history of religions, sociology, psychology, philosophy and folklore. Karl Jaspers (1883- ) and

stories about gods, accounts of origins through which religious assertions, pronouncements, affirmations, events, beliefs are depicted or re-presented. In short, myths are ‘that which we understand,’ ‘the object/objective’. However, as the contemporary trend is ontologico-subjective, according to which, myths are those ‘through which we understand and not that which we understand.’

According to Panikkar myths are the ensemble of contexts which are taken for granted. Thus, the myths of the Archaic and the Historical both have their ensemble of contexts. Such contexts place one in reality. They provide one with a point of reference in the world; they make one unique; they are the foundation of language; they are that which is experienced and manifested through one’s being, without one being aware of it. In inter-personal relationships one comprehends another’s myths.<sup>22</sup> Various philosophical systems have their significance in the ground, i.e., the myths. Thus, the Indian philosophical systems have their significance in the myth of the Archaic and the Western philosophical systems have theirs in the myth of the History. The ground is polyvalent; therefore, myths are indispensable in the encounter of religions and cultures.<sup>23</sup> Myths are those which make the meaning meaningful without being meant in the meaning.

Myths are reference points which give orientations. While one lives one’s myths, one does not see them; they are the accepted horizons within which one experiences truth; one remains immersed in one’s own myths. One is not critically aware of one’s myths; one speaks from one’s own myths from one’s unexamined presuppositions. One’s myths are invisible to oneself but may be visible to the other, especially in close inter-personal relationships, which disclose the myths. One’s myths make one unique and specific. Living myths, because they do not need an intermediary, do not permit interpretation.<sup>24</sup> Myths are those which one does not question because they are seen as unquestionable; one takes them for granted. Mythical stories are forms in which the myths are expressed and illumined.<sup>25</sup>

## 2.4 Myth and Logos

Co-relation and Inseparability: Myth and Logos are two forms of human awareness. They are tools which enable one to understand the universe. Both are necessary to reach the mystery of reality. They are two attempts of man to provide an integral expression of reality. They are irreducible functions of apprehending the real. The whole reality is a texture of myth and Logos. They are not the same; they are not of the same order; both have their place. They myth is not Logos nor is it subordinate to it. They can be distinguished but not separated. Myth is eliminated when reduced to the intellectual level. Myth is unseen and can be seen with hind sight only after it has passed by. It is also seen in the traces, evidences left by it in

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Paul Ricoeur (1913- ) positively defined myths as expressions or as ciphers of the transcendent, a language of being. In the primitive religions, myths exist as living and functional religious values. On the one hand, myths belong to the world of the imagination, while on the other hand, myths are the language of religion par excellence. J. Baumann (1837-1916, A.E. Jensen (1899-1965) and M. Eliade (1908- ) have researched and presented a variety of forms and types of myths. According to them, myths are sacred stories of primordial events, which constitute and inaugurate a reality and determine the existential situation of man in the cosmos as a sacred world. Myths deal with the mysterious moments of human existence, namely, birth, death, initiation. Myths refer such moments to a divine archetype which happened in mythical time or mythical no-time and thus give them a sacred meaning.

<sup>22</sup> R. Panikkar, “Tolerance, Ideology and Myth,” *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, 191-192.

<sup>23</sup> R. Panikkar, “Śunaḥśepa: A Myth of the Human Condition”, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, 243-245.

<sup>24</sup> R. Panikkar, “Introduction”, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, 4-5.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

the Logos. Myth becomes mythology when approached with the instrument of the Logos; that spells the death of the myth. Under rational investigation, the myth seems to be false and immoral.<sup>26</sup> The agent/component of ontology is the Logos/reason; the domain of the myth is faith. The relationship between myth and Logos is placed in the realm of orthopraxis (right action). Just as a mythical interpretation of the Logos is wrong, so also a metaphysical interpretation of the myth is erroneous.<sup>27</sup>

Myth and Logos are both found in time; they have a universal value referring to that which goes beyond them. Logos maintains a univocal sense; myth does not contain but rather indicates and so it can be transmythologized, remaining open to several possible interpretations.<sup>28</sup> 'Mythological' means the concrete awareness resulting from the entrance of the Logos into the myth. It changes some mythical content into a logical content. The myth is distorted.<sup>29</sup> Where there is myth there is also Logos; Myth-Logos are inseparable. There is not Logos without myth nor myth without Logos. While myth is dialogal, Logos is dialectical. Myth and Logos provide responses to many of the concrete problems faced by humanity. Pluralism belongs to the realm of myth and not to the Logos. A myth permits many and variant concretizations, whose relationship, may not be logical. Through such concretizations of a myth, plurality is born thus allowing a human co-existence in polarity and creative tension.<sup>30</sup>

Balance and Integration: Myth can be compared to a bright dazzling light. Such a light is invisible because one cannot look at it directly; rather one turns one's back to it so as to see the things illuminated by it. Myth illuminates reality but is itself invisible and cannot be directly looked at. It is not the object of thought; it is not the object of discourse but the expression of a particular form of awareness. It is transparent. It is that which we take for granted, that which is not questioned by us. It is not the thought. It purifies thought, by-passes thought, so that the unthought may emerge and the intermediary disappears. Myth does not think, and thus it liberates us from thinking. It leads human beings into the realm of freedom of choice and even more – into the freedom of being. To be in the domain of the myth implies no thinking, no thought and no knowing of what is being thought in the thinking. This does not necessarily imply that we should neglect or undermine the legitimate importance of thought, the Logos. It only points to the fact that the Logos cannot monopolize man. Every human being is more than the Logos, thought or reflexive consciousness. Unfortunately, the Western Christian world view has reduced man to Logos, thought and reflexive consciousness. In such a world view, the whole understanding is epistemological; it reduces the whole world to an object; it investigates and analyzes Being; it paves a way towards Being in a projective transcendence.

Ideology: The demythicized part of the view of the world is called ideology. It is born from personal reflection and the movement from mythos to Logos; it is the critical awareness, rational world-view in a particular place and time; it is limited to time/temporality, space and history. It is a doctrinal framework which flows from the conscious part of oneself. Unlike

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<sup>26</sup> R. Panikkar, "Morale de Mythe et Mythe de la Morale: Mythologie et Logomythologie", *Demitizzazione e Morale*, *Archivio di Filosofia* (1965), 393-396.

<sup>27</sup> R. Panikkar, *Kultmysterium in Hinduismus und Christentum* (Freiburg: 1967), 189.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 189-200.

<sup>29</sup> R. Panikkar, "The Law of Karman and the Historical Dimension of Man", *Philosophy East and West*, 22 (1972), 33.

<sup>30</sup> R. Panikkar, "Education Religieuse dans une Perspective Interreligieuse", *Monchanin*, 8 (June-December 1975), 68.

myth, one can recognize one's own ideology and those of others. Thus, the myths of the Archaic and of the Historical cannot be recognized but the Eastern and Western ideologies can be recognized. Ideology is an intrinsically temporal system of idea governing social life. It is the passage from myth to Logos. Through personal reflection, one builds up a somewhat congruous set of ideas, a doctrinal system which permits one to place oneself rationally and ideologically in the world, in space and time. Ideology consists of a spatio-temporal system of the Logos; it functions in a concrete Historical moment. In the place where it is situated, it is a system of ideas formulated by the Logos; it cannot transcend its temporality.<sup>31</sup> Myth has its own specific role in the attainment of reality. Myth has its own truth. Myth empowers one to search for the foundation of everything. Myth withdraws to a deeper level when confronted by the Logos.<sup>32</sup> In fact, demythologization implies a remythologization, i.e., a change of myth.<sup>33</sup>

Integration: Besides Logos awareness there is also mythical awareness. Hence, human awareness should not be reduced only to the realm of the Logos alone; but should also be integrated with mythical awareness. A constant interaction between Logos and myth leading to a new mythical awareness emerges strongly in theological reflection. Theology is a conscious passage from myth to Logos. Along with the demands of the Logos, the realities of the myth and the freedom of the Spirit should also be well integrated. This integration between myth and Logos, is the task of philosophy and theology.<sup>34</sup> Thus, Indian philosophy and theology have to bring about the integration between myth of the Archaic and the Logos; so also Western philosophy and theology have to bring about the integration between the myth of the History and the Logos.

## 2.5 Myth, Faith and Belief

Faith and Belief: Beliefs are like windows to a world-view. They are not pictures of the outside world. They do not do justice to the demands of the outside world and so they get corrected complemented and adjusted. Operative beliefs shape the perspective of every person and every group. Consequently, one group produces a perspective different from another, according to its beliefs and horizon of understanding. For example, in general we could say, Germans are workaholics, French are revolutionaries and Indians are tolerant people. Human consciousness passes from mythos to Logos through the instrumentality of belief. The myth in which one believes is articulated through belief. However, to believe in a belief does not imply making it an object of knowledge. Human reflection on the contents of belief could either be a useless, thinking reflection – since the content is not understood – or a destruction of belief by converting belief into knowledge. We know that we believe in something but we do not know what we believe in. faith expressing itself in belief has no object. For example, the expression of the act of believing could be a cognitive statement, 'I believe in God'. The expression becomes a real belief when I do not know God as the object of my belief. Thus, the God of belief is a symbol and not a concept, a formulation or an object. The believed is not the known. Thus, knowledge and belief are different forms of consciousness.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> R. Panikkar, "Tolerance, Ideology and Myth," *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, 30-32.

<sup>32</sup> R. Panikkar, "The Supreme Experience: The Ways of East and West", *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, 297.

<sup>33</sup> R. Panikkar, "Tolerance, Ideology and Myth," *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, 30-32.

<sup>34</sup> R. Panikkar, *Worship and Secular Man* (London: 1973), 93.

<sup>35</sup> R. Panikkar, "Tolerance, Ideology and Myth," *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, 30-34.

Symbol and Reality: The passage from mythos to Logos is the expression of belief; it is not a concept by a symbol. This expression is the Truth of Being. Revelation is the disclosing of the vessel. The symbol constitutively joins the two poles of the real, the object and the subject. A symbol which requires interpretation ceases to be a living symbol and becomes a mere sign. Signs help in interpreting symbols.

Hermeneutics: The hermeneutic of a myth<sup>36</sup> is its Logos and is no longer the myth. Myth is the horizon against which any hermeneutic is possible. Man cannot manage just with symbols alone, he requires hermeneutics also. Hermeneutics is the art and science of interpretation which brings forth significance, conveys meaning, restores symbols to life and finally lets new symbols emerge. It is a method through which the distance between a knowing subject and an object to be known is overcome. It overcomes the epistemological distance and as a consequence, the human alienation. Through hermeneutics of the myth of the Archaic we have the Eastern world view and through the hermeneutics of the myth of the Historical we have the Western world view.<sup>37</sup>

Morphological Hermeneutics: Morphological hermeneutics is the reading of the text; it is the unfolding of implicit or unknown elements. It proceeds according to the rules of correct thinking. Thus, the text of the myths of the Archaic and of the Historical are read in order to get the morphological hermeneutics.<sup>38</sup>

Diachronical Hermeneutics: Diachronical hermeneutics implies the knowledge of the context, of ideology and time in order to understand the text. The gap between the reader/understander and the read/to-be-understood, dims or changes the meaning of the given. Such a gap is reduced by diachronical hermeneutics; its method is Historical. It implies entering another

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<sup>36</sup> In the Heideggerian sense, hermeneutics is not general but fundamental because understanding is not psychological and epistemological but ontological, from the point of view of being. Ontological hermeneutics implies that reality is not taken as 'a collection of objects' but rather 'all-that-exists'. It means experiencing and seeing a unitary vision of reality as full openness and not as subject-object dichotomy. It is not objectifying the reality but rather seeing the inter-relationship between all things that exist. It does not accept subject-object epistemology or metaphysics but ontology. It does not imply speaking of things ontically, of their entityness, of 'what' a thing is but rather ontologically, of their being,, of the mystery of being present, of 'is'. Ontological hermeneutics takes a human being as one who is always 'aware of his being in-the-word' and as one who searches for be-ing. A human being is not just a knower or a subject but a 'clearance' where the light of be-ing lights up both his own be-ing and that of his world; it means 'be-ing there', i.e., 'Dasein', that is, one who carries this world wherever he goes; thus, he is the 'there', i.e., *das 'Da'*; he is the lighting of Being. He is the Being of the *Da*. Besides, his 'be-ing there' is understanding; his ek-sistence be-ing and understanding are identical, i.e., being is understanding and understanding is being and therefore, understanding is ontological. Also, we say, we are our knowing and not we have our knowing. Knowing is being and being is knowing, not metaphysically but phenomenologically. According to ontological hermeneutics, being-in-the-world is constitutive of being human or Historical; Reality is cosmotheandric, a triple community, having three irreducible centers. Knowing is ontological; knowing means (under-) standing in the dis-closure of reality; not objectification of truth, i.e., truth is not dependent on the knowing subject. This dis-closure of reality is the ontological truth. Human beings have an anticipatory structure of knowing, i.e., our be-ing-in-the-world implies a world of familiarity in which we are used to 'having-in-advance' and 'grasping-in-advance'. All understanding is ontological; it is partial, never exhaustive; understanding is 'understanding as'; Understanding means responding to the issue that the pre-understanding raises. The act of understanding is determined not so much by our judgments as by our pre-judgments. Every act of understanding shapes tradition and is itself shaped by tradition. The mythic level most common to all human beings in the level of be-ing-in-the-world; where, irrespective of culture, creed or period of History, we have a common world of birth, suffering and happiness. Language is the realm of meaning. Cf Francis X. D'Sa, "Introduction to Hermeneutics", 1-39. Cf also R. Panikkar, "Introduction," *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, 8-11.

<sup>37</sup> R. Panikkar, "Introduction", *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, 8-11.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*.

world view, a movement from present to the past; it is learning from the past. Thus, in order to understand the text of the myths of the Archaic and of the History, the knowledge of the context and of time is required.

**Diatopical Hermeneutics:** Diatopical hermeneutics reduces the gap between cultures. It is cross-cultural hermeneutics. Every culture has a radically different approach to reality. Both cultures offer an equally original source of understanding and so such a hermeneutics is not objectifiable. The method is dialogical dialogue and not scientific. The self-understanding, self-interpretation of every human being is part of one's being-in-the-world and so cannot be limited to what one thinks of oneself alone. Even one's interpretation of the world, belongs to what the world is. Therefore, the human search is never-ending and infinite.<sup>39</sup> Such diatopical hermeneutics reduces the gap between the two world views, the Eastern and the Western. Each one of these world views has a different approach to reality.

## 2.6 Myth of History

History is a point of reference for the indisputability of facts on which the critique of other myths is based. There are no pure facts; facts exist always within the context of a myth. Thus, the point of reference, the touchstone, the criterion of truth is the myth; myth is the basis and foundation of belief. Historical facts comprise of simple evidence for those who live the myth of History; and for those outside the myth of History, they are events which do not have their full, genuine reality. There is the myth of History in the Judaeo-Christian tradition; but there are also other myths. These myths have to put on a historical garb so as to be intelligible in the mythical world of History. In the myth of sacred History, the truth lies in the historical character of sacred History, and mystery lies in the sacred character. Because of this sacrality a particular historical fact becomes the model, the ideal and the pattern.

**Ultimate and Immediate:** Myth is like the sun whereas History is like the objects that the sun falls on. Like the sun, myth cannot be looked at, but it illumines many articles; it shows and brightens all. The observer must look for the objects/articles and explore, to find more than what the naked eye can see or ears can hear. One has to go beyond five senses and experience through the awareness of the heart and inspiration of the spirit. History instead tempts one with immediate objects, the facts of life, that which functions, works and is pleasing to the five senses. These objects or historical facts attract attention and their immediacy hypnotizes an onlooker. It satisfies the intellectual thirst and one gets lost in the attractive world of historical objects, articles and facts, so much so that one fails to look around and see the rest of reality which is so vast and rich. One forgets that the whole of reality around is lit and illumined by the sun. History is lit up and made visible by myth. Myth is the ultimate illuminating background against which all historical facts and events make sense and have their meaning. Myth is the illuminated background, presupposed in the conscious life of History.<sup>40</sup>

**Narratives:** Apparently the myth of History and the myth of the Archaic seem to be complete opposites. But they are not. Both are narratives, i.e., arrangements of events into unified stories. The myth of the Archaic is a narrative of origins, taking place in a primordial time beyond everyday reality. The myth of History is a narrative of events both recent and further in the past but situated in human time or the time of everyday reality. They myth of the

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-11.

<sup>40</sup> Francis X. D'Sa, "The Reality of the Archaic and the Historical: Tentative Reflections on the Myth of the Archaic and the Myth of History," 4-5.

Archaic is thus foundational; it narrates founding events.<sup>41</sup> When a founding event has no place in History because it is situated in a time before all History, only then does the myth of the Archaic exist. This 'time before all History' is called '*in illo tempore*' by Mircea Eliade. The myth of the Archaic is not the founding events but rather the relation between our time and the time of the myth of ancient origins and figures.<sup>42</sup>

Relation to Myth of the Archaic: Relation to myth of the Archaic to the myth of History<sup>43</sup> can be considered at three levels:

(1) Meaning Class of Literature Gives to History: Besides being a literary product, the myth of History is also what men do or suffer; it is the narrative of the events of the past. Besides narration, there are other issues that the myth of History examines: interpretation by a given culture and its historical mode of existence; the stability or change affecting the mores or institutions of a culture and the meaning of change. Does change have any end or is it meaningless? Does the change lead to progress or to regression?<sup>44</sup>

(2) Meaning Society Gives to History: History is a literary activity through which a society accounts for its own past. There is a relationship between History as literary activity and History as lived experience; and this affects the relationship between the myth of History and the myth of the Archaic. Myth as a foundation gives a positive or negative value to History. History is a mode of human existence. A society may have two types of myths, namely, myths of decadence and myths of progress. Historiography provides with partial answers whereas the broader questions are answered through myths. Two societies may have different fundamental myths but similar Historical goals.<sup>45</sup>

(3) Truth of Myth and Historical Veracity: The myth of the Archaic relates events which have happened before History began, trans-historical, in an eternal instant. Hence, by its very nature, the myth of the Archaic repels historicity. The myth of the Archaic is not an unintentionally distorted, misrepresented or selected History. It tells about real things that happened, not in recorded time or Historical time but before time began, in the era of the gods. The myth of the Archaic tells the story of primordial events which narrate the manner

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<sup>41</sup> The myth of Archaic model (or myth of ancient origins and figures) has come down from the stories of the gods in ancient Greece. The Greek myths of Archaic gradually begin to include the history of heroes and ancestors; thus there is a transition from the myth of Archaic to the myth of History in the Greek myths. According to contemporary anthropology, the notion of the myth of Archaic has been extended to mean types of narratives; and these narratives are widespread in all contemporary Archaic societies. These narratives are anonymous, without any proper origin, received through tradition and accepted as credible, with no guarantee of authenticity. After many stages of evolution, the myths of History put a stop to this mode of transmission, especially in the West.

Myth of Archaic as concerned with narrative or origins, goes beyond the myth of History of gods, heroes and ancestors. The questions of the origins embrace many issues regarding individual and social life, namely: i) origins of a particular society; ii) causes of the existence of an event or a rite; iii) justification of a particular authority; iv) causes of suffering, misery and death. The myth of Archaic deals with the creation of the world and man. It is concerned with the present physical, moral and social condition. Thus, the myth of Archaic deals with a basic explanation and maintains a complex relationship with myth of History.

<sup>42</sup> Paul Ricoeur, "Myth and History", *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol. 10 (1987), 273.

<sup>43</sup> The myth of Archaic and the myth of History are two different kinds of narratives. Myth of Archaic is a narrative about the origins. The myth of History is a literary genre, namely the writing of History or historiography. The myth of History has originated from the myth of Archaic; this is a genetic relation between the myth of History and the myth of Archaic. The place of the myth of Archaic is not necessarily taken by the myth of History; rather both co-exist.

<sup>44</sup> Paul Ricoeur, "Myth and History", *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol. 10 (1987), 273-274.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

in which reality entered time and thus came into existence. The myth of the Archaic manifests the true nature and structure of the present realities by associating them to a meta-empirical reality. It illustrates and exhibits the deeper and real meaning of life by demonstrating how a particular being in the world came into existence or how it began to exist in time and space. The myth of the Archaic reveals more than it explains. It is not concerned about apparent contradictions. The contradictions if any, are only in the empirical realm and not in the meta-empirical realm. But the myth of the Archaic is not any remarkable learning or scientific exposition but rather a consciousness of a reality. It demonstrates whatever is true and valid according to the religious consciousness of the believer.

The myth of the Archaic is considered holy because its principal performers are gods or superhuman beings whose intervention in the cosmos is for the sake of establishing an order. The recitation of a myth of the Archaic, especially during cult ceremonies, makes the presence of the supernatural a reality. The priests or elders who are experts in the myth of the Archaic, initiate others at a proper age into the sacred traditions of a religion, sect or a tribe.

### **3 Different Views: Archaic (Hindu) and Historical (Christian)**

The world can be compared to a mountain. Just as there are different angles from which the same mountain can be viewed, so also there exist different world-views. The same world can be experienced differently from different view-points all views are valid, real and complementary, yet each view is specific, unique and different. Unfortunately, the world view of History has dominated all other views considering itself to be the real objective view and the only one that really works. The rest of the views are considered mythological.<sup>46</sup>

#### **3.1 The Historical World View**

History belongs to a world of reality, a real world. It is concerned not just with knowing historical facts that exist objectively and independently of the interpretation of the historian but is a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts. It is an unending dialogue between the present and the past. The facts of history are not absolute, but are refracted through the mind of the recorder. It is indispensable for a historian to make contact with the mind of those about whom history is written. He is bound by the conditions of his own age; and has to choose his words/language. His choice of words does not permit neutrality. The dual function of a historian is to understand the History of the past and to increase one's mastery over the present. There is no History without interpretation. History does not consist of pure facts but of selected recordings. The basic facts are already an interpretation because they are filtered through the world-view. Historical consciousness has its roots at the mythical level. There is no dichotomy between myth and History. The perspective of History is grounded in the myth. Thus, the historical is also mythical.

**Salient Features:** According to the Christian or historical world view, change is synonymous with events; it is recorded as a history of events. Change is events concretized in history. This historical world-view concentrates on events; thus it focuses on the part (events, man) and not on the whole (cosmos). It stresses the partial aspect of a larger process. History is real and reality is to be found only in history, reality which has taken place. History discovers causes of change in man and environment. History provides the 'glasses' through which one sees the real, the bridge that connects to the real, the criterion of the real. Every event is true and real.

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<sup>46</sup> Francis X. D'Sa, "The Reality of the Archaic and the Historical: Tentative Reflections on the Myth of the Archaic and the Myth of History," 6-7.

History is made up not so much of individual happenings as of patterns of events. If we are in the world of change, we are real. The house of History is built with the bricks of facts.<sup>47</sup>

This Historical world-view looks for a pragmatic reality. That which is not connected with events and with what really happened, is considered illusory or unreal. That which corresponds or is coherent with what happened, is considered to be true. The dialogue between change and man implies events. It has to do with that which has been made, that which has become, or has come to be. The historical world-view searches for truth in historical happenings. History is a conscious dialogue between the past and the present. The foundation of historical interpretation is the search for direction; the movement of History is linear.<sup>48</sup> The stress on history and the historical is the foundation stone of the myth of history. In this historical world-view, the real is identified within the basic framework of the world of space and time. It is suspicious of anything which does not stand on the foundation of space and time. The net of history catches the fist of the (significance of) events of space and time which escape the net of the Archaic. The Christian historical world view is not more real than the Hindu Archaic world view. Reality seen through the eyes of history is not more real than the reality seen through the eyes of the Archaic.<sup>49</sup> Historical time<sup>50</sup> is made significant, so that history becomes salvation history; salvation is in time;<sup>51</sup> History is the foundation of a salvation-History; History assumes that bondage is due to historical happenings and liberation is to be achieved through historical events. For example, Adam's action is

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-9.

<sup>48</sup> The cyclical and linear conceptions of time oppose one another and the question of their opposition is a thorny one. Myth of Archaic follows the cyclical time, whereas myth of History follows the linear time. The notion of cyclical time has pluri-meaning. Besides the periodical regeneration of time through particular rites, there are other ways of returning to same situations and events. That the notion of linear time is a global alternative to cyclical time is not certain. Contrary myths concerning the cyclical or linear character of time could exist in a particular culture or society. This presents uncertainty regarding Historical condition and the whole of humanity. A culture that produces myths of cyclical time or of linear time may also yield a History within the temporal confines, suiting both the versions of time. Cf. also Francis X. D'Sa, "The Reality of the Archaic and the Historical: Tentative Reflections on the Myth of the Archaic and the Myth of History," 7-10.

<sup>49</sup> Francis X. D'Sa, "The Reality of the Archaic and the Historical" 7-9.

<sup>50</sup> History unfolds in time and the society interprets the time. Myth of History is the narrative of human actions in the past. But the interest in the past is inseparable from an interest in the present and the future. Thus, a reference to time has to be included in the definition of myth of History; it deals with the knowledge of societies and people in time. Myth of History takes place in the real time or Historical time. Temporality is the time of the myth of History. Temporality in an autonomic world. It is the specific form of human time. It is neither eternity nor indiscriminate time, i.e., a mere succession of different moments. Temporality is the particular way in which man exists, through events, looking back to the past to learn for the present and marching ahead into the future. It is a qualitative accumulation, incorporation of the past into the present and stretching towards the future. [Cf. R. Panikkar, *Worship and Secular Man*, 38-39].

Time is neither *a priori* nor *a posteriori*. It is the crossing point between matter and consciousness. It cannot be objectified. Man as a temporal being is constantly unfulfilled with his temporal existence. He continually attempts to overcome his temporality. In man there exists a constant tension between being and becoming, one and the many, identity and difference, time and eternity. Time is a property inherent in any being but being is not exhausted by time. [R. Panikkar, "Times and Sacrifice: The Sacrifice of Time and the Ritual of Modernity," *The Study of Time III: Proceedings of the III International Conference of the International Society for the Study of Time*, eds. J.T. Fraser, N. Lawrence, D. Park (Berlin: 1978, 684-713].

<sup>51</sup> In the mythical world of History, time is but the moving image of unmoving eternity; it is an unending repetition of creation through the means of recurring regeneration re-creation, renewal and restoration. According to Judeo-Christian tradition time is creation itself. Historical events are important since they mark God's intervention in time; the Historical events do not record periodical repetition of archetypes but rather unique and decisive moments, taken place once and for all never to be reversed. The Prophets underscored the Historical interventions of Yahweh in time-space-History of the people of Israel. They did not speak of God's presence in the cosmos. They had a strong sense of History and the decisive moments and events in the life of Israel.

considered an act of disobedience, whereas Jesus' death is held as an act of supreme obedience. Jesus' actions of incarnation, passion, death and resurrection have paradigmatic character and are salvific events. They are efficient causes of salvation.<sup>52</sup> The incarnation effects salvation through acts arising from the power of his divine essence. The eternal event is the God of History acting in History; the temporal event is act and potency constituting being.<sup>53</sup>

### 3.2 The Archaic World View: Salient Features

Happening, Change: The Hindu world view concentrates on happening; it is a cosmic perspective. The central category is the cosmos and the cosmos becomes the background; the stress is on wholeness, totality, fullness, completeness and comprehensiveness. According to Archaic world view, change is considered a mere happening in the whole of the reality. No change is considered as an event. Change affects the whole and the whole is fully interconnected. When a part is affected, the whole is touched. There is no pattern of events. The large net of the cosmic world-view cannot catch the small fish of historical facts since they are of no interest on it.<sup>54</sup>

Trans-Historical is Real: Reality, according to this Archaic world view, is not in history and history is not the bridge that connects to the real, nor is it the criterion of the real. The Archaic is as real or illusory as the historical world view. It looks for truth in the trans-historical realm. The historical is not neglected but its worth is seen in its relationship to the Imperishable Arche. That which is immutable is real and if we are in the world of the immutable, we are real. What changes cannot be real. The world that abides in spite of change is significant. The criterion of truth is absolute immutability. Only the Absolute is real. The real is abidingly immanent. It does not look for pragmatic reality because that is not really real. The truths of daily life (e.g. it is raining, there is a road accident, etc.) are not to be taken as truth in the real and lasting sense of the word because they are immutable. If we are lost in the world of change, we are not real. The Archaic world view holds that soteriology is built on ontology. There is no final fulfilment that makes sense; there is no goal to be reached, no aim to be achieved. The movement is spiral and not linear. Actions are not viewed as good, bad or neutral but the intention behind the actions is examined. The essence of liberation is the inner intention which binds or frees. This is a viewpoint which is holistic and integral and overcomes partiality. The symptoms of unreality and bondage are incompleteness, partiality, fragmentariness, dissipation and dispersion.<sup>55</sup>

The Archaic world view does not consider this or that time but the wholeness of time.<sup>56</sup> Archaic comes from the word *arche* which means the origin, the beginning which has no

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<sup>52</sup> In the annual liturgical year the birth, activity, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are repeated. This re-actualization, re-presentation takes place even through the celebration of the seven sacraments or special rituals. In spite of the fact of re-actualization *hic et nunc* of the events through the sacraments, the insistence on their being Historical events is not minimized. By remembering them as Historical events, their salvific effect achieved *once and for all* in time-space-History is underscored. The early Christian gave great importance to the historicity of the events: "For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eye-witnesses of his majesty...we heard...we were with him..." (2 Pt. 1:16-18).

<sup>53</sup> Francis X. D'Sa, "The Reality of the Archaic and the Historical: Tentative Reflections on the Myth of the Archaic and the Myth of History," 7-9.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> Each being reaches temp-iterity at the end of its time. In order to have a glimpse into the tempiternal one

beginning, he eternal presence, the trans-historical which is eternally present.<sup>57</sup> It refuses to accept the world of space and time as the basic framework within which the real is identified. It points to the realm beyond space and time. The net of the Archaic catches the fish of (the significance of) space and time itself; the Archaic looks through space-time for the imperishable on which everything rests.<sup>58</sup> In the Archaic Indian world, *Avatāra* is not temporal but tempiternal Revelation; *Avatāra* is a paradigm of integration, wholeness, of concentration and completeness; *Avatāra* performs actions holistically, not for selfish reasons but for the welfare of all. It has the right intention; and acts selflessly and holistically. It is not an efficient cause of liberation but rather the final cause. The cause of bondage is the absolutization of a part by placing itself in the centre. *Avatāra* does not put itself in the centre.

## Conclusion

Every world view is a product of experience and interpretation. There is no world-view which is a purely objective. Every world-view is a combination of both the subjective and the objective; it affects the whole being, namely, knowing, willing, action and passion. It is holistic, and has a thrust that manifests a historical consciousness or a cosmic perspective. The Historical and the Archaic are world views; each of them is a view and not a vision. Only the two together, like the two eyes of the *Puruṣa*, can produce a vision, depth-vision. Joseph Campbell mythically describes the emerging encounter between the two world views:

Two completely opposed mythologies of the destiny and virtue of man, therefore, have come together in the modern world. And they are contributing in discord to whatever new society may be in the process of formation. For of the tree that grows

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needs to transcend imagination and even thinking; tempiternity is more than mere non-temporality. [Cf R. Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (Bangalore: 1982), 161]. The spirit in a human being is killed by reducing man to a mere temporal being, and time to a linear succession. The uniqueness of an act is destroyed by the very consciousness of time; there are many human realities which are not datable. [Cf. R. Panikkar, "The European University Tradition and the Renascent World Cultures", *Communio Viatorum*, (January-February 1968), 7]. In the human person there is an element which cannot be reduced to the temporal. [Cf. R. Panikkar, "The Mirage of the Future," *The Teilhard Review* 8 (1973), 45]. Outside temporality, man has a certain perspective whereby he is aware of this very temporality. Some human experiences are not temporal. [Cf. R. Panikkar, *Worship and Secular Man*, 41-46].

Novelty is not criterion of authenticity. If one sees time as circumference one would be liberated from this obsession of novelty. The past is not outdated. Seeing time as equidistant from a centre takes away the obsession of the future. True liberation implies realizing that the ultimate significance of life does not lie in time. Experiencing time as a closed circle takes away the obsession of the present. One need not have the totality of human experience in a purely temporal present. One may live the present in the temporal event or in its tempiternal reality. [Cf R. Panikkar, "Le Temps Circulaire: Temporalisation et Temporalité", *Temporalité et Aliénation, Archivio di Filosofia* (1975), 220-225].

Tempiternity is built into the very core of time and yet not to be confused with it. It is neither eternity nor post-temporal eternity; it is rather the very heart of time. It is that which overcomes time (here) and eternity (later). The entire reality is tempiternal, i.e., temporal and eternal simultaneously. Tempiternity is not something separable from time or contradictory to it but is in the midst of time. Man is conscious of temporality but the act of consciousness is not temporal. An act of consciousness is inseparable from the object of awareness and is beyond space and time. [Cf R. Panikkar, "Times and Sacrifice: The Sacrifice of Time and the Ritual of Modernity," 698-713].

<sup>57</sup> The time of the myth of Archaic is trans-historical time; it is not pre-historic time but primeval time. In reference to the eschatological myths; it is not the future but the last days, the end of time. Before all other time comes the primeval time. It is the time of origins; this primeval time can never become a past; it is continually a present. Eternity is independent of time. It is neither infinite time, nor supra-temporal or infra-temporal. It cannot be compared to the temporal reality. It is the specific character of divinity. Certain trends in Western and Oriental thought have interpreted eternity as a dualistic conception of the universe; but it need not necessarily be so. [Cf Panikkar, *Worship and Secular Man*, 30-34].

<sup>58</sup> Cf Francis X. D'Sa, "The Reality of the Archaic and the Historical: Tentative Reflections on the Myth of the Archaic and the Myth of History," 6-9

in the garden where God walks in the cool of the day, the wise men westward of Iran have partaken of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, whereas those on the other side of that cultural divide, in India and the Far East, have relished only the fruit of eternal life. However, the two limbs, we are informed, come together in the center of the garden, where they form a single tree at the base, branching out when they reach a certain height. Likewise, the two mythologies spring from one base in the Near East. And if man should taste of both fruits he would become, we have been told, as God himself (Genesis 3:22) – which is the boon that the meeting of East and West today is offering to us all.<sup>59</sup>

In the final analysis, the two world views that we have examined, viz., the Archaic Hindu and the Historic Christian perspective, are simply two ways of experiencing our Being in the world. They are not antithetical; rather they are two faces of a single coin – two different ways of looking at a single reality. They represent two universes of meaning. Today, while we await a new dawn, in which the encounter of these two worlds is gradually becoming inevitable, one is called to be aware of the presence of two world-views within oneself. The confrontation, meeting, rendezvous has to be first and foremost experienced within oneself. This points to a personal conversion; for which a change of heart is indispensable. East and West, the myth of the Archaic and the myth of History, Myth and Logos, have to meet within oneself; and only then can we hope for not just a dawn but a sunrise and flowering of the budding encounter. Globalization is a call to bid farewell to isolation, individualism, self-centredness, egoism and ghettoism, and to face the challenges of a paradigm shift to cross-culturation, cross-fertilization, mutual-correction and mutual-enrichment.

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<sup>59</sup> Joseph Campbell, *Oriental Mythology: The Masks of God*, Vol. II (New York: 1976), 9.

## **Fudging Figures and Twisting Facts:**

### **A Reflection on the Philosophy of History**

- **Ashley Miranda**

*Our contemporary experience with the media presenting the stories we ourselves are well aware we find that presently verifiable facts and figures are twisted, exaggerated or cited out of context in order to prove a point or support one's own agenda. Such fudging facts and deliberately coloring the truth brings us to the reflection on the 'philosophy of history' that if things happening in the here and now can be fudged and twisted, how much more things that have allegedly happened in the past? Statistical data, facts and figures pertaining to present situations can always be cross checked and verified, but how does one verify 'historical accounts' of past happenings when there is usually very little hard evidence to support the 'initial historical account' in the first place? Dealing with 'epistemological fragility' of the very discipline of history, which is part and parcel of all 'history discourse' it is true that past events are usually interpretations or 'personal constructs' determined by the historian's perspective. This makes a philosophical reflection on history very important. We have got to move beyond a naïve understanding of history as an objective account of facts as they took place to a more subtle understanding of history as guarantor of identity, significance and importance.*

## **Introduction**

The Mumbai edition of the *Times of India* dated 14th August 2011 carried a very interesting and thought provoking article entitled *Wrong Numbers*. In this article, Shobhan Saxena speaks of how facts and figures are twisted, exaggerated or cited out of context by government or other agencies in order to prove a point or support their own agendas. Of course while this article holds politicians guilty of fudging facts and deliberately lying to color the truth, it also seems to hold the naïve assumption that with proper use of the *RTI Act* one can have access to accurate information on any issue.<sup>1</sup>

The point that I want to make right at the beginning of this reflection on the 'philosophy of history' is that if things happening in the here and now can be fudged and twisted, how much more things that have allegedly happened in the past? Statistical data, facts and figures pertaining to present situations can always be cross checked and verified, but how does one verify 'historical accounts' of past happenings when there is usually very little hard evidence to support the 'initial historical account' in the first place?

What G. K. Chesterton in his classic book *The Everlasting Man* says about Pre-history applies equally well to the writing of history. In the technological sciences progress is made by means of experimentation, however when it comes to history there is little or no place for experiment. History depends on evidence, of which there is usually very little. There is a built in corrective

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Shobhan Saxena, "Wrong Numbers", in *Sunday Times of India*, Mumbai, 16.

mechanism in the technological sciences. Chesterton puts it beautifully, “the marvellous and triumphant aeroplane is made out of a hundred mistakes.” The so called science of history has no such self-corrective mechanism. If the historian gets it wrong at any stage in his ‘history writing’, he goes on only multiplying his errors from then on in the absence of a built in self-correcting mechanism.<sup>2</sup>

Many, so called historians tend to pass off their field of expertise as a straight forward discipline that provides an objective, non-disputable account of events and peoples past. However, reflection reveals that things are not as simple as they are often made out to be. Keith Jenkins, in his book, *Re-Thinking History*, speaks of the ‘epistemological fragility’<sup>3</sup> of the very discipline of history. He thinks that fragility is part and parcel of all ‘history discourse’, even though very few historians would care to admit it. He identifies four reasons for this ‘epistemological fragility’. (1) no one could possibly recount all that has happened in the past. The sheer bulk of the past precludes total history. (2) since the past is past, no account of it can ever be cross checked against it; any cross checking would have to take place vis-à-vis other accounts. (3) no matter how verifiable or widely acceptable, history is always a personal construct of the historian. (4) while history in a certain sense is less than the past, it is in another sense more than the past. Past events are invariably understood in hindsight. These ‘understandings’ are usually interpretations or ‘personal constructs’ determined by the historian’s perspective.<sup>4</sup> While life is lived forwards, historians have the advantage of beginning with an event and tracing its roots back in time. As the historian does so, he or she invariably makes connections, highlights details, focuses on some events rather than others, and comes up with an interpretation rather than an exact account of how things took place.

Now the question is, if history suffers from such ‘epistemological fragility’, how is it different from fiction? Could it be called a ‘discipline’ or ‘science’ at all, or would it be more appropriate to call it a pseudo-science? In fact, there are quite a few thinkers who are ‘suspicious’ of history. They think that all history is nothing but propaganda, all historiography is at the service of covert or overt agenda. In the light of this, some might be tempted to suggest that we could do without history or that it is not worth doing history. However, that would be taking things in the opposite direction. While history is a ‘epistemologically’ and even ‘methodologically’ fragile discipline it is, from the human point of view a very important and indispensable discipline nonetheless. History gives individuals, communities and peoples their sense of identity. History gives our lives, our life styles, our value systems their legitimacy. You separate an individual, a community, a people, from their history and you reduce them to the status of a nobody. This makes history very important. This makes a philosophical reflection on history [the goal of this seminar] very important. We have got to move beyond a naïve understanding of history as an objective account of facts as they took place to a more subtle understanding of history as guarantor of identity, significance and importance.<sup>5</sup>

In this brief, introductory reflection on the philosophy of history I would just like to highlight some of the most important issues that any philosophy of history would need to pay attention to. Of course, it needs to be admitted that it is next to impossible for anyone to delineate all the

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. G. K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man* (New York: Image Books, 1955), 41-42.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Keith Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History* (London: Routledge, 1991), 11-13.

<sup>4</sup> Keith Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History*, 21.

<sup>5</sup> Keith Jenkins, *Re-thinking History*, 18-19.

questions and issues that arise with regard to history, its nature, its method, its purpose and its legitimacy.

### **1. Ahistorical philosophy and Aphilosophical History**

One needs to be wary of both ahistorical philosophy and aphilosophical history. Both these realities are very common; but to my mind, an ahistorical philosophy is an impoverishment of philosophy and an aphilosophical history is an impoverishment of history.

Philosophers do not drop down from the sky. Their insights and reflections are most often a response to the most pressing and significant issues and questions of their particular time and age. Secondly philosophers usually do not work in isolation; their thought is part of a dialogical framework within which it makes sense. A philosopher's insights and the new paradigms he or she proposes may not be meaningful and significant to individuals and peoples living in a very different time from the one in which the philosopher lived. That is why to separate a philosopher from his/her age and time and to study his/her thought in isolation from the dialogical context in which it evolved would be to distort in a way what the philosopher says. Another kind of ahistorical approach to philosophy is one that treats all philosophers as contemporaries. As a result one brings the thought of Socrates in dialogue with the thought of Sartre and the thought of Thomas with that of Heidegger, and the thought of Foucault with that of Augustine as if they were addressing the same issues and were inhabitants of the same intellectual universe. A way needs to be found to bring philosophies of very different times and ages into dialogue but it is clear that this cannot be done by disregarding history as irrelevant.

Similarly to think that history is just a plain, unbiased, objective recounting of facts as they took place is a little naïve. One can speak of history and of philosophy of history. Philosophy of history is sensitive to the presuppositions, the value judgments, the agenda, the vested interests that underlie any historical account. In history while the focus is on providing an account of events as they unfolded, there are always unacknowledged but subtly present philosophical presuppositions that underlie the account in question.<sup>6</sup> In fact, we can say that instead of speaking of historical accounts it would be more correct to speak of historical discourses. This is because every historical narrative is shaped and directed by philosophical presuppositions that ascribe significance to particular individuals, ways of life, value systems, etc., and privilege them over others.

### **2. Professional History and the New Histories**

The historian is considered a professional, trained and competent in his art. Historians are noted for careful, meticulous and systematic study that often absorbs them for a lifetime. Until recently people did accept that there was a difference between the professional historian and the popular historian. Now that distinction has become more blurred. In the past the professional historian capped his years of work and research by publishing his findings which was then up for public scrutiny, appreciation and criticism, by his fellow professionals. However, now the tag of 'professional' is claimed also by those who write popular history. In fact, history today has become very popular and the way history is 'written' has changed dramatically. Today we have

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse* (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1978), 126-127 cited in Keith Jenkins, *Re-thinking History* (London: Routledge, 1991), xi.

the 'historical novel', the 'historical movie', the 'historical documentary'. What we notice about each of these media is that they are extremely attractive and have the power to enchant the audience/reader like the professional history book never had. The professional history book was usually assigned to some shelf in the library and when the student was asked to check on some historical fact, the student would borrow the book and then return it as soon as the work assigned to him/her was over. However, these new media make history not only easily available but also available 24X7. History has now become not only gripping and stimulating but also entertaining.<sup>7</sup>

The professional historian may be tempted to belittle the history 'dished' out by television, motion pictures and novels. While one may feel certain sympathy for this point of view of the professional historian it must also be admitted that the influence of these new media involved in the production of history is enormous. These media reach out to millions of people and the impact they make on the way people think, choose, feel and act is stupendous.

The professional historian may say that the quality of the history communicated by these media is of dubious worth. But the question is, 'How does one convince people about that?' There are many who have the guts to question the gospel, but there are few who even doubt the so called 'facts' communicated by the historical movie, novel or documentary. The last fifty years have seen a flood of historical movies, novels and documentaries.<sup>8</sup> These may contain 'factual facts', 'fictional facts', 'factual fiction', or even 'fictional fiction'<sup>9</sup>, but for the lay person it is all the same. These media influence him and shape his/her mind like few other things can.

### **3. Historical Truth and Conflicting Versions of History**

The way I began this essay may give one the impression that I believe that there is no truth in history and that all historical accounts are nothing but expressions of a historian's personal presuppositions and biases. However, I do think that it is possible to arrive at historical facts. As a point of fact, I do agree with those who think that 'there are thousands of historical facts which are not contested at all, because the evidence for them is large and unambiguous.'<sup>10</sup> But what I want to assert is that a lot of history is interpretation, especially when the historian sets out to give reasons for why things happened the way they did, when the historians seek to ascribe praise and blame, when they create heroes and villains, when they set out to describe a person's thought and intentions.

It is difficult to deny that the historian's presuppositions, interests, value system, methods substantially influence the history he or she writes. Secondly his/her version of history can never

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Beverley Southgate, *History: What & Why? Ancient, Modern, and Postmodern Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 1996), 31.

<sup>8</sup> These historical novels, movies and documentaries number in the thousands. On the net, for example, one can find a list of more than 5000 historical novels. Cf. <http://www.historicalnovels.info/>

<sup>9</sup> By 'factual facts', I mean, facts for which there is documentary evidence that even professional historians accept as genuine. By 'fictional facts' I mean, creative addition of details to the life of a character who did exist or an event that did take place. There may be evidence for the existence of the character or event in question but everything else is the fruit of the writer's/producer's imagination. By 'factual fiction' I mean, a story or the main characters of the story may be the fruit of the producer's imagination, but the customs, traditions, values, of the time/locale in which the story is set has a factual core. By 'fictional fiction', I mean, that both the story/characters and also the customs, traditions, values, of the time/locale in which the story is set is fictional and the producer admits that this is the case.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. C. Behan McCullagh, *The Truth of History* (London: Routledge, 1998), 22.

claim to be complete because even the best historian does not and cannot have access to all the facts. A historical account therefore, by its very nature, is affected both by the context in which the historian finds him/herself and the limitedness of his/her perspective. The fact that his/her version of the truth is limited does not mean that every historical truth claim is relative or subjective. I think, it is indeed possible, to arrive at objective truth to a certain extent in history. The fact that one does not know everything about a person/event of the past does not mean that one knows nothing. It is perfectly possible that what a historian knows is limited but that at the same time what he knows is true to fact.

When confronted with different accounts of an event or a person's life one may be tempted to think of them in either/or terms as being either right or wrong. We need to realize that there could be more than one way of looking at persons and events and that while historians may come up with conflicting versions of what a person did or what happened, it is perfectly possible that all of them may be right, each in his or her own way. Therefore, when historians today speak of truth in history they mean not so much that a particular version of history corresponds exactly to how things happened, but that this version of history is plausible because it has a certain internal coherence and consistency.

In my view, historical truth by its very nature is dialogical. It is not something static and fixed that must be discovered by the use of proper methodology. Since no historian can be open enough to study a person or event from all possible perspectives, we have got to admit that it is only through a frank and open and ongoing dialogue between different historical versions of a person's life or events that the truth gradually emerges. Risieri Frondizi puts it very succinctly; he says that truth in history, "is always in the making and it should be looked upon as a never ending process of organic integration."<sup>11</sup>

#### **4. History, Giants and Lilliputs**

The historian can create a person or destroy him or her and this can be done even without the historian even knowing it. We said that people create history. We have got to also admit that history also creates people. History can make giants out of Lilliputs and Lilliputs out of giants. A person who in his or her time made a big difference can be simply blanked out from the pages of history by the simple act of forgetting [which may be either innocent or intentional]. At the same time history can make a person who did precious little into a hero, a model to be emulated and worshipped. India is a land that loves its heroes. At this point of time we have heroes both at national and state levels who are presented as paragons of virtue, courage and selflessness. To even suggest that being humans they were likely to have human shortcomings is often a risky enterprise tantamount to putting one's head on the block.

In societies marked by turmoil and conflict between different groups over a period of time it is likely that one will find that one and the same person is referred to by one group as a saint and by the other as a brigand, by one group as a freedom fighter and by the other as a militant, by one group as a brave soldier and by the other group as a terrorist, by one group as a model of virtue and by the other group as a vile immoral individual.

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<sup>11</sup> Risieri Frondizi, "Are Truth and History Incompatible?" in Hans-Georg Gadamer (ed), *Truth and Historicity* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972), 33.

As far as history is concerned, therefore, the status of a person is not determined so much by how he/she lived, or what he/she believed in or stood for, but by what that person means to a particular group. When a person is a hero for a particular group not only does his/her thoughts and actions get gilded with virtue but also his/her physical dimensions change. A person who in real life may have been a Lilliput ends up becoming a giant in the minds and imaginations of the people for whom he/she is a hero. And when this happens the only thing that matters from then on for those who write about this 'figure' is to be politically correct.

## **5. The Evolving Present Changes the Past**

The Past is past and it cannot change. What can change is the present and the future. However, things are no more as simple as that. The evolving present has a great influence on how people understand the past. New sensitivities, new values dramatically alter how the past is read. A decision or action that until recently was seen in positive light could suddenly come to be regarded as an act of violence or oppression. What till the other day was viewed as an act of barbarism could suddenly because of changing perspectives become an act of courage and heroism. In the light of this, we can say that as far as history is concerned, the past is not static or fixed but volatile and effervescent. One does not really know and one cannot even reasonably predict the 'future of the past'.<sup>12</sup>

## **6. History, Power, and the Politics of Truth**

In his book *Power/Knowledge*, Foucault asserts that historical truth is part of the general politics of a society. 'Truth' is a tool, a 'useful fiction,' used by those in powers to exercise control over others and manipulate them.<sup>13</sup> While this may be too powerful a statement and may not apply to all writing of history, there is no doubt that a lot of history, especially when it is motivated by economic, political or moral considerations is an instrument used by those in power to legitimize the status quo, financial and political decisions, and dominant life styles.

K.N. Pannikar speaks of the politics of writing history. He says, "Although it is quite common to talk about the objectivity of history, which a historian attempts to achieve within the limitations of the discipline, there are no historical writings not imbued with some elements of politics. All historiographies,... are... embedded in the struggle for power."<sup>14</sup>

## **7. Grand Narratives and Alternate Histories**

In his seminal work, *The Postmodern Condition*, Jean-Francois Lyotard launched a no holds barred attack on 'meta-narratives'. History, in its traditional form, he says, has specialized in weaving grand narratives or 'generalizations'. In his view these generalizations or grand narratives have all been proved false and have been discredited. He suggests therefore that we should abandon them and begin writing 'little narratives' of particular events which are short and which focus on the activities of individuals and how they struggle to meet the contingencies of

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Beverley Southgate, *History: What & Why, Ancient, Modern, and Postmodern Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 1996), 158-159.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. M. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon, 1981), 131-133 cited in Keith Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History* (London: Routledge, 1991), 31-32.

<sup>14</sup> K.N. Panikkar, "Alternative Historiographies: Changing paradigms of power", in Felix Wilfred and Jose D. Maliekal (ed), *The Struggle for the Past: Historiography Today* (Chennai: University of Madras, 2002), 12. .

life. He is of the view that this makes history more readable, and lot more fun because it has a certain energy that the dry accounts of social abstractions churned out by traditional history lacked. Besides ordinary people are able to empathize more easily with the characters they encounter in these little narratives.<sup>15</sup>

The ‘incredulity towards meta-narratives’ that Lyotard recommended has now become the order of the day, not only because many philosophers have found these meta-narratives to be false but more because many today feel that these meta-narratives are nothing but biased accounts of history woven to further the interests of the dominant groups in society. The big stories are never about the people on the margins, about the poor and underprivileged. Invariably they seek to justify the status quo, to explain away unjust social structures and the privileges that a select few enjoy. The present times have seen a new found interest in alternative histories of people on the margins, of people whose stories no one seemed interested in, of people who had no story to tell and of people who didn’t seem important enough to have a story at all. Today we speak of subaltern history, the history of Dalit and tribal peoples, the history of indigenous peoples and the history of displaced and oppressed populations.

## **8. History from Below**

History has usually focused on the deeds and achievements of important people – of kings and rulers, of politicians and statesmen, of the wealthy, the famous and the powerful. This history is referred to today as ‘history from above’. However, the present times has seen historical attention shifting from these ‘extraordinary people’ to more ‘ordinary people’, to the contribution and the deeds of the common person. Felix Wilfred calls this history, “uneventful history”.<sup>16</sup> The last twenty years or so has seen the growth of the popularity of a movement that goes under the name, the ‘history from below’ movement. This movement considers the story of ordinary people, workers, immigrants, women, ethnic and racial minorities important and seeks to recover the stories of these people even if they may not be very dramatic. This movement has challenged traditional notions about who the historian is and what history is about. It has attacked the presumption that only professional historians are qualified to do history and has popularized the view that even ordinary people who are interested in the past of their families, and communities can make a big contribution to the understanding of history.<sup>17</sup>

The new media, especially the internet, has made ‘history from below’ not only very popular but also very exciting as well. The internet makes it possible for an ordinary individual to trace his/her ancestry and build up his/her family tree across generations. It also gives the ordinary person the possibility of writing the story of his/her own life, the story of the street on which he/she lives, the story of his/her school or workplace; anything actually. And what’s even more wonderful is that he/she can get people from across the world to read his/her story and comment on it.

## **9. History V/s Herstory**

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Vol. 10 in the series: *Theory and History of Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), cited in C. Behan McCullagh, *The Truth of History* (London: Routledge, 1998), 298-300.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Felix Wilfred, “Whose Nation? Whose History” in Felix Wilfred and Jose D. Maliekal (ed), *The Struggle for the Past: Historiography Today* (Chennai: University of Madras, 202), 79.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Jeremy Brecher, *History from Below*, <http://www.stonesoup.coop/historybelow/historybelow.htm>, 21.08.2011

Robin Morgan, in her book, *Sisterhood is Powerful*, coined the neologism 'herstory'. Etymologically the word history which comes from the Greek, *istoria*, meaning 'learning or knowing by inquiry, has nothing to do with the possessive pronoun *his*. Nonetheless, Robin felt that coining a word like 'herstory'<sup>18</sup> would drive home the powerful message that conventional history suffers from a great blindness in that it has systematically ignored the life and contribution of women. It has treated women as if they do not exist;<sup>19</sup> as if they were a different species altogether.

The question that needs to be asked is that considering that women constitute half of humankind, how did a discipline that prides in its attention to detail and objectivity miss out something as obvious as this? What needs to be done to ensure that women and other groups that mainline history has systematically ignored thus far are not overlooked anymore? It is difficult to disagree with the women who think that a discipline which has such major blind spots cannot make claims to great objectivity or credibility.

## **10. History, Demythologization and Theology**

History has traditionally advocated that in order to get to the fact one must clearly distinguish it from the many myths that get attached to it over the course of time. Demythologization is a fashionable word especially in the field of theology and religious studies. In Christian theology for example in some quarters there has been a search for the 'historical Christ'. The presumption being that the Church over the centuries has distorted both Christ and the Gospel by the myths it has woven with regard to him, his identity and his message. The question is, 'is this critique legitimate?' Is it really possible to separate the 'historical Christ' from the myth surrounding him? Would such a process clarify for us who he really was or would it distort his true identity?

In my view myth [especially religious myth] is not necessarily the opposite of history. The myth that gets attached to a person's identity is part of who he/she is. When one takes away the myth one does not come closer to the truth. On the contrary, one ends up distorting the truth about that person. Philosophy of history today needs to abandon the simplistic view that history and myth are antipodal. In the interests of truth, one must be careful not to succumb to the temptation to exaggeration while writing history, especially the history of religions and religious figures. However, one has also got to accept that the myth is very much an integral part of the person around whom it builds up.

## **Conclusion: Speculative and Analytic philosophy of History**

In this paper, we have highlighted some of the important issues that 'philosophy of history' needs to be sensitive to in our contemporary times. But, the issues we have highlighted here are by no means the only relevant issues. Philosophers of history tend to distinguish between two distinct branches of this field: the speculative and the analytic.<sup>20</sup> Speculative philosophy of history focuses on the content of history and asks questions about the *telos*, the overarching purpose, that governs historical processes. However, with the post-modern suspicion of grand narratives, speculative philosophy of history has lost ground and popularity. Analytic philosophy

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herstory>, 10.08.2007.

<sup>19</sup> Virginia Wolf is supposed to have observed that women have been 'all but absent from history'. Cf. Beverley Southgate, *History: What & why? Ancient, Modern, and Postmodern Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 1996), 99.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. M.C. Lemon, *Philosophy of History* (London: Routledge, 2003), 281.

of history focuses on history as a discipline. It asks the question of truth, method, and objectivity of historical accounts. Most of the issues we have identified are part of the subject matter of analytic philosophy of history. Both these branches of the philosophy of history are equally important. What is perhaps, more important is to recognize that 'history' is not a straightforward, black and white, simple discipline that gives us an indisputable account of how things actually happened. History is not so much a collection of facts as it is of interpretations.

## Mass Mediated History

- Francis Arackal

*A journalist is basically a chronicler of events as they unfold. In the process he/she makes the first draft of history, which history may come to the use of a professional historian to record the events objectively and bequeath to the future generations. New technologies have made journalist's task easy but the rise of media empires and the subsequent formation of culture industries have made his/her job complex at the same time. Since media empires or cultural industries are primarily driven by profit motive and a desire to set the agenda – economic, political, social, cultural, etc., journalists come under increasing pressures to compromise objectivity and truth. Accordingly at times the mediated history that is produced in the newsroom is a distorted version of reality out there. This is especially so in times of conflict and war. Some media critics goes on to the extent of saying that media is also a maker of war. Media assumes the self-appointed role of actors or agents in the events and processes which they purport only to be reporting. To that extent the media themselves have had an impact on the course of historical events, and been a significant ingredient in their development. This becomes evident when one considers carefully the major historical events of the twentieth and early twenty-first century.*

### Introduction

We live in a 'mediated' – by newspapers, magazines, radio, television, internet – society. The person who facilitates this mediation is a journalist. Journalist is basically a chronicler of events – reports events as they unfold. Locally, nationally, globally, things happen, then they are reported to the public. Thus what he/she writes down is the first draft of history. In this sense a journalist is the primary historian. In journalistic language the first draft of history is a 'story'. We might recall here that in both French (*l'histoire*) and German (*die Geschichte*) 'story' and 'history' are expressed by the same word. A professional historian to write history would need first to peruse through the drafts that the primary historian has drawn. 'News' is constantly blended into historians' narratives, and eventually becomes part of it. Thus there is a clear link between newstoriography<sup>1</sup> and historiography. In the twentieth century context, it is right to say that historiography is to a considerable degree old newstoriography. The news is credible and believed, or it is not news. The first drafts were supposed to have been made following the professional code and other ethical principles. But it does not seem to happen this way always. For SIDE – Selection, Interpretation, Distortion and Emphasis - influences the way events are recorded. This is the crucial point in media<sup>2</sup> making history.

Media in some form or the other have existed from the dawn of human history. It is not in the ambit of this short paper to go into the history of media. In showing how media makes history

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<sup>1</sup> The concept is a derivative of 'historiography'. It means the undertaking of charting and analyzing news discourses within their ideological and political contexts, just as historiography does for historical discourses.

<sup>2</sup> In this paper the terms 'media', 'press', 'journalism' is used almost interchangeably. The term 'media' is used both in plural and singular.

this paper will focus exclusively on some of the major events, which changed the course of history, in the twentieth and early twenty-first century. To explain how media makes history one needs to understand the two and only two functions of media: 1) mirroring society, 2) setting agenda. Now these two functions may be carried out in various ways.

Mirroring society means recording/reporting faithfully, objectively events as they unfold. Generally and traditionally it is thought that a journalist's task is to search out and portray an accurate and true depiction of events as possible. The late twentieth century even established virtually instantaneous global communication networks whereby the event and the report on it (print & visual) were often simultaneous. The suicide attacks on the twin towers of the World Trade Centre in New York on 11 September 2001 are an example of this. The visual media does the mirroring part more vividly and accurately. That's why anti-corruption activist Anna Hazare wanted the Lokpal Bill drafting committee's meetings to be video graphed. Minutes of the meeting (chronicles) do convey what went on but not so solidly as the video. After all, in normal course cameras cannot lie. The visual media also makes the recalling/remembering of an event (by now history) easier. It is a common sense expectation on the part of the audience that there be proper sequence (from event to report to reception).

Media setting agenda has to do with its social responsibility, and should have been only because of that, not due to pressure from power-elites, vested interests, and business-interest of a particular media house. In the course of this paper we will learn that media's setting agenda has not been always above board. In fact it is when media seeks to set the agenda (except social agenda for the good of the society) that untruth and half-truth results. By seeking to set the agenda they try to mould the audience's historical and current assumptions. In this respect journalists are not our guides, but our great misleaders.

The two-fold functions of the media outlined above raise some pertinent questions: To what extent have the media been *actors or agents* in the events and processes which they purport only to be reporting? To what extent have the media themselves had an impact on the course of historical events, and been a significant ingredient in their development? What if corrupt narratives have led to false perspectives and conclusions such that the 'lessons of history' and the justifications for future actions are, at crucial moments, based on misapprehensions or deliberate misappropriations?

We stated previously that this paper's focus is on history altering events of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. We shall elucidate how mass media journalistic practice has not just reported and portrayed the twentieth century's history falsely as it went along; it has also, through doing so, created consequences, chains of further events which could not have happened, or at least not in the way they did, without the intervention of initial misleading mass media discourses. Such discourses were in part due to the subjecting of mass media to market forces and ideology. Media was owned by powerful entrepreneurs for whom the maximizing of accuracy and objectivity was, ultimately, subordinate to the business of accumulating wealth and power.

## **1. The Power of the Media**

Hence at this juncture it is appropriate to discuss briefly the power of the media. By the middle of the twentieth century mass media became a cultural industry having transforming effects on people's perception of the world in terms of time and space. The mass media corporations, or more precisely, the global industrial corporations, were able to acquire the status of expanding world powers which eliminated most of the competition in the field. This commercialization is at the root of mass media's massive distortion of discourse, and the consequent intention to mislead the public, which had become so routinized in media production that the working journalists either just accept it as coming with their job, or no longer notice it. Herman and Chomsky speak about it in *Manufacturing Consent*. In this connection Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2001) joins Chomsky (and many others) to highlight how media uses language as "an instrument of action and power". Thus corruption of language is a central issue with regard to the power of the media:

Popular concepts like 'democracy', 'freedom', 'choice', and 'reform', are emptied of their dictionary meanings. This has long been standard practice, but in the late twentieth century it is reinforced by the facility of technology and the illusion of an 'information society', which in reality means more media owned by fewer and fewer conglomerates<sup>3</sup>

In a lecture *On Television* Bourdieu expounds his view that "television poses a serious danger for all the various areas of cultural production" and 'poses no less of a threat to political life and to democracy itself.' "Television enjoys a de facto monopoly on what goes into the heads of a significant part of the population and what they think"<sup>4</sup>. Looking at television's discursive practice, he argues that it:

[...] can hide things by showing something other than what would be shown if television did what it's supposed to do, provide information. Or by showing what has to be shown, but in such a way that it isn't really shown, or is turned into something insignificant; or by constructing it in such a way that it takes on a meaning that has nothing at all to do with reality<sup>5</sup>.

In another lecture on *The Power of Journalism* he examines "how the structural pressure exerted by the journalistic field, itself dominated by market pressures, more or less profoundly modifies power relationships within other fields". John Pilger too in *Hidden Agendas* eloquently demonstrates the immense and increasing power of media corporations in the media age, with its discourses conforming to "hidden agendas" which "often prevent the audience from understanding the meaning of contemporary events"<sup>6</sup>. He goes on to show how Rupert Murdoch's media empire is involved in manipulation of facts, stories, and language, particularly by his UK tabloid *The Sun*.<sup>7</sup> Vital to this role is the manipulation of discourse:

One of the most effective functions of 'communicators' is to minimize the culpability of this [Western] power in war and terrorism, the enforced impoverishment of large numbers of

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<sup>3</sup> J. Pilger, *Hidden Agendas* (London: Vintage, 1998), 490.

<sup>4</sup> P. Bourdieu, *On Television and Journalism* (London: Pluto, 1998), 18.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>6</sup> J. Pilger, *Hidden Agendas*, 4.

<sup>7</sup> What many writers and critics of Murdoch's media empire have been saying all along was proved right when the 'phone hacking scandal' unfolded in the UK in July 2011.

people and the theft of resources and the repression of human rights. This is achieved by omission on a grand scale, by the repetition of received truths and the obfuscation of causes.<sup>8</sup>

We shall see that what was said above has been crucial in media's making history.

## 2. Media and World War I (1914-18)

According to John Pilger in the First World War journalists told lies in order to make acceptable that which would not be acceptable, or *accepted*, if instead the truth were told.

In other words, in the 1914-18 war, lies changed history, and cost the lives of millions of young men. The false version of events, where a 'massacre' became a 'victory', was what the public read in their newspapers, and the daily lies added up to an image of the war, as perceived [in UK], which made it acceptable. Untruth masquerading as truth did not just provide the public with a wrong account of what had just happened at the front, it ensured that as a result of that false story, the massacre continued; it *determined future events*.<sup>9</sup>

Karl Kraus'<sup>10</sup> voluminous record of how the war was reported in Vienna is a real eye opener. Kraus' work which he later turned into a monumental documentary drama *The Last Days of Humanity* (1919) exposes "satirically the specific processes of discursive deception from event to its 'mediatic' transformation to its reception and consequences, revealing the combination of economic, political and journalistic power interests that were operating it".<sup>11</sup>

Kraus viewed the war from the start as a commercial operation, desired and run by those who could profit from it – a diabolic materialist elite of techno-capitalist entrepreneurs, opportunistic traders, corrupt journalist, and the military leadership.

Within this unsavoury collaboration, the press plays *the key* role, for it delivers public opinion, based on its hegemonic discourse, to the economic power elites and their political fig leaves. For Kraus, the war is just one lucrative episode in a larger, long-term process; the press did not suddenly switch to such a propagandistic role because of the outbreak of war. Rather, this was part of its structural function, which it had been practising for years. Correspondingly, it had not only long since gained control over public thought patterns and attitudes, *it had also by 1914 created the cultural climate in which war became possible, acceptable, even desirable*.<sup>12</sup>

In December 1914 Kraus expressed the idea of the press as the provoker, through its lies, of future evil, corrupt actions and news events.

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<sup>8</sup> J. Pilger, *Hidden Agendas* (London: Vintage, 1998), 489.

<sup>9</sup> J. Theobald, *Media and the Making of History* (Hants, England: Ashgate, 2004), 55.

<sup>10</sup> Karl Kraus (1874-1936) was an Austrian writer and journalist. He is regarded as a foremost radical media critic of the twentieth century. He founded his own newspaper *Die Fackel* (The Torch) which he continued to direct, publish, write until his death.

<sup>11</sup> J. Theobald, *Media and the Making of History*, 56.

<sup>12</sup> J. Theobald's observation based on Kraus' article written in his newspaper *Die Fackel* in 1914.

“For Kraus, at the centre of this process of media provoking atrocities is linguistic corruption. This comprises his whole conception of the death of imagination and public disorientation through the commercialization of language, and his detailed unpacking of how language is instrumentalised by the press for the purposes of deceit, control and profit”<sup>13</sup>.

### 3. Media and the Rise of Fascism

Adolf Hitler understood the central importance of media discourse in controlling the mind of the public. Hitler stated in 1923: “Propaganda, propaganda, propaganda, all that matters is propaganda”.<sup>14</sup> Two years earlier, Kraus wrote: “In the beginning was the press, and then the world appeared.”<sup>15</sup> Here Kraus meant to say that how we see the world depends on media discourse.

At this moment in history (around 1925) newstoriographical lies were woven into the everyday language and imagery and were fed into media consumers, including those in positions of power. It is the mass-murder of language in the media which preceded Auschwitz, that made the mass murder there conceivable and possible. Social democracy was failing and the doors were opening up for the ‘unconquerables’ return to dominance. Foremost among the ‘unconquerables’ was, inevitably, the press. Kraus wrote in January 1926: “That the bourgeois press had the power to unleash the war was something we had to experience. But that it could also emerge from it unscathed and, more insolent than ever, raise its head, on which the cross of incorruptibility is drawn; [...]”<sup>16</sup>

In early 1929, as he approached the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of *Die Fackel*, Kraus wrote: It was my work to expose the press as the event-creating, death bringing organization of moral and spiritual irresponsibility, as that greatest evil of human society which, by means of the fascination of the printed word was able to divert attention from the danger it represented; as the suicidal weapon by which all the cultural achievements were stripped away, which it purports to protect. From this, it was a small step to state, in 1933: “National Socialism did not destroy the press, rather, the press created National Socialism”.<sup>17</sup> Viennese newspapers of the time used clichés associated with German superiority and Jewish inferiority. The Nazis took them literally, and turned the words into action. Worn out clichés like ‘Jewish vermin’ became believed *fact*, and led to the obvious conclusion that they had to be exterminated, and thence to actual extermination.

Hitler’s arch-propagandist, Goebbels was ‘the thorough connoisseur of journalistic dialect’, that is, he who has appropriated the full range of corrupt manipulative practices of the press, and fashioned out of them the whole set of Nazi propaganda instruments, which he then applied to the brains of the German public, already anaesthetized by previous journalistic practice. Thus by 1933 the cultural prerequisites were in place for the savagery (World War II and holocaust) that was to follow. According to the analysis of Kraus it would have been no more than the logical

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<sup>13</sup> J. Theobald, *Media and the Making of History*, 60

<sup>14</sup> Curran & Seaton, 1991: 249.

<sup>15</sup> As cited in J. Theobald, *Media and the Making of History*, 67.

<sup>16</sup> As cited in *Ibid.* 70.

<sup>17</sup> As cited in *Ibid.*.

outcome of the rise to power of the anti-culture, rooted in journalistic manipulation of language, which Hitler and his supporters had always represented.

#### 4. Media and the 'Cold War'

The misleading term 'Cold War' was the invention of a Western journalist. It was universally adopted by mass media, politicians, and academics and came into everyday parlance. This is thought to be the greatest discursive coup.

The resonant term 'Cold War' was always a deceit, covering up a series of 'hot' wars in, for example, Korea and Vietnam, where millions were killed. [...] One might argue that, from the [1960s], the continued use of the misleading term 'Cold War' in the political and economic interests of those promoting and pursuing it, successfully imposed and reinforced the accompanying mindset, and criminally distracted media audiences from the really vital issues.<sup>18</sup>

While a relatively small number of active citizens did understand and protest against the follies of the 'Cold War', the broad publics of Western Europe and the USA acquiesced in them over the last four decades of the twentieth century in accordance with dominant media discourse. Bertrand Russell, who became in this period of his life one of the clear minds amid the predominant obfuscation and mendacity, writes about the lies and half-truths fed to Western publics [through the media]: There is in the West much more regimentation and much more misleading propaganda by the Establishment than is generally known. Nor is it admitted that all such restrictions diminish the difference between East and West, and make the claim of the West to be called 'The Free World' derisory.<sup>19</sup>

During the 'Cold War' period a piece of widely available discourse, Tintin, a few pages of a children's comic strip, was used for propaganda by the West. The first Tintin story *Tintin in the Land of the Soviets*, 1939, was quasi-fascist and anti-Soviet ('evil empire'). Five main anti-Soviet themes in *Tintin in the Land of the Soviets* provided the rationale, aspects of which were also used by the Nazis to justify their anti-communism and invasion of the USSR, for the hostile public image of the Soviet Union in the West which was integral to the construction of the 'Cold War', and was successfully used to justify the demented conduct of the nuclear arms race.

The five main themes are, first, the ubiquity and deviousness of the Soviet secret police; second, the Soviet construction of fake factories to deceive gullible Western visitors; third, the holding of phoney elections; fourth, economic disaster – ruined buildings, bread queues, and famine as a result of the Soviet system; fifth, secret stores of luxury goods, used for propaganda purposes.<sup>20</sup> The anti-communist discourse unleashed through these themes impregnated and re-enforced the 'Cold War' mentality among Western media audiences. The comic book was symptomatic in that it contained within itself key characteristics of the larger propaganda system of the West to malign the East and sustain the 'Cold War' to its advantage.

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<sup>18</sup> J. Theobald, *Media and the Making of History*, 80.

<sup>19</sup> B. Russel, *Has Man a Future?* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), 40.

<sup>20</sup> See J. Theobald, *Media and the Making of History*, 84-89.

There can ultimately be no doubt that Western ‘Cold War’ propaganda, its historiography and newstoriography, was successful. All of the time, greater or smaller majorities of Western citizens and media consumers were sufficiently convinced by the constantly repeated hegemonic story to either agree with or at least consent to it – and remain passive.<sup>21</sup>

## 5. Media and the ‘Fall’ of Berlin Wall

The ‘fall’ of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989 was a real time media event. Thousands witnessed it on the spot and millions across the world watched it on live television, awed by the symbolism of the occasion. Yet, despite the fact that the subject was seemingly covered from every angle, and that such a detailed record was gathered, and remains available to journalists, commentators, historians, and the public, an extraordinarily selective and distorted image was quickly constructed, and remains embedded in popular memory. This is an amalgam of resonant media images and hegemonic media discourse, a story moulded in the interests of the West German and US power elites. According to this version, the ‘East German people’ rose up against their dictatorial government, and stormed the Berlin Wall, attacking it with hammers and chisels until it was breached, and then poured through to ‘freedom’ in ‘the West’. The long-separated ‘German people’ were re-united amid euphoria and popular celebration, following forty years of cruel division upheld by the morally and economically bankrupt Eastern communist regime. Thus the ‘Cold War’ came to an end in a spirit of universal rejoicing and victory for the West.<sup>22</sup> Thus a useful myth had been successfully created which, although untrue in every detail, had gained currency through the presentational work of the mass media.

In fact ‘the East Germans’ did not storm the Wall. A poorly phrased press statement from the just concluded GDR Politbüro early November signaled the imminent end of travel restrictions. Travel restrictions had already been somewhat relaxed between the East and the West. Besides, the ‘fall’ of the Berlin Wall had nothing to do with German re-unification. What actually happened was not popular anti-communist revolutionary action rather it was the result of the US-dominated global geopolitics. Of course, one cannot underplay the 4 November demonstration, the largest East Berlin had ever seen, calling for GDR reform. However, none of its speeches, and none of its banners called for German unification. It was simply not on the agenda. But five days later (9 November 1989) what happened was the annexation of their state and society by West Germany. Such an outcome was far from a general wish, let alone a foregone conclusion, except perhaps in the schemes of the US and West German governments, their business backers, media colleagues and political acolytes, that is, those most capable of bringing it about.

Michael Hofmann demonstrates cogently in his essay ‘*The Unity Train*’ (Nowell-Smith & Wollen 1991) the way in which the mainstream German media interacted intimately with the Helmut Kohl government in the creation of an unstoppable pro-unification bandwagon within Germany. He points to several ways in which media interventions crucially influenced events and public opinion while shoring up Chancellor Kohl’s then precarious political fortunes in West Germany. He shows how critical public debates were suppressed as the whole spectrum of media opinion from right to centre-left swung behind the Kohl line on unification. While in the international media opposition to unification and non-conforming views were progressively marginalized.

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<sup>21</sup> J. Theobald, *Media and the Making of History* (Hants, England: Ashgate, 2004), 108.

<sup>22</sup> J. Theobald, *Media and the Making of History*, 141-142.

Thus the media coverage of events preceding 9 November and after is a prime example of biased news ending up as distorted history.

## 6. Media and the Rise of Nationalism and Xenophobia

In the 1990s when the question of greater integration and strengthening of European Union arose a section of the British population perceived it as weakening, even destroying, certain ideas of essential British identity. Popular conservative newspapers such as the *Daily Mail*, which sold mainly to 'middle brow' audiences and supported the interests of the Europhobic establishment did not hesitate both to inflate and exploit this perceived threat by exciting embattled, xenophobic and anti-European feelings, and to present glorified myths of British superiority. In the autumn of 2000 British nationalist media polemics, sparked off by the Danish 'No' in its referendum on introduction of the Euro, stamped an emphatic 'No' to Britain joining the Eurozone. In this context the *Daily Mail* published an essay of one Paul Johnson titled 'In Praise of Being British'. The essay can be analysed under three headings: promotion of the British nation and its tradition as superior to all others, and rejection of any alternative evidence; one-eyed celebration of Britain's historical openness and generosity in its integration of persecuted foreigners into its pluralistic tradition and tolerant value system; pride in Britain's gift of its language and culture to the rest of the world. According to critics a closer look at Johnson's essay reveals more precisely the message that the *Daily Mail* was sending out to its readers.

It was becoming clear to observers that in the face of the German 're-unification' the dominant British media was making efforts to revive and magnify a wave of anti-German feeling as a useful component of campaigns to separate the UK from deeper EU integration. It fitted unproblematically with the unquestioned media-promoted view of Europe as a set of juxtaposed rival national boxes, each with separate essential, unchanging and conflicting identities.<sup>23</sup> These were the battle lines in the British debate over 'Europe' in the 1990s. The dominant Rupert Murdoch media empire, comprising *The Times*, *The Sunday Times*, *The Sun* and *The News of the World*, followed by media baron Conrad Black's *Telegraph* group, and the *Mail* group, led the anti-Europe press pack, with only the relatively small *Guardian* group being committed 'pro-Europeans'.<sup>24</sup> At this time the broadcast media, particularly TV, provided virtually constant identification of Germany and Germans with Nazism and Nazis. It is worth noting that the BBC put out a series, *The Nazis: A Warning from History*, which went to emphasize more than before the involvement of 'ordinary Germans' in Nazism and its atrocities.

Germanophobia in the British mass media can be traced back to even before the First World War – the image of the militarist, expansionist, threatening German was established in the popular mind. The two world wars spawned many variations of these. After 1945 Germany's economic rise was presented as a threat. Countless films, comics, press articles, cartoons and broadcasts evoked the war and established the poisonous image of the German as Nazi, or Nazi in disguise

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## 7. Media and the War in the Balkans (Kosovo)

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<sup>23</sup> J. Theobald, *Media and the Making of History*, 159.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

That Rupert Murdoch's British tabloid, *The Sun*, played a major role in inciting NATO to military action over Kosovo in the summer of 1999 is evident from its headline 'Clobba Slobba'.<sup>26</sup> A critical analysis of the BBC TV programme: *Kosovo: How the War was Spun*, broadcast on BBC2, 16 October 1999, takes a look at the media handling of the war. The overt assumption behind the programme was that the audience was already 'on message' and willing to sympathise with NATO, and the BBC in particular, and to understand their genuine difficulties in getting the real, honest truth about what was happening [in Kosovo] over to the public. In this programme audience was given a selective peep behind the scenes of *how* the war was spun, but were not invited to ask *why* the war was spun, or whether it should have been. The primary source of information for the BBC programme regarding the war was Captain John Meitner, a veteran of numerous NATO bombing missions over Kosovo and Serbia. Mind you viewers did not know how much death, mutilation, agony and destruction Captain Meitner was instrumental in causing. Yet his primary accounts formed the basis of the Western consumers' most credible source of 'truth' about NATO's conduct of the war. And it would be clear that what he was describing was not giving the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, but willfully *depriving* the audience of it. In so doing, he was preventing them from reconstructing in their minds a full and accurate picture of what was actually happening, in order to make a properly informed judgement about its acceptability.

There were both economic and political reasons for this sanitization. In economic terms, news was and is a commodity, its form and content determined by its commercial value. In terms of TV news, this means ratings; commercial pressures mean that ratings are more important than truth. TV channels fear people switching off if some reality of war is shown, which led to the broadcasting of a distorted version of the realities of the Kosovo war. In political terms, showing any real war would quickly turn the public against it and every war. This is a development which governments – especially those of leading arms manufacturing and exporting countries like the USA and UK – would not wish to encourage.

## **8. Media and 9/11, 'War on Terrorism' and 'Anticipatory Pre-emption'.**

Here it is very apt to begin with the words of John Pilger: Had the great broadcasting institutions and newspapers on both sides of the Atlantic not merely channeled and echoed the agendas and lies of government, but instead exposed and challenged them, the Bush/Blair attack on Iraq would have been made untenable).<sup>27</sup> It is now admitted that the media coverage of '11 September' was magnified far beyond appropriate proportions at the expense of other tragic and barbaric situations of yet greater dimensions. Instead of provoking Western media audience to thoughtful investigation of why it happened, and alerting them to burning issues of global inequalities, injustices and exploitation, the coverage flooded their minds with an elite-promoted global scenario of conflict between good and evil. Media focused excessively on George Bush's 'axis of evil', 'war on terrorism', and 'anticipatory pre-emption'. BBC, supposedly a trusted source of unbiased information, lent itself as a mouthpiece for US propaganda, and a majority of the UK press cheered and misled Britain along the runway to war and at this time they

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<sup>26</sup> On 25 March 1999 *The Sun* tabloid had this headline: 'Clobba Slobba' meaning British boys batter butcher of Serbia in NATO blitz in a stinging attack of its own on Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic.

<sup>27</sup> *The Independent on Sunday*, 6 April 2003.

contributed more to war than to peace. Two BBC programmes – BBC1's *Panorama* and *Panorama Interactive* – set the agenda to tame a highly skeptical public into accepting that military action in Iraq was inevitable and justified, and sought to stifle the opposition and discredit counter arguments. The coming attack on Iraq was presented as part of the continuing 'war on terrorism', with that country being placed at the heart of the 'axis of evil', and thus becoming the prime target for 'anticipatory pre-emption'.<sup>28</sup>

It was only when it was too late for the uncounted thousands of Iraqis who were slaughtered during the invasion and for the many further thousands of injured and bereaved, that is, only after the acclaimed 'liberation' of Iraq, that admissions started to be made in the mainstream media which undermined the previously unassailable hegemonic story, and pointed to the deception of the public by its leaders.<sup>29</sup> Even now, neither the BBC, nor the other parts of the mainstream media both in the US and UK, which had been crying foul of Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction, issued any statement that they had been 'simply wrong'. Still less did they confess to misleading the public and to making an active contribution to the process which led to invasion, carnage and huge long-term damage.

## Conclusion

Media's huge role in informing, educating, and entertaining the public is very significant, especially in a democracy. At the same time Media's hegemonic discourse in collusion with power-elites has resulted in lies, distortion, exaggeration, sensationalism negatively affecting the very course of world events. Those maintaining underlying skepticism about according a substantive role to mass media discourse in determining the direction of historical and current events may wish to consider the following internet appeal, by the organization Search for Common Ground, emerging from Macedonia, apparently on the verge of civil war in early 2001, and ask what lies behind such behaviour by the international mass media:

We in Macedonia are facing not an imminent civil war, but rather the possibility that irresponsible international media may incite more violence than the people with guns. The international press has been extremely provocative and irresponsible in this very sensitive situation. CNN has reported that Tetovo has 'been taken by the "rebels" who are advancing on Skopje'. The BBC has also been broadcasting alarmist and unconfirmed reports. This is utter nonsense, and incredibly dangerous [...]. An urgent call must be made to all international media to stop escalating the situation by putting out inflammatory and unfounded reports that will provoke people here to believe that their only resort is to violence.<sup>30</sup>

The words of Aleksandar Zograf, surviving Captain Meitner's bombs in the Kosovo war provide a salient insight: "I should say again and again, that we are living in a savage world, hiding behind the happy face of mass communication"<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> J. Theobald, *Media and the Making of History*, 187.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>30</sup> Mango Website 2001, as cited in J. Theobald, *Media and the Making of History*, 77.

<sup>31</sup> A. Zograf, *Bulletins from Serbia* (Hove: Slab-O-Concrete Publications, 1999), 62.

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## History – Science or Art?

- Gerard Pushparaj

*The paper attempts to describe what history, science and art are in order to initiate a discussion on whether history is science or art. History has been understood as the study of reality in its aspect of becoming. It is the study of the past, particularly of developments and events which are the work of human beings or have affected them. Historians have studied the past with varying trends and theories. Political and economic movements, advancement of learning and the development of religion, law, art, literature and science are all art of the historical record. History is an unending dialogue between the present and the past. Unlike science, history deals with description of a situation and does not collect facts to establish laws; rather it seeks to exploit laws to explain facts. Historians use deductive method whereas the scientist uses the inductive method. Historical synthesis is necessarily a highly subjective art. The historian has his own method of presenting the facts and this method makes it as an art. The paper proceeds towards qualifying history as science in one sense and art in another sense.*

In this article, we shall study about what is History and whether it is science or art. Hence this article has four sections, dealing with descriptive details of History, Science, Art and their interrelations. Description is followed by a discussion on whether History is science or art.

### 1. Understanding History

What is History? “History is the study of reality in its aspect of becoming,” says Buddha Prakash.<sup>1</sup> He quotes Arnold J. Toynbee while explaining the reality. “Reality is the undifferentiated unity of the mystical experience.”<sup>2</sup> This means that a part of the reality in the form of the human mind treats itself different from the rest of it and forms an image of it. Thus, all thought is based on the vision of the reality, caught by the human mind. History is the study of the past, particularly of developments and events which are the work of human beings or have affected them. A historian perceives the past through evidence preserved in written records or in physical remains. The historian gathers evidence, sifts and weighs it critically in order to determine its meaning and validity and reports the results.

History is a record of past events, usually a written account of the development of human civilization arranged chronologically, including an explanation of how and why the events occurred. Political and economic movements, advancement of learning and the development of religion, law, art, literature and science are all art of the historical record.

Before modern times, historians thought that knowledge of the past could help in predicting the future. They know that patterns of events such as war and peace or conquest and defeat, happened over and over again. History they believed, ‘repeated itself.’ Modern historians know that pattern of civilization change, and that what has happened before may never happen again. Knowledge of the past, however, can help people understand the present because history reveals the sources and causes of today’s events.

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<sup>1</sup> Prakash Buddha, *The Modern Approach to History*, Delhi: university Publishers, 1963, p.1.

<sup>2</sup> Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, Vol. II, p.8, as cited in *Ibid*.

The Greek, Herodotus, in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century BCE, is considered the father of history. Since that time historians have studied the past with varying trends and theories. For example, St. Augustine's view of history as the unfolding drama of salvation set the tone for all Christian medieval historians. Renaissance admiration for the classical civilizations meant increased attention to the writing of the Greeks and Romans, and the rise of lay culture led to such views as those of Machiavelli, who saw all history as a struggle for power. Voltaire, Georg Hegel and 19<sup>th</sup> Century British Whig historians all saw history as the record of progress toward human perfection, while Edward Gibbon attempted to display the historical record as complex and not readily resolved into patterns. Since Karl Marx put forth his theory that history is a mere expression of economics, historical work has paid greater attention to economic history and economic influences on history; the last hundred years have also brought forth what has come to be known as cultural and social theory.<sup>3</sup>

The age preceding that of written records is called the prehistoric or preliterate era. This era is commonly divided into four stages for western civilization. During the Old Stone Age men hunted and gathered food. They made tools by chipping stone. In the New Stone Age (c.a.9000 B.C.) men raised crops, domesticated animals and made tools by grinding stone. During the Bronze Age (c.a. 3000 B.C.) and the Iron Age (around 1000 B.C.) men learned to work with metals. The history of western civilization is usually divided into three periods – ancient, medieval and modern. Ancient history begins with the birth of civilization and ends with the collapse of the Western Roman Empire in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. Medieval History covers the Middle Ages from the end of 5<sup>th</sup> Century to the latter part of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century. The Medieval period may be divided roughly into three parts – the first extending either to the end of the reign of Charlemagne (814) or to the beginning of the Crusades (1096); the second extending to the end of Crusades (1270) or the expulsion of Christians from the Holy Land (1291); and the third lasting until the fall of Constantinople to the Turks (1453) or the beginning of the age of discovery with Columbus' first voyage (1492). Modern history covers the period since the Middle Ages. History is also divided into periods in which an area or country was ruled by certain people, reigning family or individual sovereign. For instance, some of the periods in English History are the Roman, Saxon and Elizabethan.<sup>4</sup>

Every branch of knowledge has an inevitable subjective aspect. Nothing can be purely objective. History, conceived or written in a particular period, bears its special impress. St. Augustine viewed the history of Rome from the point of view of an early Christian; Tillemont, from that of a seventeenth century Frenchman; Gibbon, from that of an eighteenth century Englishman; Mommsen, from that of a nineteenth century German; Rostovtzeff, from that of twentieth century Russian. The histories of Rome, coming from the pens of these writers, are not only the histories of Rome, but also the histories of the respective ages, in which these writers lived. Thus, history should not be defined as the study of the past; it should rather be defined as the study of the present in the light of the past. History is an unending dialogue between the present and the past. The function of the historian is neither to live the past nor to emancipate himself from the past, but to master and understand it as the key to the understanding of the present. There are many instances to show that history is as much concerned with the present as with the past. Thus, history may better be defined as a study of the past with a view to the future or in accordance with our standpoint of the present, which implies our objective of the future.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *The New College Encyclopedia*, New York: Banner press Inc. 1978, p.424

<sup>4</sup> *New Standard Encyclopedia*, Chicago: Standard Educational Corporation, Vol. 7, Pp 183-184.

<sup>5</sup> <sup>5</sup> Prakash Buddha. P. 2-3.

## **2. Scientific Accounts and Historical Data**

Some writers like William Dray have observed that history, unlike science, must always deal with description of a situation or state of affairs which is unique. As a matter of fact, every situation or event is unique by virtue of being a distinct assemblage of characteristics not precisely duplicated in any other situation or event. It is only in thought that a situation or event becomes non-unique by being treated as an example of a type or class. It loses its individuality after passing through the silver-platter of thought in the mind of man, whose view about the past is relative, always changing in response to the increase or refinement of knowledge. The mind of the historian, like that of the scientist works in an order, marked by the following four steps: Examination of the data, Formulation of an explanatory hypothesis, Analysis of the consequences of the hypothesis, Test of these consequences against additional data.

Some philosophers have drawn a distinction between history and science as follows: The difference between history and the historical sciences resides neither in subject-matter nor in method but in the objective of the research, and the consequent perspective, that is taken in looking at the past. History does not collect facts to establish laws; rather it seeks to exploit laws to explain facts. According to them, the historian uses deductive method whereas the scientist uses the inductive method. Though in theory much can be said for this view, but in practice it is difficult to observe the distinction, implied in it. While approaching problem, the human mind rambles through facts and generalizations in such an indiscriminate manner, in one moment emphasizing the one and in the other concentrating on the other, according to the nature and degree of its comprehension of it, that it is not possible to direct it with fixed boundaries of methodological postulates.<sup>6</sup>

A study of natural or human affairs has to be selective by reason of the limited range and faculty of the human mind. No body howsoever intelligent or long-lived, can hope to know everything even of the smallest fragment of reality because of the multifarious connections, which bind it with the scheme of being into an organic unity. The part presupposes the whole, just as the whole comprises the parts. Hence the human mind bewildered and overwhelmed by the surging multitude of facts and events, can only hope to grope its way by a process of picking and choosing. This imperative necessity of selection accentuates the tendency of interpretation through the methodology of analysis, analogy and classification. It has been computed that if all the files, produced in one particular ministry in the United Kingdom during the II World War, were to be stacked on edge, jacket pressing against jacket, in a single continuous row, the length of this row would be seventeen miles. Is it possible for a historian to go through all of them and retain their contents before beginning to write something on this war? Obviously the task of studying, digesting and classifying them can be apportioned among many specialists and their works can be consulted and interpreted by the historian to the general reader, interested in a panoramic view of the events of the war. This synoptic and panoramic view centers round the investigation of connections and consequences or the tracing out of uniformities and regularities or the formulation of what we call “laws” with the object of grasping the shapes of things.

A “law” is the expression of regularity in phenomena, observed by an investigator. It has relevance to the study of the phenomena with reference to the standpoint of the observer. It is, thus, merely a working hypothesis to facilitate the approach to the bewildering mass of

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<sup>6</sup> Prakash Buddha, pp.4-6.

phenomena. Its role is to act as scaffolding for raising the structure of thought out of a heap of notions and perceptions which is to be removed after the structure attains sizeable dimension. Scaffolding is purposely made of fragile and resilient materials, like bamboos and planks, so that it may be adjusted and altered with ease, according to the exigencies of the construction of the building. Similarly, a system of law is made of tentative and operational hypotheses with the object of arranging the data of experience in the form of a unified and synthesized structure of thought. Their value and validity is no more than heuristic, operational and instrumental. Some of them work and are retained, others fail and are rejected. Thus the function of “law” is the elucidation of ‘fact’. This is clear from the changes in ‘facts’ following the changes in ‘laws’. All laws, whether social or scientific, are devices to improve some adjustments, the former, among the relations of individuals, and the latter, in the understandable aspects of reality. They serve their purpose in as much as they further the advancement of human interests or the comprehension of reality respectively. But when they became ends in themselves, they act as curbs rather than spurs for their basic purpose. A progressive society, no less than a progressive science, has to avoid these dangers.

It is clear from the above observations that history, in the sense of a study or enquiry, the original import of the Greek word *historia*, is not basically different from other mental disciplines, that we call science or philosophy. It involves, like them, a subjective aspect, as a result of the operation of the cognitive and cogitative agencies of the human mind. It also proceeds like them along the channels of analysis and classification and implies the search of recurrences and regularities through the use of hypotheses, theories and laws. However, since it deals with human affairs, which exhibit a more bewildering range of variability than the brute and blind phenomena, with which physical sciences have to deal, its results and conclusions are more tentative than theirs and it has a greater relativity to its age than they have. As said above, history changes from age to age. Every age has its own approach to history.

### **3. Historical Synthesis as Art**

The historian is made aware of the inherent defects in most of his sources – not only deliberate bias or deception, but also the errors of memory and even of perception that causes eyewitnesses to disagree, as well as the incompleteness caused by the loss of sources or the failure to make certain records in the first place. Synthesis of historical data is the most difficult step of all. A conceptual scheme must be developed around which the facts are to be organised with an appropriate logical sequence of topics and points. Then a detailed outline is prepared. Finally the narrative is composed with due concern for balanced presentation and leaving of generalization with illustration.

The narrative itself is a tool of integrative explanation since it compels the historian or orders his data to form the most meaningful representation of reality and demands filling up the gaps and reconciling the inconsistencies in the data at hand. Where the facts are lacking, careful conjecture is necessary in preference to complete silence about probable but undocumented events, though the historian must be careful to alert his readers when he is indulging in educated guess work. Ordinarily the narrative in a learned article or monograph is supported by an extensive apparatus of footnotes and bibliography, designed to indicate to the reader the original source and scholarly authorities utilized by the author in arriving at his conclusion.

Historical synthesis is necessarily a highly subjective art. It involves the intuitive perception of patterns and relationships in the complex web of events, as well as an art of narrative

writing. Explanations and judgement may be called for that will involve the historians own personality, experience, assumptions and moral values. Inevitably there are personal differences among historians in this respect, and prolonged academic disputes among the historians over practically every important event. The initial reduction of the complex events of the recent past to comprehensible patterns is particularly difficult and subjective. This is subject – even more than older history – to serve disputes and partisanship among different schools of historians.

Because the process of reducing the historical past to a meaningful narrative is a human one, total objectivity can never be achieved. Outright bias, distorting and suppressing facts to fit preconceived notions or purposes, is not uncommon, particularly under conditions of dictatorial government and censorship or the stress of national and partisan conflict. Relative objectivity depends on the freedom of the historian and his willingness to face the facts whether they are comforting or not. But all historical conclusions are relative, conditioned as they are by time, place and the identity of the author. It is better for a historian to acknowledge this and make his assumptions explicit than to pretend to perfect objectivity with an unwitting bias.

Since history contains an inherent element of subjectivity, the final truth on any important subject can never be written. Later historians will work with different frames of reference, new interests and new conjectures. They will ask new questions and often discover new source material. Finally, because of the defects of the sources themselves the total truth of an important event can never be completely established. New generations and other nationalities will always be ready to offer new insights and new interpretations of the past.<sup>7</sup>

#### **4. History: Science or art**

We must say specifically that when we use the word “Science” with reference to history it not the Greek word for knowledge that we have in mind, but rather the idea of an art or technical method. In other words, as opposed to the ordinary knowledge of daily experience we have reference to an elaborate knowledge set forth in terms of a systematic and rigorous method which has proved to be productive of the optimum measure of truth.<sup>8</sup> As we have explained the scientific nature of history it follows certain deductive scientific method. As we have seen in the art of the historical texts, the historian has his own method of presenting the facts and this method makes it as an art. Thus history can be called science in one sense and art in another sense.

#### **Conclusion**

In this article we have seen what history is and whether it is a science, if so, why do we consider it as a science and whether it is an art and, if so, why do we call it an art. From the investigation of the past and scientific approach which is used by the historian it is called a science. From the way the historian organises the material according to his own approach, we can call it an art. Thus history is science in organising the material and art in the presentation of the material of the past with the background of the present. History should not be defined as the study of the past; it should rather be defined as the study of the present in the light of the past. History is an unending dialogue between the present and the past. The function of

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<sup>7</sup> *Encyclopedia Americana*, Glazier Incorporated, Vol 14, 1981, Pp. 228-229

<sup>8</sup> Marrou Henri, *The Meaning of History*, Baltimore: Helicon, 1959, pp.34-35.

the historian is neither to live the past nor to emancipate himself from the past, but to master and understand it as the key to the understanding of the present. History may better be defined as a study of the past with a view to the future or in accordance with our standpoint of the present, which implies our objective of the future.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> <sup>9</sup> Prakash Buddha. P. 2-3.

## **PART II**

### **SPECIFIC MODES AND MOMENTS OF HISTORIZING**

## Religious Understanding of History

- Selva Raj

*Religion is part and parcel of the vast majority of humanity, and is a very important phenomenon. From the very beginning of human history, religion has played a great role in the life and history of the world. No one will deny that religion through its beliefs and teachings, myths and legends, prayers and rituals, sentiments and liturgies, ceremonies and festivals, dance and music, art and architecture, worldviews and ethics – plays a part in explaining and structuring life. Each concrete religion has its own understanding about salvation and about its fruition (way of attaining) in human history. History presupposes human consciousness of time and the seeking of meaning. Time demonstrates the relentless change from past to present to future; and amidst all the changes human beings search for the elements of continuity so as to reconcile their memories of the past with their experiences of the present and their expectations of the future. History is the unity of past, present, and future, by reconciling change and continuity in a manner that gives meaning to human beings. Religion gives that meaning and continuity, and therefore religion and history are linked. An interpretation of history where religion plays no role is not a complete interpretation. A religious understanding of history needs to be constantly purified in us by the musings of the sacred, interpreted in the light of reason. The paper shows a general picture of a salvific reading of history in different religions and points out some of the implications of the salvation-history perspective.*

### Introduction

Pope Paul VI<sup>1</sup> says, “It is true that history turns our gaze towards the past, it is equally true that history ... reveals the present more than the past; it shows us what has been, in order to enable us to foresee what must and will come to pass in the future.” As Indian Christian Philosophers, we reflect on ‘History and Historizing’. The word ‘history’ may have many meanings. Basically I consider it as the combination of two senses: as past actuality or events which have in fact occurred; and as the process and product of discovering, interpreting and recording past actuality. The first meaning can be related to the German *Geschichte* (‘event’ or ‘happening’) envisaging the event itself: the individual occurrence, individual life-process, and total world-process. Whereas, the second meaning stems (through the Latin *historia*) from the Greek, referring to investigation, enquiry, information, knowledge, or bearing witness. The Sanskrit/Hindi *Itihasa* (‘verily thus it happened’) or the Chinese *shih* (‘fact’ and ‘record of facts’) or the corresponding words from any culture or language would speak of ‘history’ as the past events and the record of

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<sup>1</sup> As quoted in Mathew Bunson, OSV’s *Encyclopedia of Catholic History* (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, Inc., 2004), p. 9.

past events and trends.<sup>2</sup> We need not exclude words, thoughts and other products of humans in our consideration of ‘past events and their recordings.’

This meaning of history might seem simple. But, it is a balanced meaning, which gives credence to the objective event as happening and the subjective knower as recording/interpreting the event (not fabricating the event). If history is a series of past events and their records, then ‘historizing’ would mean the act of interpreting history. The act of writing history and the study of the writing of the history have been known as ‘historiography’; in fact, historiography, the act of recording history, could itself be seen as interpretation of history. History can be understood and interpreted from different perspectives: the scientific perspective, secularist’s or humanist’s perspective, feminist’s perspective, subaltern perspective, religious perspective etc. It is my endeavour here in this paper to justify and uphold the religious reading of the history of humanity and to understand the implications thereof.

### **1. A Question on the Validity of Religious Historizing**

Karl Rahner considers all history as salvific history.<sup>3</sup> Considering that all religions are human quest for salvation, we could say in the Rahnerian language: all history is religious history. Let us reiterate the thesis by taking the example of the Hebrew people as a sample for religious believers. The Hebrew people were interested in history not so much for the sake of the events themselves that took place; they were interested in them more for their ‘why’, seeing in them the hand of God; their thinking was “entirely coloured by their religion so that for them there was no merely profane history; for them all history was religious history.”<sup>4</sup> Now, the serious question is: Can religious reading of history be a valid interpretation of human history? Is not religious historizing a distortion of history?

Sreedharan, an author and a teacher of history, considers the Hebrew scriptures (the supposed record of the Judeo-Christian salvation history), the *Itihasa-purana-kavya* texts of the Hindu scriptures (the supposed records of Hindu historical tradition), and the like as “quasi-history”. These texts are quasi-history because, according to him, they resemble history by making statements about the past, but in fact they are distortions of history. Citing the observations of R. G. Collingwood, the same author also considers the writings of the Christian medieval historians as quasi-history,

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Ernst Breisach, “Historiography: An Overview,” in Mircea Eliade (ed-in-chief), *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), vol. 6, p. 371. James Hennesey, “History,” in Joseph A. Komonchak et al. (ed.), *The New Dictionary of Theology* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1987), p. 469-470. Adolf Darlap and Jorg Splett, “History,” in Karl Rahner et al. (ed.), *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology* (London: Burns & Oates, 1969), vol. 3, p. 31-32.

<sup>3</sup> “For Rahner, all of human history is the locus of God’s grace. ... all history can therefore be regarded as the history of salvation.” Joan M. Nuth, “History, Historical Consciousness,” in Michael Downey (ed.), *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1995), 477.

<sup>4</sup> E. L. Peterman, “Salvation History,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967), Vol. 12, 998.

“deliberately and repulsively wrong-headed.” Of course the author does not deny the historical elements present in all these works, but these texts, for him, do not deserve to be in the category of history because they are a confused mass of theocracy, myth, legend, and history. “The medieval historian was personal, unscientific, and unsystematic, which often betrayed him into foolish credulity.”<sup>5</sup> According to the author, the historiography of the medieval times were replete with eschatology and transcendentalism (‘the transcendent divine nature is the only force that determines history’), which are “intrusive elements” in history. According to him, “A historian’s claim to know the future in advance of its happening is a sure sign that something has gone wrong with his fundamental conception of history. ...The *root of the error could be traced back to the providential or salvation history*.”<sup>6</sup> Conceding that the ancient Hindus lacked historical sense in comparison to the ancient Greeks, Romans, and Chinese, the author says that “Divine intervention and supernatural occurrences in human affairs, the doctrines of karma and rebirth, the role of destiny were all intrusive elements which vitiated ancient Hindu historiography.”<sup>7</sup>

Analysing the stand of Sreedharan, let me say that there are many mistakes in his understanding; for example: the view on eschatology as foreknowing the future (abandoning the characteristic element of ‘already’ and ‘not yet’), and the deterministic view of the divine as the sole agent of history (abandoning the element of human response to the divine in freedom); besides, nobody would rightly claim the Bible to be a textbook of history (abandoning the aspect of interplay of ‘divine inspiration’ and ‘the freedom of the human author’ dealing with historical and trans-historical matters). Now keeping aside these misunderstandings and many of the correct observations, the core claim of the author is clear: faith vitiates historiography.<sup>8</sup> So, the question recurs: Can religious reading of history be legitimate?

## 2. Validity of Religious Reading of History

Let us find out if there is a legitimate link between religion and historiography. I attempt to show the link between religion and religious historizing first by an analysis of the general meaning of history, and then by examining the role of time in human life. One may observe that there is hardly any distinction between how we use history, historizing and historiography: we have put religious history, religious historizing, and religious historiography on the same plane. Is the history of the human civilizations as we have it now distinct from the writing of it? If another interpretation of the past events is put forward, is that history or historiography? Is history the past event or the perception of it? Can we know the past as it actually was? (Or, for that matter: Can we know a present event as it actually is in its comprehensiveness without the event being coloured by our own perception of it?)

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<sup>5</sup> E. Sreedharan, *A Textbook of Historiography: 500 BC to AD 2000* (New Delhi: Orient Longman Pvt. Ltd., 2000), 61; See also page 7, 62, 315, and 337. Cf. R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), 46-56.

<sup>6</sup> E. Sreedharan, *A Textbook of Historiography*, p. 61. Italics mine.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 339.

<sup>8</sup> In the postmodern language: Faith does violence to history or History is tainted by faith.

We are aware that there are scanty and incomplete evidence available of past events and that the historian himself is the product of his own convictions and culture.<sup>9</sup> We do not say that history is entirely ‘created’ by the human mind; but, while holding on to a ‘basic realism’, we accept the *constructive role* of the human mind in all knowledge/experience. This constructive aspect in all knowledge is reinforced by Philosophy of Science and Sociology of Knowledge, as theory-ladenness or pre-understanding. Even St. Thomas Aquinas (in his *S.T., II/II, Q. 1, art. 2*) states that: Things known are in the knower according to the mode of the knower.

So, facts are theory-laden; ‘I have no philosophy’ is itself a philosophy. “Facts are not really like boulders. ... They are like...bricks. Human action has had a hand in making them what they are, and they would not be what they are if this action had not taken place. ‘The facts of history are not the brute things or events outside the mind, for they are filtered through minds before I have word of them’.”<sup>10</sup> So, we make a distinction between event and fact: ‘event’ is the happening as such, and ‘fact’ is the event as interpreted by the historian. It is difficult to determine how much is fact and how much is interpretation, because there are no ‘bare facts’. “If there are no longer any ‘bare facts’ for the historian, it is convenient to define a fact of history as an event together with the (inevitable) interpretation that enters into the recollecting and recording of it.”<sup>11</sup> Facts of the past are events as interpreted by the perceiver, be s/he a historian, historiographer, or interpreter of history. If the very definition of history itself permits interpretation, a religious interpretation of history is valid. There is no reason to consider the work of the faith-tradition as pure fabrication; nor is there a need to degrade religious belief as credulity. Of course, one should not forfeit intellectual honesty and respectability in one’s religious interpretation of history.<sup>12</sup>

Let me speak for the validity of religious reading of history from another perspective. History presupposes human consciousness of time and the seeking of meaning. Time demonstrates the relentless change from past to present to future; and amidst all the changes human beings search for the elements of continuity so as to reconcile their memories of the past with their experiences of the present and their expectations of the future. The quotation from Pope Paul VI, given in the beginning of the Paper, pictures this aspect of continuity as a characteristic of human history, connecting the past to the present in view of the future. The search for meaning and continuity is eminently fulfilled by religion.<sup>13</sup> Religion recognizes continuity in the

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. B. C. Shafer, “History,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967), vol. 7, 13-14.

<sup>10</sup> E. W. F. Tomlin (ed.), *Arnold Toynbee: A Selection from His Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 134. Cf. also M. C. D’Arcy, *The Sense of History*, 48.

<sup>11</sup> C. R. North, “History,” in George A. Buttrick et al. (ed.), *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), vol. 2, 608; See also pages 607-608.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. C. R. North, “History,” 608 and 611.

<sup>13</sup> I do not intend to say that those who do not accept any religion have no meaning in life or have no continuity in life linking the past, to the present, and to the future. I am only showing the sublime way in which religion gives meaning to one’s life and how religion plays important role in the interpretation of human history.

temporal events as well as affirms a continuity transcending world and time. History is the unity of past, present, and future, by reconciling change and continuity in a manner that gives meaning to human beings. Religion gives that meaning and continuity, and therefore religion and history are linked.<sup>14</sup> An interpretation of history where religion plays no role is not a complete interpretation.

### **3. Importance of Religious Perspective in History**

Religion is a very important phenomenon. From the very beginning of human history, religion has played a great role in the life and history of the world. It is obviously an overstatement to say: “All political and social events have taken place only on account of religion.”<sup>15</sup> But, no one will deny that religion – through its beliefs and teachings, myths and legends, prayers and rituals, sentiments and liturgies, ceremonies and festivals, dance and music, art and architecture, worldviews and ethics – plays a part in explaining and structuring life. It changes and shapes the way people think and act. Every aspect of life is guided by religion. It takes us beyond the material world of here and now. It teaches us acts of generosity, kindness and thoughtfulness. It opens up humanitarian, social, and environmental concerns. It also brings in wars, violence and suffering; it tolerates and facilitates the thriving of evils like slavery, racism, sexism, extremism, cruelty, etc.; and in spite of its cruel and oppressive factors, it has given and continues to give hope and meaning to what could otherwise be experienced as a meaningless world. Science – with all its technological and methodological success, with all its supposedly better answers about the origin of life, the nature of matter, and the workings of mind – has not been able to replace religion, because religion provides far more powerful answers to questions concerning the meaning and purpose of existence.<sup>16</sup> It answers the yearnings of human hearts.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century some scholars maintained that there were peoples without religion, until it was recognized that such investigators had simply failed to find religion as they themselves conceived ‘religion’. However, the universality of religion cannot be denied. Religion originates with the awareness of the sacred and the desire for salvation. There is no need to postulate the origin of religion to some period in history; whereas the sacred can be seen “as an element in the structure of consciousness, rather than as a stage in the history of its development.”<sup>17</sup> Religion has existed from the earliest times. “The beginnings of religion are as old as the human consciousness, and we can no more go behind the religious stage in human

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Ernst Breisach, “Historiography: An Overview,” 371.

<sup>15</sup> Pradip Jaiswal, *Research Methodology in History* (New Delhi: Omega Publications, 2008), 57.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Martin Palmer, *The Times World Religions: A History of Faith* (London: Times Books, 2002), 7-17.

<sup>17</sup> Carsten Colpe, “The Sacred and the Profane,” in Mircea Eliade (ed-in-chief), *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), vol. 12, 523. Colpe holds that this is the approach of Mircea Eliade. He also holds that it is impossible to verify any theory of origin and development of religion. I also think that the different theories advocating to unravel the origin and development of religion – (theories such as totemism, manism, animism, nature worship, polytheism, monolatry, monotheism, etc) – be seen not as stages in the development of religion, but as indicators of the sacred being part of the very structure of the human consciousness.

history than we can go behind the origins of language or of social life itself.”<sup>18</sup> According to Christopher Dawson, the earliest form of religious observance, of which there is any real evidence, is connected with the idea of death. It dates from the time of the Neanderthal man, long before the rise of the Palaeolithic culture, the early Stone Age. The Neanderthals, he says, seemed so primitive a type as to be scarcely human, yet they cared for their dead, which is a sign of religious practice. Archaeological evidence of religion can also be seen in the Palaeolithic period in the hunting-related ceremonies, cave paintings, artefacts, Stonehenge, etc., which prove the inalienable relation of human history with religious phenomena.<sup>19</sup> It is so, because human beings themselves are inalienably related to the Sacred. If humans are basically religious, the most basic perspective determining everything of life and world would obviously be the sacred reality.

Religion is part and parcel of the vast majority of humanity. Its presence remains as strong as ever amongst both under-privileged, as well as economically and technologically advanced people. We do well to see that the American presidential elections are fought also on religious lines, more precisely on Christian religious sentiments and convictions. In Japan in spite of the apparent materialistic culture with the bullet trains, camera cell-phones and pocket-sized supercomputers, it is recognizable that there co-exists a thoroughly deified conception of nature. None will doubt the religious fervour of both the poor and the rich Islamic countries. The day by day additions of commoners and celebrities to Buddhism, the increasing influence of the ‘gurus’ and yoga-centres, testify the vitality of Buddhism and Hinduism beyond Asia. Unfortunately, the only exception to a renewed religious vitality seems to be Western Europe, which has refused even to acknowledge the legacy it owes to Christianity. It has its repercussions on Western society, which has become materialist and consumerist. However, there are positive signs of a religious revival in terms of the immigrants who go to make the West their home with their own strong religious beliefs, be they Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Chinese or any other. One can well assert that religion is alive and thriving as a potent factor defining human civilization.

Religion, a most potent factor, cannot be kept away from history. In our attempt to understand history, when we speak of the mythological stages (which concerns all humans attempting to know the origins), narrated in the scriptural texts or oral traditions of all peoples, we observe that sacred concepts alone define the unity of time. Symbolic language (myth) and symbolic actions (rituals) in all their sacredness attempt to explain the emergence of the cosmos and the beginning of human society. Thus, the attempt of humans to find meaning and see unity of the past, present, and future, is clearly in religious terms.

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<sup>18</sup> Christopher Dawson, *The Age of the Gods: A Study in the Origins of Culture in Prehistoric Europe and the Ancient East* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1933), 22.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Martin Palmer, *The Times World Religions*, 11-12. Cf. Christopher Dawson, *The Age of the Gods*, 23f. See also Christopher Dawson, *The Dynamics of World History* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1957), 111f.

Religions in historical times<sup>20</sup> incorporated the mythical and ritual elements in their religions; the Indigenous religions kept their mythological core; whereas, the major religions –like Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, etc.– while keeping the mythical elements, considered the sacred texts (words and works of the *rishis*/teachers, prophets, Moses, Confucius, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, etc.) as central in their outlook of history. These texts formed the living-memory of the sacred past giving their adherents meaning and continuity, connecting the sacred past through the ongoing present to the future. History has been seen as sacred or salvation history moving towards glorious and perfect end-times, overcoming a loss of perfection due to human corruption.

Modern times, empowered by the success of scientific and rationalistic trends, have seen the shake-up of traditional religious world-views. In fact, there have been attempts to sever religion from history (or for that matter, religion from any other human endeavour).<sup>21</sup> The continuity and meaning, longed for by humans, and supplied so far by a religious world-view, have now been provided by the humanistic trends. However, in the contemporary times, there has been a revival of the role of religion with scientific theories being interpreted from a religious perspective. The human spirit transcends the material and the temporal. A purely scientific worldview, which denies the role of religion, cannot satisfy human aspirations. As mentioned earlier, the deepest longings and the fundamental questions of meaning and existence cannot be answered except by religion. There has never been an adequate substitute for religion in the entire history of human race.

#### **4. Religious Calendars and Historizing**

The importance of a religious understanding of history can also be seen in the relation between calendars and religions. Calendars are the human way of ordering and describing time (taken both in the linear as well as cyclic way: as a continuous one-way movement, or as a repetition of sequences like day-night, months, seasons, etc). Calendar or time is of interest, not as a simple fact of nature, but as a dimension of human life. There is a basis/purpose on which humans arrange calendars; some have argued for purely utilitarian reasons for the origin of calendars: astronomical-mathematical (movement of the bodies), economical (based on production and leisure), socio-political (ordained by community/rulers), etc; whereas some propose a sacral origin of calendars, without however denying human/ practical reasons.

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<sup>20</sup> We can speak of historical religions in terms of religions which have existed /exist in history: religions of the past and the religions of the present. Basing on a general review of the History of religions, in the category of the now no-longer-existing ancient religions, we can speak of religions from: the Ancient Near East (Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Canaanites, Hittites, etc), Ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome, Northern Europe (Celts, Germans, Balts, Slavs), Central and South America (Toltecs, Aztecs, Maya, Incas), etc. In the category of the now existing religions, with or without continuity from ancient times, we can speak of: Indigenous religions (from every part of the globe), major World religions like Bahai faith, Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Sikhism, Shinto religion, Taoism or Daoism, Zoroastrianism, etc (with their sects and sub-sects), and the multi-farious New religious movements.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Ernst Breisach, "Historiography: An Overview," 371.

Calendars are based on lunar or solar months; the main calendar we use is the Western Gregorian calendar; but, every religion or culture has its own calendar; and dates and time are calculated to show in a special manner festivals, fasts, and sacred and auspicious times, most of them having a religious significance. It is because humans see time as bonded to the sacred. Certain events, especially those related to religious personalities, are of utmost importance for religions, and they are commemorated every year, whereas the rest of the days seem to be revolving around significant events.<sup>22</sup> The ceremonies associated with sacred days show that not only some specific time but the whole of the year is consecrated and dedicated to the sacred reality, thereby showing the human bond to the sacred. The religious influence on the calendars shows how humans understand history from the religious perspective.<sup>23</sup>

### 5. Religious Historizing: Balance between Conservatism and Rationalism

We have accepted the validity and importance of the religious interpretation of history. Let us now reflect on some of the religion-based interpretations of ancient history. Navaratna S. Rajaram<sup>24</sup> and Dilip K. Chakrabarti,<sup>25</sup> claiming to be scientific researchers, write on the history of ancient India, especially against the Aryan Invasion Theory and the Aryan Migration Theory. Some of their claims are: that the Aryans were the original inhabitants of India; that the Indus valley civilization or the Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro civilization was the same as the Vedic or Saraswati-Sindhu civilization of the Aryans; that, after the disintegration of the Saraswati-Sindhu civilization due to ecological reasons (the drying up of the Saraswati river), the diffusion of the Aryan people (the ancient Hindus) in Northern India was peaceful; and that there never have been Aryan-Dravidian conflicts (e.g.: “We have it on the authority of Manu that the Dravidians were also part of the Aryan fold.”<sup>26</sup>). These authors base their conclusions mainly on the Hindu sacred scriptures, while

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<sup>22</sup> For example: the flight of Muhammad from Mecca to Medina, which marks the beginning of New Year as well as the centre of time-reckoning for Muslims; the period of Islamic fast; the incarnation of Christ as the dividing mark of history for Christians, Christmas and Easter; Buddha’s enlightenment; Ram’s birth or ascent to Ayodhya, etc. Religions have changed the course of history, and religious events are of utmost importance to the history and life of humans. However there are modern secularist trends which want to do away with religious references in human lives, which is lamented by many people. For example, Lucetta Scaraffia laments the generic use of BCE (Before Common Era) and CE (Common Era) instead of the Christian specific BC (Before Christ) and AD (Annum Dominum: In the Year of the Lord) as an attempt, as in similar cases, to erase every trace of Christianity from Western culture. She considers such attempts as “anti-historical and senseless” because they deny even the cultural debt that civilization owes to Christianity. Cf. Lucetta Scaraffia, “The BBC and the Calendar: Historically Senseless Hypocrisy,” in *L’Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition in English, no. 41/2215, Vatican City, 12 Oct 2011, 1-2.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Giulia Piccaluga, “Calendars,” in Mircea Eliade (ed-in-chief), *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), vol. 3, p. 7-11; Giulia Piccaluga, “Chronology,” in Mircea Eliade (ed-in-chief), *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), vol. 3, p. 461-465.

<sup>24</sup> Navaratna S. Rajaram, *The Politics of History: Aryan Invasion Theory and The Subversion of Scholarship* (New Delhi: Voice of India, 1995).

<sup>25</sup> Dilip K. Chakrabarti, *The Battle for Ancient India: An Essay in the Sociopolitics of Indian Archaeology* (New Delhi: Aryan Books International, 2008).

<sup>26</sup> Navaratna S. Rajaram, *The Politics of History*, p. 152. See also p. 16, 175-176, 182, 228.

claiming to give evidence from archaeology, geography, ecology, metallurgy, mathematics, etc.

According to them, the Aryan Invasion Theory (or its later version: Aryan Migration Theory) was the fabrication of Christian missionaries with politico-colonial and missionary motives; that Max Muller, who was originally responsible for this “racist” theory was an agent of British Government, a willing pawn in an imperial game, a tireless evangelist, a crusader for Christianity, valued more for his attempts at conversion than for his contribution to scholarship, not a Vedic scholar in any real sense, but a calculating and shrewd man, etc.; that even now colonial and missionary interests continue to dominate Indian history, and Arun Shourie, in “his valuable new book *Missionaries in India*, ... has laid bare the full scope of activities of Christian missions that for all practical purposes functioned as an agency of the colonial administration;”<sup>27</sup> and that the continuance of such a theory [of Aryan Migration] is a subversion of ancient Indian history and its scholarship as the “Christian dogma was transformed into the Marxist dogma operating under the camouflage of ‘linguistic evidence’.”<sup>28</sup>

Conceding that there have been political and ideological interests and factual errors in the theories of European Indologists (for example: the Aryan Invasion as the cause of the end of Indus River Valley civilization is shown to be wrong; the causes are attributed to nature), many Indian historians agree: that the urbanized agriculture-based civilization of Indus or Harappan cities “pre-date the Vedic culture by at least a millennium”; that the “earliest of the Vedic texts, the *Rg Veda*, reflects a pastoral, cattle-keeping people”<sup>29</sup>; that “a group of people who called themselves *arya* and were distinguished by their language, later known as Sanskrit, migrated into the subcontinent from the northwest at some point after the Harappan civilization ended”<sup>30</sup>; and that there were indigenous cultures existing in the subcontinent whose “non-Aryan beliefs and traditions influenced or joined with the ‘original’ Aryan system(s)” resulting in the body of Vedic literature.<sup>31</sup>

The question is therefore asked what about the claims that the Aryans were the original inhabitants of India and that Harappa was their creation. The “battle” is less concerning actual history of early India and more concerning the legitimizing of one’s own superiority. There are many more claims from the protagonists of Hindutva: concerning the Babri masjid as Ram’s birthplace, or concerning Adam’s Bridge or Ram Sethu as a man-made construction built by Ram (with archaeological

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<sup>27</sup> Navaratna S. Rajaram, *The Politics of History*, p. x. See also p. 1, 60, 74, 105-118, 138, 210-229.

<sup>28</sup> Navaratna S. Rajaram, *The Politics of History*, p. xiv. See also p. 145-155, 203-228.

<sup>29</sup> Romila Thapar, *Interpreting Early India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), 10. See also pages 1-22; The book is re-published in the collection: Romila Thapar, *History and Beyond: Interpreting Early India, Time as a Metaphor of History, Cultural Transaction and Early India, From Lineage to State* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>30</sup> Manu Bhagavan, “The Historical Context,” in Sumit Ganguly and Niel DeVotta (ed.), *Understanding Contemporary India* (New Delhi: Viva Books Private Limited), 19.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Manu Bhagavan, “The Historical Context,” 19; Cf. also Romila Thapar, *Interpreting Early India*, 11-13.

proofs, satellite images, and scientific evidence). There are Christians who attempt to “prove” the historicity of the creation account in Genesis as Creation-science, with ‘evidence’ from palaeontology (fossils), molecular studies, etc.<sup>32</sup> According to them, every Bible narrative or statement is ‘fact’ – in the sense that things happened exactly as described.<sup>33</sup> The actual aim of these fundamentalist-Christians is to use the Bible to claim exclusive superiority to themselves. There are Jews who legitimize their oppression of the Palestinians claiming themselves to be the chosen people of God with exclusive right over the promised land. There are Muslims who use Qur’an to oppress women and people of other religions.

What is interesting in the protagonists of fundamentalism, be they Hindu, Christian, Jewish, Islamic or any other, is their claim that they are giving historical and scientific proofs (claiming themselves to be specialists in history, archaeology, astrophysics, molecular science, etc.). Are the sacred texts of different religions history books? The sacred texts are related to human history; but they are not meant to be historical works. In fact, the sacred texts themselves acknowledge that their aim is salvation and enabling the humans for a ‘life’ in view of the all-pervasive Sacred reality. The mistake of the conservatives lies in their claim to “bare facts”; it is an error to claim that the historian, far less, the writer of the sacred texts, is narrating ‘events as they have actually happened’. In our earlier section we have defined history as recordings of events, making distinction between ‘event’ and ‘fact’. History is not ‘pure event’; it is the narration of events as perceived and interpreted by the historian. If the conservatives are able to recognize the interpretive element in sacred texts, their wild claims will be mitigated; sabotaging of evidence in one’s favour will be avoided; and they will be tolerant and open to listen to the interpretations of others.<sup>34</sup>

There is another extreme in the religious understanding of history. It comes from the rationalistic stream, which considers all history as ‘pure interpretation’. Rudolf Bultmann’s historical-critical method on the Gospels is a classical example of this stream. (Of course, there are rationalistic streams in interpretations of other religions as well. Bultmann’s method is taken here as a sample.) Basing itself on an existentialistic approach, the Bultmann’s project attempted to recover the past as it actually happened, say, for example, in the case of Jesus, and ended with the conclusion that the historical Jesus (or the historical basis underlying the Christian gospel) is inaccessible to the historian or believer, because of lack of reliable evidence; Only the Christ of faith is accessible to the individual believer. Form-criticism showed: that the resurrection account is not acceptable on account of the

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<sup>32</sup> The origin of the world, according to the ‘creation-scientists’, is approximately 6000 years ago (as opposed to the billions of years generally understood in Science). Cf. L. R. Croft, *How Life Began* (Durham: Evangelical Press, 1988); Andy McIntosh, *Genesis for Today: Showing the Relevance of the Creation/Evolution Debate to Today’s Society* (Leominster: Day One Publications, 1997 [2004]); *Creation or Evolution?: Your Questions Answered about Creation and Evolution* (Calcutta: Creation Science Association of India, 2003).

<sup>33</sup> We understand ‘fact’ in the sense that events have actually happened as perceived/interpreted by the knower.

<sup>34</sup> C. R. North, “History,” 608.

‘discrepancies’ in the gospels; that the miracles and extra-ordinary events do not stand the scrutiny of the critical analysis based on physical causality; that the historical Jesus was an ordinary person around whose memory legends had developed; and that the gospels were unreliable historically.

The attempts to discover authenticity, by demythologizing the texts from the trappings of the particular cultural milieu, ended up in nullifying history itself. The scientific-secularist approach to history, deriving its methods from an anti-religious philosophy of the Enlightenment, ended up in historical scepticism. It is, however, a fact that Bultmann’s disciples themselves, from within the historical-critical school, claimed that “there was more history in the gospels than Bultmann had allowed”; that the traditions of the Gospels, written under inspiration with a good deal of editorial freedom, rest on a historically reliable basis (which is to be worked out at each point of the given material of the gospel).<sup>35</sup>

The mistake of the rationalistic perspective on religious historizing is its denial of the transcendent dimension and its distrust of actual history itself. The secularist-rationalist approach limits itself to the finite and the immanent, keeping itself to the one dimensional earth-boundness, and excludes any transcendental dimension to human life.<sup>36</sup> Speaking on the importance of a religious reading of human history, we noted that the human being is basically related to the sacred in finding meaning in life; the sense of the sacred controls the whole of human life. In fact, the human being is a religious animal; the religious nature of human social activities from time immemorial stand witness to it. Anyone who has understood the meaning of lasting friendship, forgiveness, sacrifice, self-giving, love, etc., will also know the existence of the sacred as an undeniable aspect of one’s life. The rationalist-based historical critical approach begins with doubting the authenticity of history-texts and ends up with relativizing and dissolving history itself. Historical-texts, for the ‘critic’, are context-based and without any basis on metaphysical principles or transcendental norms; they are determined by the socio-political and other interests of the individuals and community. For the historical-critic, in fact, history, why, all knowledge, is socially constructed and maintained; all knowledge is relative to the standpoint of the author. Extreme forms of subjectivism naturally lead to relativism, which in itself cannot be defended.

From the perspective of a definition of history which we have proposed in this Paper, we are aware of the need to maintain its dual-meaning as ‘events and recordings/interpretations’. History is not pure interpretation or fabrication; there is no need to deny either the historicity of ‘events’ or the ability of the humans to know

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. I. H. Marshall, “Quest for Historical Jesus,” in Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright (ed.), *New Dictionary of Theology* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 305-306; I. H. Marshall, “Salvation-History,” in Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright (ed.), *New Dictionary of Theology* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 612; Dennis Nineham, “Historical Criticism,” in Alan Richardson and John Bowden (ed.), *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1983), 255-258; R. P. Mohan, “Historicism,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967), vol. 7, 5.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Dennis Nineham, “Historical Criticism,” 260.

the ‘events’. As a balance between rationalism and conservatism, a time-tested critical realism should be our approach.

## 6. Salvation-History as Religious Historizing and its Implications

As an instance of critical-realism approach, avoiding the dangers of conservatism and rationalism, I uphold a ‘salvation-history’<sup>37</sup> perspective. “Salvation history is a way by which faith sees and interprets the vast expanse of history.”<sup>38</sup> The Salvation-history approach holds that the sacred reality acts in history, without however taking away the freedom of human beings; it speaks of both world and history as oriented towards salvation; history itself as a whole is seen as a process of salvation. The word ‘salvation-history’ may appear to be a Christian term; but ‘salvation’ being the central element of all religions, it is a common term belonging to all religions; it speaks of the interpretation of history from the perspective of salvation/religion.<sup>39</sup>

We know that the most basic concepts, common to all religions (including the atheistic variety of religions which reject the idea of a ‘personal God’), are the inter-related notions of the sacred and salvation.<sup>40</sup> Whether one considers the sacred to be *outside* oneself or *within* oneself, it is seen as something *beyond* oneself (transcendent), which one seeks to attain in salvation. All religions have the aspect of ‘salvation’, whether they understand time in terms of a line, circle, triangle, widening circle, or spiral; diagrams can be distorting;<sup>41</sup> it is wrong to claim that Hinduism, Jainism, tribal religions, etc., do not have the idea of salvation, because they conceive time predominantly as circular, or because they have no concept of a ‘saviour’. We can speak of salvation as ‘liberation’ or ‘union’ with the sacred, in the sense of ‘*ultimate* union’. We can also speak of it as: ‘religious fulfilment’; attaining

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<sup>37</sup> The word ‘salvation history’ (translated from the German: *Heilsgeschichte*) is said to have become prominent in the 19<sup>th</sup> century German Protestantism through the work of J. C. von Hofmann and others. “Most commonly, salvation history is used in a special sense to refer to those events which the Bible narrates as manifesting God’s deeds for the salvation of the world.” Cf. Thomas P. McCreesh, “Salvation History,” in Joseph A. Komonchak et al. (ed.), *The New Dictionary of Theology* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1987), 929-930. However, ‘salvation’ is the basic aspect of all religions, which have salvation-based understanding of history and human life. So, here I use ‘salvation-history’ in application to all religions in the general sense of ‘religious reading of history’. So, it be taken as a sample to religious historizing; there can be other instances or expressions showing the validity of religious reading of history.

<sup>38</sup> Geiko Muller-Fahrenholz, “Salvation History,” in Nicholas Lossky et al. (ed.), *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 898.

<sup>39</sup> Among the theologians and historians involved in the religious interpretation of history are: Nicholas Berdyaev, Herbert Butterfield, Christopher Dawson, Martin C. D’Arcy, Karl Lowith, Reinhold Niebuhr, Arnold Toynbee, Oscar Cullmann, Karl Rahner, Max Scheler, Viktor Frankl, Wolfhart Pannenberg, etc.

<sup>40</sup> The sacred may be actually experienced as: God, Yahweh, Holy Trinity, the Heavenly Father, Allah, Ram, Vishnu, Shiva, Dharma, Brahman, Absolute, Nirvana, Dharmakaya, the Buddha, the Tao, Dharmes, Singbonga, the gods, spirit, the supernatural, the mana, etc. Salvation (experienced and expressed differently in different religions) is the attainment of the sacred or being in a definite relation with the sacred. ‘*Salus*’ generally means sound or safe; the state of being safe in ultimate terms, is known as ‘salvation’; Soteriology is the doctrine of salvation; *soterion* = deliverance.

<sup>41</sup> Walter Kasper, “Theology of History,” in Karl Rahner et al. (ed.), *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology* (London: Burns & Oates, 1969), vol. 3, p. 46.

God; ‘human transformation’; ‘transformation of human existence from self-centredness to a new-centredness’; ‘the realisation of a limitlessly better possibility for human existence’; ‘overcoming the wrongness of the human situation’; *parousia*, heaven, redemption, kingdom of God, eternal life, the new heavens and the new earth (Christianity); final messianic victory; the coming of the kingdom of God (Judaism); paradise, peace with God (Islam); *moksha*, *mukti*, liberation, release, timelessness (Hinduism); *nirvana*, enlightenment (Buddhism); moral and social order (Chinese religions); etc.

Each concrete religion has its own understanding about salvation and about its fruition (way of attaining) in human history. There are separate Papers presented from the perspectives of Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Chinese religions, etc., – showing concretely the religious understanding of history by present-day religions. So, under my topic, it would suffice to show a general picture of a salvific reading of history. Let me point out some of the implications of the salvation-history perspective.<sup>42</sup>

**a) History as a movement towards perfection (salvation):** Religions see present history of humans as a loss of perfection; this may sound pessimistic; however, it need not be so. Seen in terms of the process towards the goal of salvation, it is an optimistic process; it is a movement towards perfection. It is basically the realization of humans as limited beings, to which are added the socio-moral limitations of humans due to their own wrong doings and failings; It is the realization/consciousness of the misery, unreality, triviality, wrongness, or perversity of ordinary human life; In simple words, it is the awareness that something is wrong with history or human existence as such. Concrete religions speak of the human situation in history as: *kaliyug* or decline from the Golden Age, bondage, transmigration, suffering due to attachment, consequence of disobedience, sin, ‘death’, evil, corruption, decay, etc.

**b. History as the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet’ in terms of salvation:**

History may be seen as a loss of perfection; but that is not the full picture. History is also the present actualization of salvation, the process which will come to perfection in the end-times. Salvation has already dawned in history; it is seen to be temporal as well as eschatological. The sacred reality acts in history, in the here-and-now. The temporal life of humans falls under the care of the sacred. However, just as humans are not limited to the socio-temporal, but are open in a limitless way to the transcendent, salvation happening in this world and history extends to an eschatological time, when full salvation will be achieved. Human history bonded to the sacred implies both the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet’. History is not of the ‘past’ alone; it is the past interwoven into the present in view of a limitless future.

**c. History as ‘*chronos*’ as well as ‘*kairos*’:** History is the ordering of time, a chronology. But because of the intentional character of history (humans giving

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. E. L. Peterman, “Salvation History,” p. 998-1000; James Hennesey, “History,” p. 470; Arnaldo Momigliano, “Historiography: Western Studies,” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 6, p. 383.

meaning/purpose), it does not remain purely the record of social events; it gets a transcendent dimension, which colours and controls the events of life. Therefore, history is also '*kairos*', the opportune moment of divine action; humans are invited to read the 'signs of the times' and so to act in accordance with the divine will in view of salvation.<sup>43</sup> We are repeatedly invited to read the signs of the times and order our lives in view of salvation.

**d. Salvation as affecting the whole of history:** When we think of history in the general or secular sense, the scope of history is limited to human beings and events of the past, especially the social events of the past. From the perspective of salvation, history is that which affects the whole of the world and everything pertaining to human beings. The sacred reality is immanent and active in every aspect of life and world. Salvation pervades every aspect of this life: material, temporal, social, intellectual, moral, spiritual, or any other.

**e. The sacred as the transformer of history:** Some religious interpretations may put the sacred reality in opposition to history ('God against history'; 'God above history'). Basing on the salvation-history perspective, we can say that the sacred reality is actively involved in history; that there has been intervention in the course of human history for a better possibility in terms of salvation; that good can be brought out of evil.

**f. The importance of human agency in history:** The sacred is active in history; but history is of humans; they are responsible for the course of events in history. Therefore, human beings play the role of co-authors in setting the course of history. Human beings, in freedom, work for the well-being of the world. Salvation-history view does not advocate the forfeiting of human responsibility to the sacred. In fact, humans can totally close themselves from the sacred. The salvation-history view demands that humans, as eminent beings, take the world towards its fullness. Such actions of humans should be shown in works of justice and solidarity, acts of community-building and charity, care of the environment and prudent use of natural resources, etc. A salvation-based world view gives inspiration for continuous struggle to build a better world in the here-and-now, a world where salvation has already dawned.

## **Conclusion**

Religions have been ridiculed time and again. For example, Xenophanes (c.500 BCE), an early Greek thinker, is said to have remarked that horses, if they could paint, would paint their gods as horses. Yet, religions have found their way to resilience and newness again and again because they satisfy human aspirations in the most profound way. If religions and religious interpretations are to be meaningful, keeping the aspect of the sacred interacting with humanity and world, we need to keep religions open to the critical role of reason as well (yet, avoiding rationalism).

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<sup>43</sup> For example, Jesus admonishes the people for not willing to interpret 'the signs of times' and change their lives according to God's plan (Mt. 16, 3). The teachings of founders of different religions are attempts to encourage people to see the '*kairos*' in the '*chronos*'.

Without this critical element, religious texts would become sources of distrust and violence; religious beliefs would become causes of calamities and suffering. A religious understanding of history needs to be constantly purified in us by the musings of the sacred, interpreted in the light of reason.

# The Notion of Time and The Sense of 'History' in Hinduism: Clarifications and Consequences

- Dolreich Pereira

*General opinion about Indians having no sense of history and Ancient Indian developing no historical tradition or consciousness as that of others, is to be taken seriously for analysis. Has Indian society been a peculiar civilization without a history or a sense of history? We intend to take up for consideration certain aspects of Indian thought concerning history and time. Understanding the notions of 'history' and 'time,' especially in an inter-cultural perspective, poses a variety of problems. Not only the philosophical ideals but images, symbols and myths stemming from a particular cultural set-up are liable to be misrepresented and misinterpreted without being intimately acquainted with them. History and time are intimately connected. The terms 'cyclic' and 'linear' that frequently crop up in any discourse on history represent radically different time-experiences. Another source of misunderstanding is the usage of the terms "cyclic" and "circular" when attributed to time. An examination of these labels will reveal that there are good reasons for exercising caution when dealing with Greek and Indian speculative models. The paper proceeds to study Paul Tillich's analysis of time in Indian thought in order to attempt a response concerning the presence or absence of a Hindu sense of history.*

## Introduction

In his book, *An Area of Darkness*, V. S. Naipaul characterises the Indian scenario by an absence of a sense of history: "It is well that Indians are unable to look at their country directly, for the distress they would see would drive them mad. And it is well that they have no sense of history, for how then would they be able to continue to squat among their ruins, and which Indian would be able to read the history of his country for the last thousand years without anger and pain?"<sup>1</sup> B. G. Gokhale echoes a similar view: "Ancient India did not develop a historical tradition or a historical consciousness like those of the Greeks and Romans."<sup>2</sup> The special difficulty in talking about Indian history is that we have often been told that India is a peculiar civilization without a history. The goal of this paper, therefore, is to take up for consideration certain aspects of Indian thought concerning history and time. We hope the discussion will renew our understanding of the relationship that Indians have with what is termed as a 'sense of history'.

The study of the notions of "history" and "time", especially in an inter-cultural perspective, poses a variety of problems which call for clarification. The existing literature on the subject of such fundamental importance is so vast that no tradition, be it philosophical or theological, can avoid reflecting on this matter. To attempt a comprehensive appraisal is fraught with risks for they are often based on insufficient information about other traditions. Not only the philosophical ideals but images, symbols and myths stemming from a particular cultural set-up are liable to be misrepresented and misinterpreted without being intimately acquainted with them.

History and time are intimately connected. However, whenever some attempts have been made to situate the experience of time conceived by the major philosophical traditions in a global setting, the terms 'cyclic' and 'linear' frequently crop up. These labels are assumed to represent radically different time-experiences. In a rather stereotyped manner, it is said, for example, that the Indo-Hellenic time is cyclic as opposed to the Judeo-Christian understanding of linear time.<sup>3</sup> No less than a distinguished historian such as Arnold Toynbee has remarked: "This philosophy of sheer recurrences, which intrigued, without ever quite captivating the Hellenic genius, came to dominate contemporary Indic minds." He refers to the *Puranic* idea of *kalpa* as the "cyclic theory of time" which the "Hindu thinkers had evolved."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> V.S. Naipaul, *An Area of Darkness* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1968), .201.

<sup>2</sup> Balkrishna G. Gokhale, *Indian Thought through the Ages: A Study of some Dominant Concepts* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1961), 7.

<sup>3</sup> "...the Christian view of cosmic time is so distinctively different from other views – such as the cyclic view of the Greeks and the Indians." Jean Mouroux, *The Mystery of Time* (New York: Desclee Company, 1964), 48.

To ensure clarity in our discourses, we cannot stress enough the importance of examining these general and broad distinctions that are made, which are repeated endlessly and hardly ever questioned.<sup>5</sup> Can we take it for granted that the Indian conceptual world projects as a bloc, a “cyclic” view of time? In the first part of this paper, basing myself on the work of Anindita Niyogi Balslev,<sup>6</sup> I would like to examine the cliché that cyclic time is a predominant trait of the Indian conceptual world.

Another source of misunderstanding in my opinion is the usage of the terms “cyclic” and “circular” when attributed to time.<sup>7</sup> Are these terms synonymous? Do they refer to the same idea? More importantly, the Indian and Greek concepts of time are very often classified as “cyclic time” or involving “circular” time<sup>8</sup>. An examination of these labels, which we propose to do in the second part of this essay, will reveal that there are good reasons for exercising caution when dealing with Greek and Indian speculative models.

In the final section of this essay, we join issue with Paul Tillich, for whom, “India is the least history-conscious of all the great cultures”.<sup>9</sup> Does Tillich’s analysis of time in Indian thought justify this claim? At a more general level, is there a “sense of history” in Hinduism? Our method of proceeding will be to draw out the consequences that emerge from the first two sections before attempting a response concerning the presence or absence of a Hindu sense of history.

## 1. Indian views on Time: Tackling the Problem of Change

Indian philosophy is replete with an abundance of philosophical speculations that concern the subject of time in relation to the problem of change. Reflections about the problem of change are necessarily connected with time. For instance, does change imply a lapse of time? Is time, then, something apart from the changing object? Does change mean modifications of states/qualities of the identical entity or does it involve, on the contrary, a replacement of one entity by another? On one hand, one can dispute whether time is essentially a problem of appearance or not and on the other hand, there are those who accept the reality of change.<sup>10</sup> Given the diverse conceptual models that exist for understanding the problem of change, it is incumbent upon us to study the different positions about time which emerge from the various Indian schools of philosophy.

### The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika system of metaphysical pluralism

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<sup>4</sup> Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, rev. and abridged by the author and Jane Caplan (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 157. Referring to the Puranic idea of ‘kalpa’, he adds: “Are these vain repetitions . . . really the law of the Universe, and, therefore, incidentally the law of the histories of civilizations? If we find the answer is in the affirmative, we can hardly escape the conclusion that we are the perpetual victims of an everlasting cosmic practical joke which condemns us to endure our sufferings and to overcome our difficulties and to purify ourselves of our sins – only to know in advance that the automatic inevitable lapse of a certain meaningless measure of time cannot fail to stultify all our human exertions by reproducing the same situation again and again ad infinitum just as if we had never exerted ourselves at all.” *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>5</sup> Consider for instance, the ambiguity of the terms present in the following example: “In early Indian Vedic thought, annual sacrifices and daily offerings were integrally linked to the continuation of the world. A repetitive, ritualistic lifestyle became linked to cosmic regularity, which in turn was associated with immortality and perfect truth. According to early religious thought sacred time is cyclical and therefore lacks any temporal direction, unlike the one-way time corresponding to ordinary mortal existence. Thus the sacred reversible circular time could replace profane irreversible time. [...] According to the Hindu writings in every 4,320,000,000 years, a period known as a *kalpa* (world cycle), the universe is destroyed and recreated. Hence, all of human history represents but a small and insignificant part of cyclic eternity.[...]. The Greek (*sic*) also believed in cyclic time, since for the Greeks the divine presence is eternal and the universe is unchanging. For Aristotle, for instance, the world has existed for eternity, and the circularity of time was a central and powerful image.” Francis P. Xavier, “Eternal Flow of Time!” in *Indian Theological Studies*, 39/1 (March 2002), 64-66.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Anindita Niyogi Balslev, *A Study of Time in Indian Philosophy*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2009.

<sup>7</sup> See for example, the text of Francis P. Xavier in footnote no.5 above wherein he uses “circular” and “cyclic” as interchangeable and indistinguishable terms.

<sup>8</sup> “In its adherence to a belief in the sacredness of repetition, Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism shared a similar belief in cyclic time. In fact, cyclic time, with its strong links to nature and to immortality, had an enormous appeal to almost every civilization in the ancient world; it represented the common hope of ancient peoples to connect their destiny to the eternal. Even in ancient Greece, where there were many divergence (*sic*) and conflicting views of temporal progression the notion of periodic time exerted a strong pull.” HALPERN, P., *Time Journeys*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1990, pp. 4-6 cited in Francis P. Xavier, “Eternal Flow of Time!” in *Indian Theological Studies*, 65.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era*, Abridged edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 18.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Balslev, *A Study of Time in Indian Philosophy*, 117.

The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika system of metaphysical pluralism maintains time to be a separate, independent reality, outside and apart from all-that-is-in-time i.e. the contingent. It does not conceive change of any kind – whether as occurrence, disappearance, modifications of states and qualities – without reference to time. Events are in time and the duration of an entity can be understood only if one grants that the basis of the idea of time is an ontological reality. Time is, therefore classed as *nitya-dravya*, a substantial reality, which is without beginning (*anādi*) and without end (*ananta*). As time is the very presupposition of all contingency and of every possible mode in which change is conceivable, no contingency can be predicated of it.<sup>11</sup> Time is absolute and unitary.

According to the Vaiśeṣika philosophers, change points to the existence of time, time itself is not conceived as changing or moving. Time is the static (*niskriya*) background which makes change possible and explicable. Again, the Vaiśeṣika philosophers are aware that time can be measured by movement e.g. the solar motion, but movement is by no means identical with time. This leads to a difficulty concerning the passage of time. “The Vaiśeṣika philosophers account for such conventions of past, present and future time as involving no real movement or division of time but as due to external determinations, which leave the unitary nature of time unaffected”.<sup>12</sup> In other words, what changes is in time, but time itself cannot change. Therefore, such conventional usages do not imply any change of time but are, on the contrary, made possible by the ontological existence of absolute, indivisible time. Thus, for the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosophers, the reality of change can be explained only on the basis of reality of time.

### The Dualistic Metaphysics of Sāṃkhya-Yoga

The concept of *Prakṛti* in the dualistic metaphysics of Sāṃkhya-Yoga, denotes the reality of change. This model for explaining change (including events as production, continuation and destruction), is rather different from that of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika on two points: the notion of unitary time as a separate category of existence is not envisaged; the conception of time as a receptacle is rejected as superfluous.<sup>13</sup> Contrary to the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika system, in the Sāṃkhya theory of causality – *satkāryavāda*, the reality of change does not necessitate a conception of time as different from changing matter: “*Satkāryavāda*, the Sāṃkhya theory of causality, as has been pointed out previously, does not require operating with any notion of vacant time. Change, in Sāṃkhya, implies a succession of states of the substance, which persists identically through them. Change and identity are not mutually exclusive in Sāṃkhya as in Buddhist thinking”.<sup>14</sup> Thus empirical time is closely related to the changing qualities of the substance in its successive phases. In this way, the substance is a stable reference for understanding any change in its different phases.

We have just summarized how the reality of change is understood and accounted for on the basis of distinct formulation of the problem of time in the schools of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and Sāṃkhya-Yoga, which have their origins in the Brahmanical tradition. Let us now proceed to examine this idea in the philosophical school of Advaita Vedānta.

### Being as Timeless in Advaita Vedānta

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<sup>11</sup> That the contingent bears a necessary temporal reference, is amply brought out by the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika theory of causality – *asatkāryavāda*. This theory focuses on the idea of the effect as a beginning (*ārambha*) of a phenomenon in time. Similarly, the destruction of the contingent is the termination of its contact with time. This model for understanding change underlies the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika conception of time as the receptacle (*ādhāra*) of all that is contingent (*janya*). The production, continuation and destruction of the contingent are all events-in-time. To put it differently, that which is conceivable as not in time, is either a fictitious entity or an absolute entity like god, space, etc. entities listed as *nitya* in the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika pluralistic metaphysics. In other words, only the uncaused is conceivable as bearing no reference to time. The contingent is caused, and all causal operation presupposes time, conceived as all-pervasive (*sarvavyāpī*). *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>13</sup> Even if it is conceived as merely a thought construction.

<sup>14</sup> Balslev, *A Study of Time in Indian Philosophy*, 119. Analysing the conception of *laksana-parināma* clearly reveals the problem of change in relation to time as conceived in the Yoga philosophy. It is indicated that the substance (*dharmīn*) is that, which remains common to all the three stages of its changing qualities, which when sub-latent is called the past, when rising, present and when indeterminable, future. [...] Shortly, there is no event-in-time conception in this system. The ultimate substance as *Prakṛti* is beyond the three phases of empirical time. *Prakṛti* is eternal-in-change. *Ibid.*, 119.

In the philosophy of Advaita Vedānta, which marks the culmination of the Brahmanical tradition, the idea of being as timeless is the main focus and time and change are conceived as appearance. The conception of the reality of change and along with it that of time, is challenged. In contrast to idea of *Prakṛti* in Sāṃkhya, change is ascribed as an empirical reality, having no ontological status. Moreover, the ontological being is pronounced as non-dual – a conception which rejects all pluralistic / dualistic views of being.

### **Buddhism and the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika conception of time**

In Buddhist philosophy, change is not an accidental feature, but the very heart of reality. This is a radical transformation. The idea of stable matter with changing qualities is totally unacceptable to the Buddhist. An entity cannot change and yet remain the same. Change and identity are mutually exclusive. The radical understanding of change as expressed in this philosophy implies a total substitution of one entity by another: “Time is conceived as instant, one instant being superseded by another. At no two instants can the entity remain identical. The idea of time as instant and being as instantaneous and both as fused one with the other is a philosophical event, which at once places Buddhism as an original tradition, breaking away completely from the *ātmavāda* conceptual framework”.<sup>15</sup>

A Buddhist would hardly conceive time as being separate from the contingent entity. The conceptual model of “point-instant” is a mode of conceiving contingency, which is in total opposition to that of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika conception. On the other hand, the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosophers accept the reality of change, but do not accept the Buddhist view that change is replacement of one entity by another. In other words, the contingent is not necessarily momentary – as the Buddhist would have it. The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika realists as we have seen, maintain time to be absolute and an independent category of reality, the instant being intelligible only on the background of the universal, unitary time.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the interpretation of change in Buddhism is radical, giving rise to a new conceptual model of being and time.

### **Buddhism and the Sāṃkhya-Yoga understanding of time**

The problem of change with respect to time is the central problem for both Sāṃkhya-Yoga and Buddhism. The conception of *Prakṛti* as eternal-in-change is an idea, which the Buddhists attack as they cannot subscribe to a model of being where identity and change go hand in hand – unlike in the Buddhist model. There is a sharp and subtle difference in their respective conceptual models:

For the Buddhist, “movement consists of moments, it is a staccato movement, momentary flashes of a stream of energy”, whereas for the Sāṃkhyas “movement is compact, is a legato movement, the momentary changes of a fluctuating substantial stuff with which they are identical”. “Everything is evanescent,” says the Sāṃkhya, “because although never at rest, it represents fundamentally one and the same stuff”.<sup>17</sup> The radical difference in their formulation of the problem of change is thus reflected in their distinct formulation of time.

### **The Jaina tradition**

In the Jaina tradition, time is conceived in a way that seeks to justify a metaphysical pattern which seeks to compromise the reality of change with the idea of being as unchanging. Time is conceived as real and absolute but

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<sup>15</sup> Balslev, *A Study of Time in Indian Philosophy*, 120. She adds “The Buddhist conceptual model for understanding production, destruction is thus quite distinct. Nothing endures, at every instant the entity is replaced by another. The succeeding point-instant represents the annihilation of the former. Thus the conventional idea that a thing is experienced to exist through a flow of instants, is a conceptual construction and does not correspond to reality, but – as the Sautrāntika Buddhist would say – the annihilation of the entity is followed by a similar entity in the next instant”. *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> “The Buddhists rejects the idea of universal time, the instant alone is real. It is clear, that the Buddhist understanding of change is thorough and total, there is no room for any notion of unchanging substance, no category of reality as beginningless and endless (i.e. *nitya*). Thus in the Buddhist framework a conception of time as that of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosophers can have no place. Time as instant, being an instantaneous, are the inevitable concepts, when the problem of change is understood in the Buddhist manner. Even more, the instant and the instantaneous are conceived as coalesced, as fused with one another, giving rise to the Buddhist model of the point-instant.” *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>17</sup> T. Stcherbatsky, *Buddhist Logic*, Vol. I (New York: Dover Publications, 1962), 19, cited in Balslev, *A Study of Time in Indian Philosophy*, 121.

not as unitary. Time as instant is real, but these instants are present in a linear order. In other words, “the [Jaina] position agrees with the Buddhist’s in maintaining the reality of time as instant and in rejecting the idea of universal time. On the other hand, it agrees with the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika realistic conception of time as absolute, unchanging, but disagrees with the idea that time is unitary.”<sup>18</sup> In brief, the reality of change as conceived by the Jainas necessitates time as instants, which are many, but in an absolutely existing category of reality.

### **Being and Time: some Indian positions**

The problem of change and time is a challenge faced by the Brahmanical, Buddhist and Jaina systems. Taking into account that they also involve the problem of causality, they form a set of interconnected problems, which are basic to the constitution of distinct conceptual structures. In each system the thought-pattern is different. Despite the internal differences, it seems that the understanding of time and change is greatly influenced by the conception of being in each tradition.

The Brahmanical tradition developed alternative metaphysical structures formulated with reference to the problem of time and change. The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and the Sāṃkhya-Yoga schools adopted different positions regarding the problems of change, causality and time, but both systems modelled their formulations on the conception of being in the *ātmavāda* tradition. In their dualistic and pluralistic metaphysical systems, the Ātman, an ontological category, remains untouched by time.

The metaphysical structure of Advaita Vedānta rejects pluralistic, dualistic models, focusing on the reality of the unchanging and unchangeable Ātman as the one and only reality. Consequently, the problem of change is reduced to a problem of appearance. Time is no more an ontological reality but phenomenal (*vyavahārika*). The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika conception of time as a metaphysical reality is, therefore, untenable in the Advaita structure.<sup>19</sup>

The unchanging and unchangeable reality which dominates the Brahmanical tradition of *ātmavāda*, is challenged by the Buddhist tradition of *anātmavāda*. The latter reject all philosophical conceptions which are modelled on the *ātma*-pattern. On the contrary they maintain unequivocally that whatever does not change does not exist. Their philosophical stance is based on the idea of causal efficiency as the criterion of reality. With the emergence of the Buddhist tradition and its idea of reality as flux, the problem of change takes on an altogether different dimension.

We have considered several positions in Indian philosophy and it is clear from the above that a great diversity of views needs to be considered for any appraisal of the Hindu conceptual experience of time. To ignore this variety of views and to reduce them under the single caption of ‘cyclic time’ is to distort the image of a complex and a major tradition of world-religions. Balslev rightly remarks that “it is all the more questionable, since although the appellation of ‘cyclic time’ features so often in the Western encounter with the Indian tradition, the idea can hardly be identified as the view of any particular school of Brahmanical philosophy or even as an issue for debate in the polemical literature. Hindu thinkers discussed and debated about such issues as whether time is discrete or continuous, real or [in] appearance, perceived or inferred, an independent (*svatantra*) category or not, there is no record to my knowledge (*sic*) of any such dispute about whether time is cyclic or not”.<sup>20</sup> The appellation of “cyclic time” does not seem to have the same relevance when examined exclusively in the Hindu context. One would need to look into its significance in an inter-cultural and inter-religious perspective.

## **2. An appraisal of “cyclic” time in the Hellenic tradition**

Having discussed the different views of time within the philosophical traditions in India, let us examine the notion of “cyclic” time as it took shape, philosophically and theologically, in the encounter of Greek philosophy with Christian thought. A look at the objections that are raised against the so-called idea of cyclic time by its opponents could provide valuable clues to understanding the implications that are read into it.

### **St Augustine**

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<sup>18</sup> Balslev, *A Study of Time in Indian Philosophy*, 122.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

At an early stage in the history of Christianity, St Augustine of Hippo attacked the idea of “circular” time:

[...] these philosophers suppose, the same periods of time and sequence of events will be repeated; as if, for example, the philosopher Plato having taught in a certain age at the school of Athens called the Academy, even so, through innumerable ages of the past at long but definite intervals, this same Plato and the same city, the same school and the same disciples all existed and will exist again and again through innumerable ages of the future. Far be it from us, I say, to believe this. For, Christ died once for our sins; and ‘having risen from the dead, dies no more, death shall no longer have dominion over him’.<sup>21</sup>

From the above, let us note the ideas that Augustine associates with the notion of circular time. ‘The same periods of time’ repeat themselves (in a circular fashion) and along with it the same events recur in such minute detail that it regenerates in the same individuals exactly. Augustine has a view of the cosmological process being strictly periodical wherein there is an exact repetition of all events in the cosmos including the destinies of the individuals. In this framework, one cannot envisage the doctrine of salvation, which is a matter of great theological consequence. What is Augustine’s opinion of the notion of ‘circular time’ as he understands it? His views are expressed in the following passage:

[In] a theory of periodic cycles of time according to which there always has been and will be a continual renewal and repetition in the order of nature, because the coming and passing ages revolve as on a wheel. These [natural] philosophers were not sure whether a single permanent world passes through these revolutions or whether, at fixed intervals, the world itself dissolves and evolves anew, repeating the same pattern of what has already taken place and will again take place in the future. And from this game of merry-go-round they could find no exemption for the immortal soul – not even for the soul of a philosopher – but it, too, must be ceaselessly on its way to a false beatitude, only to return to its genuine misery. For, how can a soul be considered truly blessed if, with no assurance of being so eternally, it is either blissfully ignorant of its future misery or unhappily apprehensive of its present bliss?<sup>22</sup>

From this perspective of Augustine, which undoubtedly would influence later thinking in the Western tradition, we obtain certain concrete features of the idea of circular time and some of its important implications. The question to be asked is: was Augustine’s view of “cyclic” time the dominant idea among Greek philosophers? To answer this, we would have to examine the cosmological models of the Greek thinkers.

Erich Frank claims that in the opinion of the Greeks, “Time itself was a circle – a periodical recurring of the same, a cycle in which even the life of a human soul was involved. ... It was thought that the whole process of nature repeats itself in ever-recurring world periods, during which the souls are reborn in ever new bodies”.<sup>23</sup> Eudemus, a pupil of Aristotle, in a lecture on the concept of time and temporal identity, refers to this idea of an exact repetition of the revolutions of the cosmos along with recurrences of all events in exact details: “But if one may believe the Pythagoreans ... then someday I myself, with this staff in my hand shall talk to you who will sit in front of me, just as you are sitting now, and the same will be true of everything else.”<sup>24</sup>

This indicates that the idea of the exact recurrence of cosmic processes and that of every event of individual lives was present in the thinking of the Greeks. Nonetheless, the question still remains as to just how widespread and accepted this idea was to all concerned or whether it was just one amongst a plurality of views that were contemporary. Following Aristotle, we note that while these views conform to the principle *ex nihilo nihil fit*,<sup>25</sup> there is a difference in their cosmological speculations as can be seen from the critical exposition made by Aristotle in his *Physics*, where he critically reviews the positions of his predecessors.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> St. Augustine, *City of God*, Book XII, Chapter 14, “Fathers of the Church” series, Vol. 14 (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1952), 269.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 267-268.

<sup>23</sup> Erich Frank, *Philosophical Understanding and Religious Truth* (New York: Oxford University Press, New York, 1966), 67.

<sup>24</sup> Cited in Frank, *Philosophical Understanding and Religious Truth*, 83.

<sup>25</sup> For Aristotle, “it is impossible for it to arise from what is not (on this point all the physicists agree)”, *Physics*, Book 1, Chapter IV, 187 a, in *The Basic works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), 224.

## Aristotle

The idea of time as associated with circular movement has more than one version. In his *Physics*, Aristotle notes and comments on the views of his predecessors:

Some assert that it is (1) the movement of the whole, while others that it is (2) the sphere itself.<sup>27</sup> (1) Yet, part, too, of the revolution is a time, but it certainly is not a revolution: for what is taken is part of the revolution, not a revolution. Besides, if there were more heavens than one, the movement of any of them equally would be time, so that there would be many times at the same time. (2) Those who said that time is the sphere of the whole thought so, no doubt, on the ground that all things are in time and all things are in the sphere of the whole. The view is too naive for it to be worthwhile to consider the impossibilities implied in it.<sup>28</sup>

We are thus cautioned against being too hasty in generalising about the understanding of time in a philosophical tradition like that of the Greeks, which knows of a variety of views regarding specific problems. Moreover, that particular Greek view of time that we had quoted above in the writings of Augustine – namely, that ‘the same measure of time’ repeats itself ‘in a circular fashion’ – does not seem to be held in high esteem by Aristotle as the following text makes clear:

Further, there is the same time everywhere at once, but not the same time before and after, for while the present change is one, the change which has happened and that which will happen are different. Time is not number with which we count, but the number of things which are counted, and this according as it occurs before or after is always different, for the “nows” are different. And the number of a hundred horses and a hundred men is the same, but the things numbered are different – the horses from the men. Further, as a movement can be one and the same again and again, so too can time, e.g. a year or a spring or an autumn.<sup>29</sup>

It is Aristotle once again who enlightens us as to why rotation is accepted as a standard for measuring time and in what precise sense one generally speaks of the ‘circle of time’:

Now there is such a thing as locomotion, and in locomotion there is included circular movement, and everything is measured by some one thing homogenous with it, units by a unit, horses by a horse, and similarly times by some definite time, and, as we said, time is measured by motion as well as motion by time (this being so because by a motion definite in time the quantity both of the motion and of time is measured): if, then, what is first is the measure of everything homogenous with it, regular circular motion is above all else the measure, because the number of this is best known. Now neither alteration nor increase nor coming into being can be regular, but locomotion can be. This is also why time is thought to be the movement of the sphere, viz. because the other movements are measured by this, and time by this movement.

This also explains the common saying that human affairs form a circle, and that there is a circle in all other things that have a natural movement and coming into being and passing away. *This is because all other things are discriminated by time, and end and begin as though conforming to a cycle; for even time itself is thought to be a circle. And this opinion again is held because time is the measure of this kind of locomotion and is itself measured by such. So that to say that the things that come into being form a circle is to say that there is a circle of time; and this is to say that it is measured by the circular movement; for apart from the measure nothing else to be measured is observed; the whole is just a plurality of measures.*<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> To cite an example the “difference between the views of Empedocles and Anaxagoras, as he says, lies in “that Empedocles supposes the course of Nature to return upon itself, coming round again periodically to its starting-point, while Anaxagoras makes it move on continuously.” Cited in Balslev, *A Study of Time in Indian Philosophy*, 143.

<sup>27</sup> Aristotle is probably referring to Plato and the Pythagoreans respectively.

<sup>28</sup> Aristotle, *Physics*, Book 4, Chapter 10, 218b, in *The Basic works of Aristotle*, 290.

<sup>29</sup> Aristotle, *Physics*, Book 4, Chapter 12, 220b, in *The Basic works of Aristotle*, 294.

From the above passages, we may infer that at the level of concepts, Aristotle's notion of cyclic time does not in any way coincide with the views of either Eudemus or Augustine whom we have had occasion to refer to.

### 3. "Cyclic" time in the Indian tradition

Let us now pursue our investigation as to how the label of "cyclic time" came to be associated with the Indian conceptual framework. Here, the ideas associated with the notion of cyclic time – as have emerged in Greek thought and especially in its confrontation with Christian thinking – gives us a context to discern the salient aspects of the traditional Indian position.

While it is commonly held that the Indian conception of time is cyclic, it needs to be said that this designation is often assumed without attempting to clarify its conceptual content. It is, however, important to analyse this designation of cyclic time in the Indian context in order to remove any possible misinterpretation regarding its implications.

The idea of world-cycle (*kalpa*) is a general feature of Indian mythology and philosophy. Balslev notes that in the literature of the *Purāṇas*, one encounters a grandiose conception of the cosmological process in terms of repeated creation and dissolution. As an example of the gigantic scale of measurement for time one could refer to the *Vāyu Purāṇa* where a world-cycle is conceived as a day of Brahmā, creator god, followed by his night, i.e. cosmic dissolution (*pralaya*). The time-span of a world-cycle is divided and sub-divided according to different scales as equivalent to so many *manvantaras*, *mahāyugas*, *yugas*, etc. The whole process is calculated in terms of billions of human years. It is very likely that the idea is associated with Vedic astronomy.<sup>31</sup> The world-cycles can be compared to one another in terms of generic similarity just as one day resembles another, but the idea of exact repetition involving the return of the particulars does not occur. The idea of world-cycles occurs in the epics as well as in the *Upanishads*.

The ideas of transmigration and Karma, also important elements of the Indian conceptual framework, are present in different versions in Brahmanical, Buddhist and Jaina thought. "To think of transmigration as equivalent to mechanical recurrence, which debars the possibility of moral progress, is a distortion of the idea. The doctrine of Karma implies the inexorability of moral law, formulating the age-old insight of 'as you sow, so you reap' in its utmost consequence."<sup>32</sup> Hence, on the one hand, man creates his destiny through action - the present actions determining his future. On the other hand, the doctrine entails that one cannot escape the consequences of the actions, once performed.

"It is wrong to identify the doctrine of Karma with fatalism. Karma is not an external destiny driving man to his doom, nor a blind mechanical framework from which there is no escape ... It is not a blind law that operates in the universe."<sup>33</sup> The idea of Karma, shared by the Jaina, Buddhist and Brahmanical traditions refers back to the idea of transmigration, viewing human existence as going beyond birth and death. This idea needs to be construed as an attempt to answer the problem of evil. "To pronounce *samsāra*, the chain of existences, as beginningless is strongly motivated by the urge for an understanding of the problem of evil – a problem which no theological structure can evade. This has been found to be incompatible with the idea of absolute beginning, a conceptual possibility which has been also considered. If the problem of an ultimate basis for individual differences, in all its different aspects, is left to the play of sheer chance, the idea that action determines and conditions the human situation / destiny cannot be established in all strictness."<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, some Brahmanical schools point out that to make God solely responsible for these undeniable differences would be tantamount to attributing to Him injustice, which is incompatible with the divine nature.<sup>35</sup> Thus, the complex set of ideas that goes along with the doctrine of Karma has as one of its necessary implications the idea of pre-existence.

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<sup>30</sup> Aristotle, *Physics*, Book 4, Chapter 14, 223b, in *The Basic works of Aristotle*, 299-300. Emphasis is ours.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Balslev, *A Study of Time in Indian Philosophy*, 145.

<sup>32</sup> Balslev, *A Study of Time in Indian Philosophy*, 146.

<sup>33</sup> T.M.P. Mahadevan, "The religio-philosophic culture of India," in *The Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol. I, reprint 2004 (Kolkata: The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata, 1958), 179.

<sup>34</sup> Balslev, *A Study of Time in Indian Philosophy*, 146.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. *Nyāya Sūtra* 4/1/19 and Sankara's commentary on *Brahma Sūtra* 2/1/34-35 indicated by Balslev, p.146.

Transmigration is, however, not understood by any of these traditions as equivalent to a mechanical recurrence of the same individual destiny, as the Greek model of the idea which we considered above. The idea of Karma itself would refute such an idea of exact repetition, as the idea of actions bringing forth consequences cannot be relevant in that context. The ideas of transmigration and Karma (often symbolised as the ‘wheel of becoming’) are to be considered from a theological perspective, having for its goal the salvation of the person.<sup>36</sup> All religious traditions have this soteriological dimension, each with its own conceptual scheme. This idea of salvation should not be neglected in our appraisal of the place of Karma and transmigration in this discussion. Thus, for S. Radhakrishnan, the idea of a world-cycle can be understood in a theistic context: “The universe once created persists through an entire *kalpa*, or world-period, after which it returns into the supreme God, only to issue again from Him. The cause of this re-issue is that the works of the soul still survive and demand a fresh creation or a renewed existence for their expiation”.<sup>37</sup>

The multiplicity of Indian schools serves to indicate that in such complex matters, there is room for several versions, as the ideas are worked out in each system. Thus, the idea of repeated creation and dissolution is accepted by all Brahmanical schools except Pūrva-Mīmamsā and the conception of a final dissolution (*mahā-pralaya*) is to be found in the school of Advaita Vedānta, and it can be understood only in the light of the conception of universal salvation.

Ideas present in the Brahmanical traditions such as transmigration, Karma, world-cycle, salvation, are all built into an inter-connected system of ideas which have a bearing on each other. They are interrelated and meet at a theological frontier. The constraints of this paper preclude us from developing the relevant passages here. However, it is to be noted that even when the traditions operate with similar ideas, a wide variety of views develop as attempts are made at systematic philosophical formulations with all the consequences and implications that follow within the conceptual framework of different systems.

The point of this discussion is to bring out the importance of rightly understanding the appellation of the so-called ‘cyclic or circular time’, if the term is not to be a misnomer. A sculptural image of ‘the wheel of becoming’ has to be interpreted in the light of tradition where it is used significantly. In this context, let us carefully examine the familiar image of the wheel that pervades the Hindu-Buddhist world and understand the notion of recurrence that it represents.

### ***Samsara-cakra: The Metaphor of the Wheel***

One of the most profound metaphors of the Hindu as well as the Buddhist<sup>38</sup> conceptual world is the *cakra* or the wheel. Literature and the arts, life and culture have been influenced by it in a variety of ways. Commenting on the idea of the *Samsāra-cakra* which is used in Hindu religious and philosophical literature, Balslev cites an example of the functioning of the symbol from Yoga literature: “The commentary by Vyasa on the *Yoga-sutra* 4/11 describes the idea of *Sadadam samsara-cakram* (six-spoked wheel of existence) by pointing to how from ‘virtue arises happiness, from impiety pain, from happiness attachment, from pain aversion; attachment and aversion both lead to efforts, resulting in actions, which in turn again give rise to virtue or impiety, happiness or pain, attachment or aversion. Thus, it is said, revolves ‘the six-spoked wheel of existence’. To the participants of this culture, the wheel captures the pole of experience which allows [one] to arrive at a notion of a law, focusing on the recurrent generic pattern. The metaphor conveys a message which is to be deciphered in the specific context where it is used.”<sup>39</sup> In the context of our discussion, it is to be noted that the wheel of becoming, in the Indian context, does not involve a mechanical repetition of the particular or of the individual, neither does it preclude salvation, nor by any means imply that a released soul can be pulled back to this death-bound existence again.

<sup>36</sup> “*moksāyate samsārah*” Cf. T.M.P. Mahadevan, “The religio-philosophic culture of India”, in *The Cultural Heritage of India*, 179.

<sup>37</sup> S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. 1 (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1929), 514.

<sup>38</sup> The Buddhist tradition makes the symbol of wheel a vehicle of Buddhist thought. *Bhava-cakra* or the wheel of becoming, for example, is the pictorial image representing the twelve links (*nidānas*) in the chain of rebirth. One also comes across this metaphor in the Buddhist literature, describing the Buddha’s ‘setting in motion the wheel of law’ (*Dharmacakra-pravartana*)

<sup>39</sup> Balslev, *A Study of Time in Indian Philosophy*, 183.

The importance of understanding the significance of myths and symbols of a culture cannot be underestimated. A proper understanding and evaluation of symbols, verbal or pictorial (such as *bhava-cakra*, the wheel of becoming) presupposes an intimate knowledge of the philosophical background from where it stems. A lack of or ignorance of a conceptual apparatus to decipher and appraise symbols and myths coming from unfamiliar cultural set-ups leads to misinterpretations which, in turn, cause barriers for intercultural understanding and block the possibility of a fruitful encounter.

Prudence is thus advisable when we use the same label of ‘circular time’ for characterising the Greek as well as the Indian philosophical models of speculations. The presence or absence of certain ideas ought not to be the basis for any rash appraisal of traditions. While one acknowledges the presence of ideas such as world-cycles, transmigration in different versions, in the Greco-Indian fields of speculations, it is equally important that the differences of the Indian ideas from the Greek model (especially the one used by Augustine) are also noted: “The Greek conceptual model of ‘circular time’ is completely deterministic, fatalistic. Despite all the internal differences within the boundary of philosophical speculations in India, that Greek model of ‘circular time’ is nowhere to be found.”<sup>40</sup> The ideas of the transcendent and salvation pulsate throughout these traditions.<sup>41</sup>

The relevance of this discussion is to draw attention to this common appellation of ‘circular time’ – apparently a designation which stands for a complex set of ideas – to the Greek as well as to the Indian world-view. It is precisely the similarities of certain ideas which have given rise to misunderstandings and baseless polemics. This has unfortunately been the case of some western authors, who, notwithstanding their important contributions to intercultural understanding, have this Greek conceptual model in mind while evaluating and confronting the complex world of Indian philosophy.<sup>42</sup>

Consider, for example, a perceptive historian like Arnold Toynbee, who, it seems in our opinion, misconstrues the Hindu world-view. Not perceiving how the ideas of world-cycle and rebirth are interconnected with those of *karma* and *moksa* in the Hindu conceptual world, he fails to capture the significance of “cyclic time” as it is understood in the Indian context. He therefore considers the idea as a ‘cosmic practical joke’.<sup>43</sup> Later, in the same work, he observes: “The application of the ‘theory of eternal recurrence’ to human affairs is a counsel of despair for humanity, since this doctrine denies, that man has any power ever to effect a permanent change in his condition, and teaches him that he is condemned to suffer the meaningless revolutions of the wheel of existence”.<sup>44</sup> These lines almost mirror those of Augustine (cited above) who attacked the specific Greek view of the exact mechanical recurrence of human destiny.

Citing the writings of Augustine, Balslev discerns theological motives operating behind the ‘linear model’ advocated by him: “The cycle represented mechanical recurrence, complete determinism, no possibility of a final salvation. The ideas of an absolute beginning – as creation *ex nihilo* – and an absolute end – eschatology – provide the theological framework along with the specific understanding of the saviour, in which the significance of linear time is to be understood. Taken merely as an empirical concept, outside of this theological frame, the idea of time, geometrically represented by a finite line, i.e. itself having a beginning and an end, would lose its conceptual worth. We have to be aware of the pitfalls of such geometrical representations of time as a circle or a line. These have to be understood as theological symbolisms, whose intended spiritual significance can be grasped within their theological, conceptual structures.”<sup>45</sup>

The palaeontologist, evolutionary biologist and historian of science, Stephen Jay Gould, acknowledged that while the “arrow” of time is the dominant metaphor of Western culture, there is a need to reclaim the place of time’s “cycles.” Cycles and arrows, he says, are “so central to intellectual (and practical) life that Western people who

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<sup>40</sup> Balslev, *A Study of Time in Indian Philosophy*, 149.

<sup>41</sup> The materialistic school of Cārvāka is of course an exception as it does not operate within this framework at all.

<sup>42</sup> See our footnote no. 4 on Toynbee in this paper. Also Zimmer, whose interpretation of the myth of the *Purāṇa* is enlightening. Although he adequately comprehends its moral significance, his overall understanding is still influenced by the Greek model of circular time to which he alludes. Cf. H. Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974), 18-20.

<sup>43</sup> Toynbee, *A Study of History*, 158.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 487.

<sup>45</sup> Balslev, *A Study of Time in Indian Philosophy*, 150.

hope to understand history must wrestle intimately with both.”<sup>46</sup> Cycles and arrows are major metaphors for representing the two fundamental poles of human experience of recurrence and irreversibility. However, the implications of these metaphors of time gain immense significance for anyone involved in cross-cultural studies, as one cannot but take note of how cycles and arrows gradually cease to be simple time-metaphors and come to get associated with such concepts as history, progress, and salvation. One of the major tasks of those who wish to explore the cross-cultural dimension of the varied human perceptions in the treatment of the issues of time and history, is to identify and dismantle some of the stereotypes that have impeded inter-religious dialogue.

#### 4. Towards a Hindu “sense of history”

In his inaugural address in June 1929, on assuming the chair of Professor of Philosophy at the University of Frankfurt, Paul Tillich pronounced that “India is the least history-conscious of all the great cultures”.<sup>47</sup> How does he arrive at this conclusion? In *The Protestant Era*, he attempts to classify the major views by making a sharp distinction between the ‘historical’ and the ‘non-historical’ types of interpreting history. From his summary of the characteristics of ‘the non-historical type’ which comprises Indian thought amongst other similar world-views,<sup>48</sup> a few points need to be examined.

Tillich notes that “... Time is considered to be circular or repeating itself infinitely.”<sup>49</sup> The implications of designing time as ‘circular’ have already been dealt with in Section C of our essay. The other two characteristics which Tillich notes are that “the temporal world has lesser reality and no ultimate value” and that “the true being and the ultimate good are eternal, immovable, above becoming, genesis and decay.”<sup>50</sup> Tillich refers to “the Indian Brahman doctrine” and the notion of *Māyā*, which according to him, “deprives all things in time and space ... of their ultimate reality and meaning. They have reality – but from the point of view of *Māyā*; they are not simply products of imagination. ... Consequently, no event in time can have ultimate significance.”<sup>51</sup> It is clear that what Tillich has in mind is the philosophy of Advaita Vedānta, which is just one of the many schools of Indian thought with regard to these questions. The idea of reality of time has also played a predominant role in Indian thought. Once again, it needs to be emphasised that the inner divergences of a tradition should not be overlooked. Besides, “Advaita Vedānta makes use of three key concepts of *paramārtha*, *vyāvahāra* and *pratibhāsa*. *Vyāvahāra* is the empirical which is distinguished on the one hand from the *paramārtha*, as that which is unsublatable in all three times (*trikālābādhyā*) as unchanging and unchangeable (*kutasthanityā*) and the *pratibhāsa* which is purely imaginary (*alīka*) or nothing (*tuccha*).”<sup>52</sup> One could add that notwithstanding the differences that are found in philosophico-religious traditions, “parallels to awareness of this kind are perhaps not too difficult to find in traditions which Tillich does not consider as non-historical.”<sup>53</sup>

Tillich seems to be influenced by a Western view more commonly and boldly stated in the nineteenth century – that India has no history. In a book published in 1900, the professor of Sanskrit at Oxford, Arthur Anthony Macdonell, pronounced that: “Early India wrote no history because it never made any.”<sup>54</sup> In the opinion of John B. Carman, this is the most dismissive form of Western scholarly judgment being made by a professor who knew well that there was a Sanskrit equivalent for “history”<sup>55</sup> “To say that ancient Indians did not compose histories is a serious charge, suggesting a marked peculiarity of their civilization, but to say that early India made no history is

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<sup>46</sup> Stephen Gould, *Time’s Arrow Time’s Cycle*, Cambridge, 1987, p.16. He also quotes from the Book of Ecclesiastes to confirm that time’s cycles is an idea which has a religious foundation.

<sup>47</sup> Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era*, 18.

<sup>48</sup> “The nonhistorical type of interpreting history is represented in four doctrines of world-historical significance: in the Chinese Tao doctrine, in the Indian Brahma doctrine, in the Greek nature doctrine, in the late-European life-doctrine.” *Ibid*, 17.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Tillich, *The Protestant Era*, 20.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-18.

<sup>52</sup> Balslev, *A Study of Time in Indian Philosophy*, 181.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 181. One could consider, in this connection, the following lines by none other than Saint Augustine: “And I beheld the other things below Thee, and I perceived that they neither altogether are, nor altogether are not, for they are, since they are from Thee, but are not, because they are not, what Thou art. For that truly is, which remains unchangeably.” *De Civitate Dei*, Book VII, Chapter 9.

<sup>54</sup> A.A. Macdonell, *History of Sanscrit Literature*, rpt. 1996 (New York: Haskell, 1900), 10-11.

<sup>55</sup> The German word *Geschichte* or the Dutch word *geschiedenis* find their equivalent in the Sanskrit term *itihāsa* which stresses the objective side of history: it is “what happened”.

to say that this was a human community among whom nothing significant happened”.<sup>56</sup> It is a charge that concerns the double-sidedness of a typically Western concept of history: both the events that have happened and the recounting of these events in some connected way that brings out their meaning.

Carman contends that many Hindus have a double “historical consciousness,” even though neither “sense of history” is the same as that of Western historians since the Enlightenment: “The first sense of history is cosmic and generally pessimistic: the awareness of the great cycles of cosmic time and their own participation in the worst of the four ages: the age under the demon Kali when human beings are scarcely able any longer to act rightly and to work toward their liberation from this cosmic line. The second sense of history is more paradoxical and more optimistic: the confidence that within their own community of devotees, their God has released them from the imprisonment of this evil age and instituted, or at least set the stage for, the return of their righteous age.”<sup>57</sup> Carman proceeds to study the Jaina tradition which was outside of Brahmin control and who have, in his analysis, a continuous history going back 2500 years or longer, even earlier than the beginning of the Buddhist community. He observes that there is nothing new about recognizing either of these types of histories, or senses of history, except to admit that they are “histories.” Western scholars have generally not treated either genre as historical. The cosmic history of the cycles and super-cycles<sup>58</sup> are considered fantastic mythology, while the biographies of saints and sages are called hagiographies.

At this point, one may ask: to what extent can the genre of hagiography or sacred biography be considered as being historical. In other words, is there a “sense of history” to which it corresponds?

The response of Carman in this regard is enlightening. The use of any English word to designate something in another culture called by some name in another language, involves translation. However, this process is often a more complicated comparison of similarities and differences than first appears:

We tend to assume that there are universals in human cultural expression that can be quite adequately designated by one or more words in our own language. When we sense considerable difference between the meaning of our word (and the concept behind it) and what we have found in another language or cultural complex, we may have to choose between (1) considering the other language or culture more or less deficient in this respect, (2) seeking a more universal term than the name familiar to us, or (3) admitting that the “something” we are trying to name is not universal in human creativity or in human experience of reality. The more important is the subject under discussion, the harder it is to accept the third option. To pursue the second option, on the other hand, may require finding a more neutral term that does not pose the translation problem so sharply. We do this often in the modern history of religion: “Holiness” is more general than “divinity”: “Transcendence” can substitute for “God,” and instead of choosing between “history” and “hagiography,” we can speak of “narrative.” Some of these substitutions may prove more satisfactory than others.<sup>59</sup>

Carman goes on to make the case that sacred biography as found in Hinduism can be described in terms of “narrative” and he concludes his study by arguing that Hindu hagiography does correspond to both the subjective and objective sides of an older and more religious Western concept of history.<sup>60</sup>

## Conclusion

We have examined the varied understandings of time present in different Indian traditions, their similarities and differences with the Greek understanding of “cyclic” time and the pitfalls associated with any research that involves a comparative study. We have shown that the understanding of time in various Indian traditions is not homogenous and that there are significant differences between the Greek and Indian understandings of “cyclic”

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<sup>56</sup> John Braisted Carman, “Hagiography and Hindu Historical Consciousness” in Yandell, Keith (ed), *Faith and Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 138.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 138-139.

<sup>58</sup> *yugas* and *mahayugas*

<sup>59</sup> Carman, “Hagiography and Hindu Historical Consciousness,” 140-141.

<sup>60</sup> See, for example, the case-study of Ramanuja treated by Carman in *op. cit.* pp.148-150.

time. Finally, our search for a Hindu “sense of history” has revealed that the manner in which this question is framed very often leads to pre-judging the response. Our search for a Hindu “sense of history” leads us to question not just the definition of history but the manner in which it is defined. A lot of caution needs to be exercised in setting traditions as ‘diagrammatically opposed’ to one another: “Many students of historiography and especially the theologically minded among them, appear to assume that there are near and mutually exclusive views about time, the Jews had one, the Greeks another. To judge from experience, this is not so; and one would suspect that philosophers would have an easier task if it were so.”<sup>61</sup> In the preview of *Culture Theory*, Paul Kay makes the observation that “time is perhaps the favourite thing that anthropologists point to so as to exaggerate the exoticness of other people, they love to say things like ‘time is this’ for us but it is like that for the folks that I studied.”<sup>62</sup>

In conclusion, studies on history and time, which invariably involve inter-religious and cross-cultural issues, cannot accomplish their objective if there is a built-in theoretical bias at the very starting-point. The importance of ascribing a “sense of otherness” to the culture which is being studied cannot be underplayed: “A keen awareness of conceptual distinctions in the different interpretations of time-experience is indeed rewarding but caution must be exercised lest the zeal for finding differences in the area of cross-cultural studies [would be] tantamount to projecting a distorted image of the ‘otherness’ of the other culture.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Arnaldo Momigliano, “Time in Ancient Historiography” in *Quarto Contributo*, Rome 1969, cited in Balslev, *A Study of Time in Indian Philosophy*, 181.

<sup>62</sup> R. Shweder and R. LeVine (eds), *Culture Theory*, Cambridge University Press, 1984, pp.17-18.

<sup>63</sup> BALSLEV, Anindita Niyogi, *A Study of Time in Indian Philosophy*, Motilal Banarsidass, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, New Delhi, 2009, p.182.

## History and Historizing: A ‘Mādhyaṃika-seeking’

- Kurian Alumkal

*‘Mādhyaṃika-seeing’ is a term coined to refer to the style of Nāgārjuna, the founder of Mādhyaṃika school, in his exposition of pre-suppositions of philosophical systems ‘Mādhyaṃika-seeing’ is a ‘self-awareness reached by self-criticism’. This paper applies the methodology of Mādhyaṃika-seeing’ in history and historizing. The purpose of this application is to explain the ‘why’ behind the fact of various readings of history and expose the basic foundations of historizing. One who does it becomes the ‘conscience of history’ through his self-awareness of the inner process in his historizing. He sees the application of values or holding of looking-glass on one side and selection of facts or events on the other. This ‘seeing’ will give ‘the seer’ the spiritual gain of self-culture that purifies the mind and in turn frees it of the cobwebs and clogs of dogmatism. As history can be looked at as a chronology that records events, dates, characters, conquests, wars and so on, there are interpretations with value judgments. In doing so there scope for highlighting some and downplaying the rest and for subjective selection based on personal preferences, personal points of views. “Mādhyaṃika-seeing” is an application of dialectic and consequent realization that exposes the reasons behind different accounts, so also answer to the question ‘why I do it’. We present it as an effort of self-justification and in this processes this seeing becomes the conscience of history.*

### Introduction

This paper is an effort to apply a methodology known as ‘Mādhyaṃika-seeing’ in history and historizing. The purpose of this application is to explain the ‘why’ behind the fact of various readings of history and expose the basic foundations of historizing. This paper is divided into two parts. The first part answers the question: what is ‘Mādhyaṃika-seeing’? It is a ‘self-awareness reached by self-criticism’. The second part applies this ‘seeing’ to the process of historizing. The point this paper tries to prove is that one who does a ‘Mādhyaṃika-seeing’ becomes the ‘conscience of history’ through his self-awareness of the inner process in his historizing. He sees the application of values or holding of looking-glass on one side and selection of facts or events on the other. This ‘seeing’ will give ‘the seer’ the spiritual gain of self-culture that purifies the mind and in turn frees it of the cobwebs and clogs of dogmatism.

## I

### The ‘Mādhyaṃika-Seeing’

‘Mādhyaṃika-seeing’ is a term coined to refer to the style of Nāgārjuna, the founder of Madhyamaka school, in his exposition of pre-suppositions of philosophical systems. His problem sprung up from the existence of different accounts of Buddha’s teaching and he asked the question: why differences? At a deeper level too he saw differences, namely: existence of various ‘ways’ of salvation. He asked the question how is it possible that

there are very many cogent answers to same question? He came to the conclusion of subjective selection<sup>1</sup> (*dṛṣṭi*). The methodology that helped him to come to this conclusion can be termed as ‘Mādhyaṃika-seeing’.

One basic conviction of Nāgārjuna is that meaningful statements derive from pair words like husband and wife, father and son or daughter, employer and employee etc. Any component of the pairs presuppose the existence of the other with it. This is true of basic philosophical concepts too. The basic concept of ‘being’ becomes meaningful only at the tacit acceptance of its opposite: non-being. It is true of concepts like cause and effect, identity and difference, whole and parts, change and permanence, conditioned and unconditioned, particular and universal, existence and non-existence, one and many and so on. He discovered in the basic *apriori* of systems emphasising of one in the pair at the expense of other or emphasising both together or rejecting both together. His conclusion is that if we accept one at the expense of the other, there is paradox, so also there is a paradox if we accept both together or reject both together of the pairs. Nāgārjuna shows it through his method known as *prasanga* (*reductio ad absurdum*) that T.R.V. Murti translates as dialectic.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A.K. Chatterjee, “Metaphysics, Subjectivity and Myth”, published in Research Bulletin of Centre of Advanced Studies in Philosophy, BHU, *Anvisaiki*, Vol.2, No.1, January 1969, (Ed.) N.K. Deveraja, 20-33.

<sup>2</sup> The use of the word dialectic in its modern sense as to bring out the antinomies in reason is the contribution of Emmanuel Kant. In his Critique of Pure Reason, Kant examines the capacities of senses, objects and mind’s inherent capabilities. This search he calls transcendental. First he speaks of transcendental Aesthetic which are forms of perception, namely, space and time, through which every sensation enters into us. Once we receive perception, it should be made into concept. That needs ideas of cause, unity, reciprocal relation, necessity, contingency, etc. These and other categories are the structure into which perceptions are received, and by which they are classified and moulded into the ordered concepts of thought. According to him these are the very essence of the mind. Analysis of this he calls transcendental Analytic. Thus far we are in the level of phenomena, the level of logic and science. But our knowledge is limited and relative for they reveal things as they come to us through the above said ‘windows’. Thus we never know the original object; the “thing-in-itself” (noumenon) remains unknown to us and apart from our manner of perceiving them. Now he uses a term “transcendental dialectic” to reveal the limits of sensibility. It reveals that substance and cause and necessity are finite categories or modes of arrangement and classification which mind applies to sense experience and reliably valid only for the phenomena that appear to such experience; we cannot apply these conceptions to the noumenal world. Any science that makes effort to speak about things which do not come through the ‘windows’ loses itself in “antinomies”. Antinomies are the insoluble dilemmas born of a science that tries to overleap experience. Thus metaphysical questions, religious questions will end up as mere paralogisms. It is transcendental dialectic that examines the validity of these attempts of reason to escape from the enclosing circle of sensation and appearance into the unknowable world of things-in-themselves. Murti when uses the term dialectic to Madhyamaka *prasanga* (*reductio ad absurdum*), he uses it in the exact sense as Emmanuel Kant uses in his *Critique of Pure Reason* where it examined the validity of attempts of reason. Kant showed that reason lands itself in insoluble antinomies or brings out its own opposite, when it is applied to metaphysical statements. Madhyamaka showed it earlier by presenting its *Catuṣkoti* and *prasaṅga*. For Murthi, dialectic is a self-conscious spiritual movement. This is not possible when there are at least two view-points or patterns of interpretation diametrically opposed to each other like the question: is the world finite or infinite in space? Thought rebels against both the suppositions. Beyond any limit we are driven to conceive something further, endlessly; and yet infinity is itself inconceivable. Again did the world have a beginning in time? We cannot conceive any point in the past without feeling at once that before that, something was. A dilemma is not a dialectic, for that is a temporary predicament having reference to a particular situation. The dialectic is a universal conflict affecting every sphere of things. And this is possible only in the sphere of philosophy, for it universalises one pattern of explanation, exaggerating it out of all proportion and

Nāgārjuna in his *magum opus: Mūlamadhyamikakārikā*, which contains 27 *parikṣās* (examinations) exposes the incompatibility inside the systems and comes to the conclusion that all systems which have one or other of the above concepts as their *apriori* are one sided, as they emphasise one concept at the expense of its opposite without which it cannot exist. Emptying both together is an antinomy and rejecting both together results in nihilism. His unique expression is that “they are ‘*sūnya*’” and what is left is ‘*sūnyata*’. Since concepts are interdependent as everything in the universe is interdependent either as cause and effect, or as part and whole or as name and the designated<sup>3</sup>, they have no independent existence or no own-being. Nāgārjuna calls it ‘*sūnyata*’ because for him reality is that which exists on its own right. But nothing stands on its own right in our experience, therefore everything is *sūnyata*. When we ask the question how did Nāgārjuna come to such a conception of *sūnyata*, the answer is our coinage, it is through the “Mādhyamika-seeing”.

### **Two levels of Philosophizing: Construction of systems and becoming conscience of systems**

Philosophy is rightly defined in India as ‘*Darśana*’. If we leave aside the deep meaning of *darśana* and take the ordinary meaning of it, then it is ‘to see’. If we look at the history of philosophies in the world in an ordinary way we see nothing but different ways of seeing. Let us take the example of modern readers of Madhyamika. One of them is Thomas E Wood. He titled his book: *Nagarjunian Disputations: A Philosophical Journey through an Indian Looking-glass*. Here the book is presented as the fruit of the journey made through a particular looking glass. We know that always the looking glass colours the seeing. If one looks at Madhyamika through the glass of the traditional systems, he will see one way. And if one has glass of ‘sympathetic readers’ (what Thomas E. Wood calls the non-nihilistic readers of Madhyamika) then also he is looking through a glass, and he will see ‘one way’. It is said the subject matter is the same but when one gets a

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universalises it to infinity. Such a chosen pattern Kant calls as an Idea of Reason. If we ask why one selects one, the answer is: our spiritual affiliation. Mahayanist calls it our spiritual genes (Buddha-gotra). Every philosophical system is an evaluation of things or a prescription to view them in a particular way. That particular way of looking Madhyamika calls as *dṛṣṭi* or *anta*. But philosophical systems will never accept it. According to them their way of looking is the complete and only picture of all things. They have their reason to hold it, for there is no scientific experimentation possible here, for it is speculation about super sensible, what is beyond the sensible, but that which is the ground of the sensible as Kant calls it. In the world of experience there will be some experiences that support them, and some do not but that never upset any philosophy. Thus there is always chance of criticism of this philosophy by a rival emphasising the opposite experience. This brings in an interminable and total conflict in reason. Dialectic is detection of that and the attempt to resolve it.

<sup>3</sup> The Audio Talks of Geshe Tshi Tsering “The Root Wisdom of the Middle Way”, first talk (introduction) at, [http://www.archive.org/details/Root\\_Wisdom\\_with\\_Geshe\\_Tashi\\_Tsering](http://www.archive.org/details/Root_Wisdom_with_Geshe_Tashi_Tsering).

‘*dṛṣṭi*’(vision), birth of a new philosophical system happens<sup>4</sup>. This is the first level activity of philosophy.

In the first level of philosophical activity construction of a system happens by using logical tools. The central core around which the construction happens is the basic intuition of the originator. Here for the constructor this is the one and only means to explain the reality. He is blind to the fact that actually he picks up one category at the expense of its contradictory that actually makes its existence possible. Here the only criterion for the choice is subjective factors like the temperament of the constructor (feeling, willing and knowing attitudes), objective facts at his disposal etc. Once he fixes the determining category his concept of reality gets fixed. This is fruit of a *dṛṣṭi* (vision). Once the vision is clear, reason comes to help the constructor to express his vision and explain coherently the whole experience in the light of this vision. This becomes his world-vision.

This coherent explanation has only one pre-supposition that the system constructor takes as the *apriori* which is the most obvious fact for the constructor. If another person does not see reality in the same manner, then that is his problem<sup>5</sup>. Here we see the reason for the existence of many philosophies and the diversity of explanations of the same reality. A “Mādhyaṃika-seeing” will show that this *apriori* of every system is dogmatic, though the system remains cogent if we accept that particular *apriori*. When someone is doing reflection within the confines of a ‘view’ already existing, he will either construct, fortify, answer critics or attack the opponents and so on. All this we see in the history of philosophy.

This can be demonstrated with a Mādhyaṃika-look at some of the Indian Systems. Nyāyavaśeṣika realistic pluralism proposes seven categories as basic and they do not see any incompatibility within their system. Sāṃkhya sees a contradiction in this vision because all categories cannot be at par. They reject relation, but takes up two categories. Now it is the turn of Buddhism and Advaita to show that if relation is unreal one of the *relatas* too must be unreal, for two absolutes are contradiction without a relation. Buddhism rejects the category of permanence because of their definition of reality as *artakriyakaritva* (practical efficiency) and Advaita rejects the category of difference because of their position *abhedapurvakobhedah* (permanence is fundamental and basic for difference)<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> It is said “the world is same for all of us, but what I see and how I see and what you see and how you see everything in it makes all differences”. This is the deep meaning of the Kierkegaardian saying “subjectivity is truth” (Søren Kierkegaard’s famous statement in his *magnum opus: Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*, (Tr.) David Swenson, Walter Lowrie, presents what he mean by subjectivity. It refers to “employment of faculties of emotion, will and knowing by an existing subject in the quest for truth” 1974, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 33. Ref. also Daniel Johnson *Quodlibet Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 2-3, July 2003 available at [http://www.quodlibet.net/articles/johnson-truth.shtml#\\_ftn22](http://www.quodlibet.net/articles/johnson-truth.shtml#_ftn22).)

<sup>5</sup> All our philosophical and religious systems points to a concept of dependence between our empirical experience and something that is behind that is really real. Philosophically it is the talk of substance and accidents. Karl H. Potter while referring to naïve realist schools of India says “They are *almost* right”. We feel, Madhyamika will say, they all are right, when we look at reality through their system. But how can it be possible, all are right? Here comes Madhyamaka concept of *Sūnyatā* “for one who sees *sūnyatā* everything is right” (*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 24, 14) (Karl H. Potter, *Presuppositions of India’s Philosophies*, Delhi, Motilal Banarasidass, 2002, 237-238).

A Mādhyamika after evaluating the positional differences of the systems of philosophy would say all these *apriori* are basically arbitrary because they are the intuitions of the originator of particular systems. That which we build based on these basics bound to be different and sometimes contradictory but cogent from within the system, which accepts the *apriori*. Mūlamadhyamikakarika says: For the one who sees *śūnyatā* every construction is legitimate. But systems do not accept this seeing. They will say ‘this is the only legitimate answer to all the issues that humankind faces’, ‘the only cogent explanation’ that has come to me as a revelation or intuition or I have discovered it. Since this is the ‘one and only answer’, the ‘one and only way’, everything based on this alone is the legitimate. This is the style of systems and their defence of themselves, they go on defending themselves sometimes by attacking others by showing their limitations.

Madhyamaka sees all these and then reduces all those constructions into four possibilities. The first two possibilities accept one of them at the expense of the other and the third possibility accepts both together and the fourth possibility rejects both together. *Mūlamadhyamikakarika* shows incompatibility inside all the four options in all its 27 *parikṣas*<sup>7</sup>. In the next stage he looks into himself and realizes that he too is not on firm ground but on quick sand. This is a self-awareness, a spiritual homecoming that result in what Madhyamaka says as “for the one who sees *śūnyatā* everything is legitimate”.

Let us ask the question: if I see the rootlessness of me along with rootlessness of all, then ‘what is there’? For Nāgārjuna this type of a search for ‘something there’ is the root cause of all suffering. What is needed is detachment...realization of *śūnyatā*...which is beyond all attempts of acceptance (it is), rejection (it is not), positive synthesis (it is and is not) and negative synthesis (it neither is nor is not). This is the famous ‘*catuskoti*’ (four cornered logic)<sup>8</sup> of Nāgārjuna with which he demolishes all philosophical positions and establishes *śūnyatā*<sup>9</sup>. Now one can ask: if everything is *śūnya*, one who says it is also is *śūnya*, just like relativism is criticised<sup>10</sup>. (the same dialectic you use to corner the opponent will apply to you too). They take the argument head on and says *śūnyatā* too is

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<sup>6</sup> R.K Tripathi “The Central issue in all Metaphysics in Indian Philosophy”, *Philosophy East and West*, Vol 19, No.1, 1969, pp.39-43.

<sup>7</sup> Nāgārjuna begins his *parikṣas* with exposition of the antinomy in causation. If cause and effect are one, then there is no causation, for it is ridiculous to say same thing as cause and effect. If they are two different entities then also there is no causing for how can they come together? Now you don’t improve your position by reconciling both these views, because it will have the demerits of both. This is the style of exposition of the antinomy by Nāgārjuna. (*Mūlamadhyamikakarika* 1)

<sup>8</sup> This dialectics is not Hegelian dialectics where he goes for a synthesis. This dialectics is a negative approach which stops at negation of all positions without proposing a new position. This they call Prasanga method (*reductio ad absurdum* argument) (ref. T.R.V. Murti, *Central Philosophy of Buddhism*, p.

<sup>9</sup> *Śūnyatā* literally means nothingness or void. But in Buddhist history this term has a different meaning according to the sense it is used. In Mahayana Buddhism this become the central word with two fold use, first as a means to realize nirvana and as the end. As the end it is *sarva sunyata* (it involves both *pudgal sunyata* which was accepted by early schools and *dharma sunyata* which is the contribution of Madhyamika). As the ‘means’ it is *pratityasamutpada* which is the interdependence.

<sup>10</sup> One general criticism that is raised against relativism is that it falls flat on its own basic position. Relativism criticizes absolutism by saying no position can be final. Now one can ask back how can you make such a final statement? This at least is absolute!

*śūnya*, but presents an awareness, an enlightenment, a clear seeing. Here Mādhyamika turns from reason to realization, from philosophy to mysticism, from construction to deconstruction, language to meta-language. For him this is really a transition point from empirical to transcendental, *samvṛti* (ephemeral) to *paramārtha* (real), where there is no talk but realization. His basic point is that there is no real difference between the two. For us this is contradiction! (If there is no difference why there are two names?) How can there be no contradiction? His answer is: the first level is the level of philosophy as construction on the basis of the structure that is revealed and the second level is philosophy as deconstruction which is a dispassionate and impersonal evaluation (review) of the constructed whole. Both are same as the subject matter is same, and both are different as the process involved (one is forward movement of construction and the other is simple self-awareness) and the result reached are far different. One is still in *samsāra* and the other is the *paramārtha*. Let us take some examples. 1) sorry, I was angry. Is there a difference between the ‘me’ who was angry and who is aware of being angry? There is a change of sphere. Two moments are there, but both are related in the same movement. Between the two there is no difference as both are same person, but there is a difference of spheres (one being angry and the other came back to his senses). Next question is how has my anger gone? By a proper seeing of (awareness) me that I am angry. In somewhat similar process Mādhyamika speaks of *samvṛti* and *paramārtha*. 2) I myself saw it: here does the word ‘myself’ refer to any other person who sees than me? Like ‘Self’ sees? Here the use ‘myself’ is only reflexive use and ‘myself’ refers not to anything else but to me only. 3) I am a sinner: it is proclamation of a sinner. There are three moments in it. First moment is the stage of sinning; second is the acceptance that I am a sinner, and the third is the liberation moment. Without one level we don’t properly understand the other levels. For Mādhyamika all the processes in between sinner and liberated is *upāya*<sup>11</sup> (expedient means). Be it dialectic, be it meditation, be it language. Since our disease is metaphysical the cure too is metaphysical. But disease is caused by construction and the remedy is deconstruction. Disease is blind, but the remedy is conscious. Thus we say Madhyamika is the remedy for the disease of philosophy. It became so by becoming conscience of philosophy<sup>12</sup>, by becoming philosophy of philosophies<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Upaya literally means any technique that someone uses. Edward Conze defines it as “the ability to bring out the spiritual potentialities of different people by statements or actions which are adjusted to their needs and adapted to their capacity for comprehension”. It consists of statements or actions adjusted to the needs and adapted to the capacity of comprehension of hearers for their benefit by someone who has care of them. For further explanation read my forthcoming article on Upaya in Buddhist traditions in Jnanadeepa, journal of Philosophy and Sacred Scriptures

<sup>12</sup> Alex Fox has written an essay showing the importance of Madhyamika in Buddhism as it is the deconstructive conscience. We extend the same logic to all philosophies and says anyone who does dispassionate and impersonal analysis of his system becomes a *madhyamika* and that becomes the deconstructive conscience of that system. (Ref. Alan Fox, “Self-reflection in the Sanlun Tradition: Madhyamika as the “Deconstructive Conscience” of Buddhism”, *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* V. 19 (1992), pp. 1-24)

<sup>13</sup> A.K Chatterjee in one of his articles calls Madhyamika as the meta-philosophy and madhyamika language as a meta-language. His reason is that while other philosophies construct, this philosophy asks us to look into ourselves, and see what we are doing while we philosophize, a so called metaphysical introspection. What should be the language for expressing the result of such introspection? He calls it meta-language which is same language but used in a new realm. (Ref. A.K Chatterjee, “The Madhyamika and the

## II

### “Mādhyaṃika-seeing” of History and Historizing

History can be looked at from two points of views. First as a chronology that records events, dates, characters, conquests, wars and so on. This is a way of looking at history from an external point of view, as if you are a bystander and you are looking at things and simply enumerate them as far as you can ascertain their correctness. Some call it historiography. Historians wish their work be like this, which is neutral to any subjective judgement. But seeing the fact that there are many differing accounts of history you can ask, what is all these? Why these many differing accounts? Here the second point of view of looking at history begins. World history written by a Communist and a Capitalist differs in many accounts. Writing about the same period of time (eg., Mughal period in India) by a Muslim historian and a Hindu historian has different slants and bias about same events. One can ask how come that same events get different interpretations. Can there be so called neutral description or statement possible or only interpretations?

Interpretations are organising the unorganised materials by highlighting some and downplaying the rest. This cannot be done without a pattern or category to organise them. The image of a net thrown in deep sea is very apt to explain this. Questions like characteristics of the net, ability of the net, material available that the net can contain etc., are important. Here comes the part of subjective selection based on personal preferences, personal points of views, looking glasses that we name as a specific metaphysical stand or *dṛṣṭies* of the historian<sup>14</sup>. In other words it is value judgement added to history by the historian. This we name as historizing. Here history is not simple enumeration of facts that are neutral, but seen by a subject as Kierkegaard would say.

This is the inbuilt paradox of history. The paradox can be expressed thus: no history without facts and no collection of facts without a selection (value judgement). Thus we must say both fact and value are interdependent, interconnected and one cannot stand without the other. If one is rejected other also has to go. But no historian refrains from explaining. For he ‘saw’ something very obvious, so self-evident that can explain the whole events. We speak of a third level where a historian asks himself: ‘What am I

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Philosophy of Language”, in *Anvishaki*, Vol.6, June 1973, R.K Tripathi (Ed.), Research Bulletin of the center of Advanced study in Philosophy, BHU, pp. 67-73

<sup>14</sup> Some of such broad looking glasses are: Cyclic concepts of history that consider history as repeats itself endlessly. Functional theories of history that emphasize the physical elements like climate, soil and geography; causative theories that emphasize factors like race and racial endowments as the determinative factor in history. There are persons who emphasize hereditary ability in terms of great dynastic or royal families; psychological factors as the moving force of history was emphasized by Sigmund Freud; Karl Marx points to class struggles; some sociologists and historians emphasize modes of economic life and for some others the relations of production in terms of legal, political, intellectual, religious and other ideological aspects of the society as determining factor for the formation of history. For some others history of the world is the biography of great men. There are ideas of history as progress oriented movement of human interests; showing history as the great drama of sin and redemption as in Christian philosophy; again showing of society as a living organism which grows from infancy, youth, maturity and decay. Seeing every historical event as a purposeful and future oriented continuum is another orientation. (ref. G. Kuppuram, *Philosophy of History*, Sundeep Prakashan, New Delhi, 2000 p.26-29 )

doing’? ‘Why am I doing it’? This we claim as the result of a “Mādhyamika-seeing”. This is an application of dialectic and consequent realization that I too am not on solid ground but on quick sand<sup>15</sup>. This will expose the reasons behind different accounts, so also answer to the question ‘why I do it’. We present it as an effort of self-justification and in this processes this seeing becomes the conscience of history.

### Levels of Historizing

Historizing can happen centring on individuals and also around human affairs. History of very few individuals become significant, because only a few individuals bring in revolution in the form of far reaching consequences to humanity like a Buddha, a Jesus, a Mohammad. But complexity of human affairs calls for diverse philosophies and there can be conflicting philosophies. (human beings have a physical or material life, emotional life and spiritual life and all these seek its flowering in community). My claim is that study of these is the first level of historizing<sup>16</sup> and there can be a second level of historizing: a dispassionate, impersonal enquiry into the structure (philosophy which is ahistorical) into which we collect facts or events. This can be done effectively without putting ourselves at the Olympic heights<sup>17</sup> is a Madhyamika contribution.

With the above yardstick when we look into the past we can speak of two important aspects to be taken care of in the study of history. First is the historical origin of idea in the form of a theory given by a historical person and the eternal nature of the idea as it is. Second aspect is to open our eyes to see the so called past which is though a continuum<sup>18</sup>, approached from different angles and interpreted differently. I would like to explain the first aspect with the example of Gautama Buddha, the Sakyamuni and Buddhism.

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<sup>15</sup> Madhyamika dialectics stands as an impartial tribunal before which any metaphysical construction –affirmative or negative – has to stand trial. Sunyata is thus the conscience of philosophy, the ‘impartial spectator’, which does not accept, or even deny, any system. For it, all systems are tenable from their own points of view, but all untenable from the point of view of self-consistency. It accepts all views (*sarvam ca yujyate tasya sunyata yasya yujyate...*) and rejects all. (ref. *Mulamadhyamikakarika* 24:14).

<sup>16</sup> William H. Dray while speaking about objectivity of History raises the issues involved in the observation of the historian. According to him there is a structure that historian applies on facts and events, and he can never have a neuter mind. This raises the issues of values of the historian and thus different structures for selection and arrangement of facts. On this basis different types of reading history comes up like pragmatic interpretation of history, realistic interpretation of history, idealistic interpretation of history, positivistic interpretation of history, transcendentalist interpretation of history etc. (Ref. Chapter 3 Historical Objectivity in *Philosophy of History* by William H. Dray, Prentice-Hall, Inc., N.J., 1964, 21-40); Another interesting study about coloured reading of history style is exposed by Andrew P Tuck in his interesting work on comparative philosophy. According to him one cannot but see through his looking glass and that is not limitation, but a ‘productive understanding attitude’ (he calls it isogesis). He subscribes to the view that readings must be “either creative or superfluous”. If one stands for complete objectivism, already the text is there, why we need a carbon copy? Creative understanding of the meaning of the book or the author is what he stands for (ref. Andrew P Tuck, *Comparative Philosophy and the Philosophy of Scholarship*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1990, 3-30)

<sup>17</sup> Olympic heights position is that ‘I and I only is right, for I only see the ‘whole’, you all have a vision like that ‘five blind man knowing an elephant’. “I am the tallest, and in front of me you all are pigmies” attitude) Some say this is an interpretation of philosophies by a person who accepts ‘Syadvada’ position developed by Jainism to accommodate all positions.

<sup>18</sup> As Karl Popper calls it ‘a vast and comprehensive stream of development’ (ref. K.R. Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*, Routledge, London, 1969, 81)

Sakyamuni is the historical person who received enlightenment and that happened at a historical point. But can we say that that enlightenment was not there before he received it and preached it? Is this something that was absent but brought to being by him at his enlightenment? Buddhism in its early age where Sravakayāna (Hinayāna) was prominent thought like that. But once Mahayāna trend started Sakyamuni receded to the background and the spiritual force which they called as the ‘*Dharmakāya*’ of Buddha took the prominence<sup>19</sup>. The result is for all of us to see. Buddhism became a religion with long line of Gods and Goddesses, and Sakyamuni became one manifestation of them. All these manifestations are explained as means or ‘*upāya*’ for Nirvana. We see the philosophical ground for such an interpretation systematically exposed in the philosophy of Madhyamika (*śūnyata*) of Nagarjuna<sup>20</sup>.

To explain the second aspect let us take one contextual and relevant example in India: the destruction of temples in the history of India as understood by different authors. There are many books written on the subject by Western authors and Indian authors, Hindu authors, Muslim authors, Christian authors, Marxist authors, secular authors etc. We see that each group has its own foundational predispositions. According to the writer, his attitudes, his purpose, the emphasising criteria will change<sup>21</sup>.

A militant minded Hindu speaks of destruction of 20,000 temples by Muslims and Christian missionaries and he presents them as anti-nationals and destroyers of Indian culture. When secular minded historians study the same events, they speak of Hindu petty kings of old, destroying the temples of other petty kings to prove their authority. They go even to the extent of showing that even if there was no Muslim invasion there would have

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<sup>19</sup> Edward Conze while speaking about the growth of Mahayana explains one important difference of this trend from earlier trend in Buddhism as emphasis to Trikaya of Buddha than Sakyamuni Buddha. Trikaya of Buddha consists of Dharmakaya which is the Absolute, Sambhoga kaya or Enjoying body and Nirmanakaya or the fictitious, conjured-up body (which we see normally when we see a saint or godly person through which absolute manifests).(ref. Edward Conze, “Mahayana Buddhism” in *Thirty Years of Buddhist Studies*, Munshiram Manoharlal Pvt. Ltd, 2008, 71.

<sup>20</sup> Its counterpart in Catholic exegesis can be seen in the controversy between ‘Jesus of history and Christ of Faith’ which comes up from the basic contrast between value and fact that Emmanuel Kant brought in. Though this idea we see in Martin Kahler (1835-1912), it was made famous by Rudolph Bultmann who brought in the following ideas related with Jesus of history: 1) it is not relevant for faith; 2) it is Jesus of scholars; 3) It is Jesus of critical history; 4) it is Jesus of uncertain foundation; 5) it is inaccessible to most Christians; 6) it is Jesus of past; 7) it is the facticity of Jesus. Related with Christ of faith he presented the ideas like: 1) it is relevant for faith; 2) it is Christ of believers; 3) it is Christ of Gospels; 4) it is Christ of certain foundations; 5) it is accessible to all Christians; 6) it is Christ of the present. The point is what Kierkegaard argued. Even if you could prove the historicity of the gospels in every detail, it would not necessarily bring one closer to Christ. Conversely if the critics could disprove the historicity of the gospels, save that a man lived in whom people believed God dwelt, it would not destroy the foundations of true faith.(Ref. Norman Geister “Christ of Faith vs. Jesus of History, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, Baker, 1999. [www.ankerberg.com/Articles/\\_PDFArchives/theological.../TD1W0701.pdf](http://www.ankerberg.com/Articles/_PDFArchives/theological.../TD1W0701.pdf))

<sup>21</sup> To substantiate the point we present the study of history of destruction of temples by the historian Richard M Eaton, published in one of India’s leading National Magazine *Frontline* in its Volume 17 - Issue 25, Dec. 9 - 22, 2000, under the title “Historical Analysis:

Temple desecration in pre-modern India, When, where, and why were Hindu temples desecrated in pre-modern history, and how was this connected with the rise of Indo-Muslim states?” The article contains an editor’s preface that speaks of the political importance of the article. (Ref. [www.frontlineonnet.com/fl1725/17250620.htm](http://www.frontlineonnet.com/fl1725/17250620.htm))

been that much bloodshed and destructions, between the petty kings. There are Christian Western historians who speak of the great transition that the missionaries brought by changing ‘barbarians’ into ‘modern cultured’ and civilized citizens. These are ‘looking glasses’ perspectives. Those who do not see along with them tend to disagree and form their ways of looking and disapprove the first. Then the other group find strategies to defend themselves make counter attacks and the process will go on endlessly, for this is a matter of taste and finding meaning for oneself. This is an issue in philosophising of history in the first level<sup>22</sup>.

I heard of a passionate Malayali professor who went often to President of India to complaint against falsification of history<sup>23</sup>; distortions of history by fascist forces with hidden motives. If this is the issue we discuss here, then this paper is out of place. For I have nothing to say extra than what is already said by eminent persons like Karl Popper at this level. Karl Popper through his books “Open society and its enemies” and “poverty of Historicism” expresses one idea; from Plato up to modern times society is structured, it branded people into haves and have-nots, those inside the boundary and outside, those in the higher levels of structure and those in the lower levels etc. and the story of branding and its satellite consequences continues in the form of discovering the rhythms, or the patterns, the laws or the trends that underlie evolution of history<sup>24</sup>.

How much harm those who try to keep the structure (conservatives, traditionalists) and those fight against it (radicals) brought in human society? Are you accepting it as a fact and then live with it? Then also I have no argument with you. For according to one’s values one takes a position and lives with it or always try for so called ‘middle way’ which never reaches in theory (because of the complexity inherent within) but happens in practical life! As it is expressed by Herman Taube in his collection of poems *Looking Back, Going Forward*<sup>25</sup>.

My effort here is to make a level change, enter into another level that we were exposing when we spoke about Mādhyaṃika and see the danger inherent in any reading of history.

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<sup>22</sup> This is also a criticism against the objective conception of history. “A historian cannot observe his subject matter as a chemist can; because his documentation of the past is fragmentary; because he must select even from this partial record; because he must arrange his materials in reporting his results; because in employing organizing concepts he imposes a structure on the past which it never really had; because the events he is interested in involve value judgement on the part of him (ethical and aesthetic considerations); because no historian in any case can bring to his work a neutral mind” Ref. William H. Dray, *Philosophy of History*, Prentice-Hall, Inc. London, 1964, 22.

<sup>23</sup> Referred by K.P. Appan in his autobiographical book in Malayalam *Thanichiricumpol ormikkunathu*

<sup>24</sup> K.R. Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*, 3.

<sup>25</sup> Herman Taube names his collection of poems as “Looking back, Going forward”. He says in the introduction “I live on a reserve of burdensome memories amassed in dark times. They are the power that excites, provokes, and stimulates my actions.”

The editorial says “The author is a poet and novelist. He reveals the inner world of a tormented yet loving soul, a world of deep richness and passion. Looking Back, Going Forward includes recent English translations of poems Taube originally wrote in Polish and Yiddish about his World War II experiences in Poland, Siberia, Uzbekistan, Russia, and Pomerania. It also includes poems dealing with emigration to the United States in 1947, his continuing work as a journalist, and a life that has been dedicated to service in Jewish communities and his expanding family” (ref. Herman Taube, *Looking Back, Going Forward: New and Selected Poems*, Dryad Press, 2002)

What is the repercussion of such a level change? For a Buddhist this is metaphysical stand for directing his conduct. This is the first requirement for shedding of desire and craving which is the first step to realization of emptiness and consequent nirvana. When shall I set myself to realize that? Or when should I go for seeing interdependency? Not in the beginning when I start my seeing or construction and criticises opposing positions. First present all the inner contradictions inherent in other positions but don't stop at the claim that because opposing positions have contradictions my position is right! This is what we see often. When a militant Hindu presents his reading of history, the response of others like a Muslim, Christian, secular is to cry foul and when the latter present their reading, the militant Hindu tends to simply ignore or reject and console himself by saying of hidden agendas of others. This leads to mutual distrust in society and each one will remain in his or her own ghettos. Thus historicising fails to do its intended purpose for society, namely, make society little more liveable with mutual respect and openness.

### **Role of the philosopher from “Madhyamika-seeing” perspective**

What is the role of philosophers? There are different roles:- role of a priest, of a leader in society, of a social worker, of a politician, of a government officer, of a teacher, of parents etc... I feel that philosopher must be aware of the fact of ghettos or monads in which theoretically we stand and dare to self-criticise ourselves. See the spiritual urge to go beyond the empirical in all, see the ego that is attached to positions in which one is, see the conviction of the holder of position which he claims as received as revelation and other positions as irrelevant<sup>26</sup> and so on...When I internalize criticism, I begin to see differently within me, this is opening of Madhyamika way, a seeing that I also stand on quick sand, not solid rock.

### **Practical implications of Madhyamika level of historizing**

Our question can be: what is the relevance of ‘Mādhaymaika-seeing? We are in a critical historical juncture and we are in need of concrete measures for social living and what philosophy can contribute for that, this is our concern... As long as concerns are empirical (philosophy as construction or ordering facts in a given structure) Mādhyamika has no message to give...but once a philosophical urge to go beyond the ‘empirical’ is irresistible in one, then Mādhyamika has a message to offer him: please look within and have a dispassionate, impersonal look at the foundations (philosophy as deconstruction, pure analysis without extra presuppositions). And answer the questions: From where I got them, why I have them, how I should use them. Regarding the philosophies which are structures in and through which I see the world is a gift to me, either by direct revelation (enlightenment), or by indirect revelation (tradition). Look at Buddha who first gave four noble truths and those who study it since then until now, the basic revelation is same. But for Buddha it was an enlightenment, for us it is basic Buddhist truth to explain reality.

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<sup>26</sup> Everyone who holds a position normally think only within that position. No amount of outside attack will touch him, rather it will prompt him to make the walls strong, if that does not convince him that there is an inner inconsistency. Seeing of inner inconsistency is possible only through self-criticism. Since he already convinced of the inner inconsistency of other rival systems, he has no ground to stand, no shelter to go...

Now I can have two attitudes to what I received. One of an insider's look and the other is an outsider's look<sup>27</sup>. This makes all differences in my interpretation.

Second question why I have them is a question to our basic predicament, for certain natures are such that they cannot but have to philosophise for getting ease. (there is the classic example of the speck of dust that has fallen on hand and in the eye. That which is fallen on the hand we don't even mind it, but that which is fallen on the eye create such an irritation that we have to remove it for getting ease! For some persons life issues are like speck of dust fallen in the eyes). The world in which we live is not always conducive for our living. We need answers, we want explanations and philosophies are looking glasses that convert the world into a liveable world for us<sup>28</sup>. How I should use them is a value filled question and according to our temperament, taste, (*gotra* according to Mādhyamika) the answers vary but we can have a broader consensus on the basis of basic values we accept. Mādhyamika as a Buddhist has two values: *Śūnyata* and *Karunā*. *Śūnyata* as the basic interrelatedness of everything we can conceive of and *Karunā* as the attitude of placing the other first. NB: for us some more questions are relevant. How far I believe what I say! How much my life is directed by them?

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<sup>27</sup> By this insiders look we mean sympathetic reading. Jesus said: "in my father's house there are many rooms" these rooms can be explained as for different philosophies. Each one is comfortable in his room, but that does not prevent me from making a visit to your room and have a tea with you there and a dialogue. But at the end of the day I like to be at home in my room! From the perspective of Buddhist '*upaya*' this is fruitful and makes us liberal and accommodative. The other position is 'outsider' view where I create walls around my room and call outsiders as infidels. 'I and my alone attitude' is the greatest danger of philosophizing too.

<sup>28</sup> The basic difference between philosophies and madhyamika is that when philosophies give looking glasses to us to make our world a livable one, madhyamika presents us a mirror to see ourselves, to see what we were doing while constructing. This role of madhyamika makes it the conscience of philosophies or the philosophy of philosophies.

## Historizing: A Christian (Protestant) View

- James D. Chellappa

*Every historian is conditioned by hi/her context. As history is connected with the past, it is developed on the basis of available evidence. Christianity and history have always been connected together as Paul Tillich says that a doctrine of life includes historical dimension of life in general and of human history. This paper mainly attempts to shed a little light on Protestant Christian attitude towards history. From the backdrop of two important religious notions of the Protestant Reformation, “authority” and “salvation,” Protestant historizing starts with some major presuppositions like ‘God is the Creator of History,’ ‘God directs Human History,’ ‘The Bible gives accurate accounts of History,’ and ‘World History consummates in the inauguration of God’s Kingdom.’ The fact that the Bible commands much importance in the development of Protestant Christian thinking cannot be denied. All histories – history of theology, political, narrative, intellectual, socio-cultural, technological, natural and material history, are said to be emerging from and influenced by history of the Bible. Protestant Christian historizing as a religious historizing is critically assessed in this study.*

### Introduction

In the contemporary philosophical circles the term ‘history’ is used in various ways. History is always connected with the past. History is developed on the basis of available evidence. Sometimes the evidence we have is like, ashes of a letter acquired from a burnt building. Though, “the ashes of a letter are related to the history of that letter, yet we cannot use the evidence in the form that it now is to infer about what was written.”<sup>1</sup> History can be defined as, “a shifting problematic discourse, ostensibly about an aspect of the world, the past that is produced by a group of present minded workers who go about their work in mutually recognisable ways that are epistemologically, methodologically, ideologically and practically positioned and whose products once in circulation, are subject to a series of uses and abuses that are logically infinite but which in actuality generally correspond to a range of power bases that exists at any given moment and which structure and distribute the meanings of histories along a dominant - marginal spectrum.”<sup>2</sup>

Bertrand Russell criticizes the process of historizing when he says that, “history, in every country, is so taught to magnify that country.”<sup>3</sup> This happens because the historian is conditioned by his context. Christianity and history have always been allies. History, more often than religious philosophy, convinces more people that Christianity is true. The Bible contains a great deal more history than philosophy or religion. Christianity is rooted in history and without its historical roots there would be no Christian worldview (1 Corinthians 15:14). Christian historizing also has its own draw backs. Whether it is Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Pentecostal, Sectarian, and Modern Movements, all Christian historizing has limitations. Though historizing has limitations, these limitations do not minimize the

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Day, *The Philosophy of History* (London: Continuum Books, 2008), 4.

<sup>2</sup> K. Jenkins, *Rethinking History* (London: Routledge, 1991), 26.

<sup>3</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Why Men Fight* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2010), 95.

importance of history. According to the famous Protestant theologian Paul Tillich, “Any doctrine of life must include a doctrine of the historical dimension of life in general and of human history as the most comprehensive life process in particular.”<sup>4</sup>

This paper mainly attempts to shed a little light on Protestant Christian attitude towards history or historizing. While speaking about Protestant historizing, great importance must be given to the Reformation. Historians’ definition of the phrase ‘Protestant Reformation’ is conditioned in different ways according to their varying outlooks. The noted Church historian Cairns says, “Some Roman Catholic historians look on it as a revolt by Protestants against the universal Church. The Protestant historian considers it a reformation that brought religious life nearer to the pattern of the New Testament. The Secular historian thinks of it more as a revolutionary movement.”<sup>5</sup> The Protestant Reformation was clearly a complex social, political, and economic movement but most of all it was a religious revolution.

The religious aspect of the Protestant Reformation must be taken seriously in to account because the whole notion of “Protestant historizing” has much of religious significance in it. The two important religious notions of the Protestant Reformation are “authority” and “salvation”. In this context Martin Luther is accepted as a great Reformer because here he proposed the concepts of “*Sola Scriptura*” and “*Sola Fide*”. Conservative theologian R. C. Sproul says that by the phrase “*Sola Scriptura*” Luther meant that, “The only source of special revelation that has the authority to bind the conscience absolutely is the Bible.”<sup>6</sup> *Sola Fide* meant that “justification is by faith alone.”<sup>7</sup> Though contemporary Protestant Christians are divided into more than 38,000 denominations,<sup>8</sup> these two religious notions as well as the affirmation of the main tenets found in the ecumenical creeds such as the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed and the formulas of Chalcedon, serve as the cohesive forces of the entire movement.

In seeing Protestant historizing the first notion of “*Sola Scriptura*” commands much significance. This is because Protestant historizing starts with some major presuppositions like ‘God is the Creator of History,’ ‘God directs Human History,’ ‘The Bible gives accurate accounts of History,’ and ‘World History consummates in the inauguration of God’s Kingdom.’ It is a must to notice that all these presuppositions are gleaned from the Bible by the Protestants. The fact that the Bible commands much importance in the development of Protestant Christian thinking cannot be denied.

A notable outcome of Protestant Reformation is that there is an appreciation of diversity. This freedom in thinking has its own consequences too. Now we see that the Protestant Christians are divided mainly in to three groups based on their perception on Biblical authority. First the Fundamentalists, they are biblicists and literalists in approach. Secondly, there are the Evangelicals who take a moderate path. Thirdly are the Liberals who deny that any religious or supernatural authority is found in a human book. Contemporary Protestant historizing must take in to account the contribution of these distinct groups.

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, (Chicago: UCP, 1963), 297.

<sup>5</sup> Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries*, (Michigan: Zondervan, 1996), 270.

<sup>6</sup> R. C. Sproul, *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification* (Secunderabad: OM Books, 2006), 21.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Mary Fairchild, “Christianity Today - General Statistics and Facts of Christianity,” in <http://christianity.about.com/od/denominations/p/christiantoday.htm> (07/10/2011)

## 1. God, the Creator of History

Bible never tries to prove the existence of God. We see the Bible starts with the phrase “in the beginning” (Gen1:1). Bible opens up with the record of the beginning of the work of God in relation to this earth or we can say in relation to the universe as a whole. This includes the entire cosmos - dimensions far more extensive human knowledge can comprehend and presumably larger than even what present day science reveals. The creation is a witness of divine presence. God has revealed his existence through the act of creating the universe. For Tillich, “the divine life is creative, actualizing itself in inexhaustible abundance. The divine life and divine creativity are not different. God is creative because He is God.”<sup>9</sup>

Bible portrays the nature as revealing the majesty of God as its creator. The magnificence of creation can be taken as clearly pointing to the unlimited power and awesome attributes of God as the creator and designer of the universe.<sup>10</sup> As we approach the subject of God as the creator of the universe our mood aligns akin to John Calvin the noted Protestant Reformer. In his commentary on the book of Genesis Calvin says, “Since the infinite wisdom of God is displayed in the admirable structure of heaven and earth, it is absolutely impossible to unfold the history of the creation of the world in terms equal to its dignity. While the measure of our capacity is too contracted to comprehend things of such magnitude, our tongue is equally incapable of giving a full and substantial account of them.”<sup>11</sup>

Louis Berkhof defines the term creation as, “that free act of God whereby He, according to His sovereign will and for His own glory in the beginning brought forth the whole visible and invisible universe, without the use of pre-existent material, and thus giving it an existence, distinct from His own and yet always dependent on Him.”<sup>12</sup> Tillich supplements the concept by saying that, “the doctrine of creation is not the story of an event which took place ‘once upon a time’. It is the basic description of the relation between God and the world.”<sup>13</sup> An Indian Christian philosopher sees creation as, “God’s beneficent action towards human beings, not the working out of material causes and the laws that govern them. Creation is pure generosity, the act of loving and giving.”<sup>14</sup>

As history begins with time, God is viewed as the creator of both history and time, whether it is of the history of humanity or of the universe. Wilber Smith a famous American theologian says, “Destroy faith in the Genesis account of creation, and the great structure of doctrinal truth built up through the ages, in the Word of God, is without foundation.”<sup>15</sup> In Protestant thought the account of creation of humanity recorded in the Bible is given much weight and it is taken to be an accurate historical account. Any denial of it is seen as sign of apostasy. The first couple Adam and Eve are seen as historical persons. Since God created Adam and Eve as the one original pair, the human race would originally form one society.<sup>16</sup>

The idea of one world, one human society and one God is found in the idea of God creating the universe. This idea also says that everything that exists has a common history. A history which permeates from God is in fact an inexhaustible history. History of the creation or the

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<sup>9</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 252.

<sup>10</sup> R. B. Thieme, *The Origin of Human Life* (Texas: RBT Bible Ministries, 1993), 2.

<sup>11</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses called Genesis* (Edinburgh: 1847), 58.

<sup>12</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1941), 129.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 252.

<sup>14</sup> Augustine Perumalil, *Religious Cosmologies* (Secunderabad: OM Books, 2007), 210.

<sup>15</sup> Wilbur M. Smith, *Therefore Stand* (Connecticut: Keats Publishing, 1981), 277.

<sup>16</sup> Gordon H. Clark, *A Christian View of Men and Things* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1952), 85.

created creatures exists as long as God exists. So by accepting the fact that God creates, Protestants have projected human history as an eternal history which is intertwined in the very being of God.

Lutheran theologian Pannenberg says, “As an eternal act God’s creative action embraces the whole cosmic process and permeates all phases of the divine action in its history.”<sup>17</sup> He further adds, “The creation of the world is not one of God’s historical acts among others, for it is not an act in time and history. It is the act that constitutes time itself with all creaturely reality. It establishes not merely the temporal beginning of creaturely existence but even this existence itself in all its range... Nevertheless, the concept of creation contains more than a mere statement about the world’s beginning. Each individual creature –indeed, each event, each moment – has its beginning in God’s creation.”<sup>18</sup>

## **2. God, the Director of Human History**

The prophetic traditions of the Bible give light on how God directs human history. God is seen as actively involving in the day to day actions of humans. A basic theme of our Scriptures is that God acts in and through history. The biblical God is discovered in historical events and human politics and institutions. It is true that, “Christianity saw history not as the work of human process but that of the divine will. The achievements of men were not due to their will but it was because of the wisdom of God, for human beings were not free agents.”<sup>19</sup> The list of God initiated historical events includes the creation of humans, the dispersion of the people from Babel, the migration of Abraham and his clan out of Mesopotamia, the great deliverance of Israel by Moses and the exodus from Egypt, the development of legal codes, the period of the judges, the evolution of monarchy in Israel and its constant battles, the prophets, the Assyrian invasion, the trauma and pain of Babylonian exile, the poetry of Isaiah, the exaltation of Daniel, the life of Jesus, the struggles of the early Christians to discover who they were and to resolve their relationship with the Jews - to mention a few things.

The historical event of the incarnation took place in order to fulfil God’s plan and purpose. Jesus repeatedly affirmed that the purpose of his coming to the world was to fulfil the will of God. Jesus obeyed God and submitted to God’s will even to the point of his death on the cross. The life of Christ even from his conception in the womb of Virgin Mary till his death on the cross reflects the fact that God directs the course of human history. This history “is not only in what is narrated but in that immensely larger area of the stage of human activity within which what is narrated takes place and by which it is so deeply affected.”<sup>20</sup> Though the Bible focuses much on the historic events related to Israel, the histories of the rest of the human societies are not entirely omitted. But it can be well traced in biblical narratives.

## **3. The Bible, a Book of History**

In Protestant historizing the Bible commands a very prominent place. Bible is seen as a sacred record of accurate human history. It is seen as the inerrant and infallible Word of God. Protestant understanding of the Bible was conditioned by the attitude of Reformers like Martin Luther and John Calvin. They both stressed the importance of the sole authority of the

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<sup>17</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* (Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1994), 41.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 42-43.

<sup>19</sup> K. Rajayyan, *History in Theory and Method: A Study in Historiography* (Madurai: Raj Publishers, 1982), 116.

<sup>20</sup> Edwin Lewis, *The Biblical Faith and Christian Freedom* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), 63

scripture. Later Protestants magnified the concept up to the level of accepting Plenary Verbal Inspiration of the Bible.<sup>21</sup>

The creation story, the fall, the flood, and all such incidents recorded in the Bible are taken as historical data. There are multiple histories taken or formulated from within the Bible, including the history of theology (the relationship between God and believers), political history (usually the account of ‘Great Men’), narrative history (the chronology of events), intellectual history (ideas and their development, context and evolution), socio-cultural history (institutions, including their social underpinnings in family, clan, tribe and social class and the state), cultural history (overall evolution of culture, demography, socio-economic and political structure and ethnicity), technological history (the techniques by which humans adapt to exploit and make use of the resources of their environment), natural history (how humans discover and adapt to the ecological facts of their natural environment), and material history (artefacts as correlates of changes in human behaviour). Protestant Christians have used the Bible as their source book for developing world views, histories, ethics, religious dogmas and traditions. C. H. Dodd a very famous British scholar says, “Christianity offers the Bible as the vehicle of our knowledge of God. For the Bible is an historical book. Its writings directly reflect more than a thousand years of the religious history of mankind, and indirectly they reach far back to the more distant past. It is true that even so the history it covers is but a fraction of the whole history of man, whether spatially or temporally considered. Yet the history it reflects is so central, so typical, and so obviously creative beyond the particular places and times, in which it was produced, that it has a very wide significance.”<sup>22</sup>

Because a Bible based devotional historizing was developed by the Protestant Christians, this way of historizing was seen as a universal method. An Indian Church historian also says that, “let us hope that the deeper we penetrate into the Bible the deeper will be our understanding of the Christian view of history.”<sup>23</sup> Many Protestant theologians assume that a proper exposition of the Scripture will lead to an adequate historizing. Niebuhr feels that Biblical faith affirms, “The potential meaning of life in history. It is in history, and not in a flight from history, that the divine power which bears and completes history is revealed.”<sup>24</sup>

#### **4. Jesus: God Incarnated in History**

Jesus Christ the son of Mary has a significant role in Protestant Christian historizing. Jesus is accepted widely as the unique son of God. Jesus is the God incarnate in human history. This is a concrete historic event which happened in human history. And this event is the most important event of human history for the Christian mind, because this event reflects the love of God the creator toward the whole created order. In Christ Jesus, Protestants see the emergence of a salvation history. God incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth and coming to this world by taking the lowly human form, by being born in some insignificant part of the world is a unique contribution to the Christian concept of human salvation in history.

There is a widespread idea that Indian Christians see the Jesus event as the event of an *avatar* that brings redemption or liberation. But in Protestant circles the concept of incarnation and

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<sup>21</sup> It is the notion that every single word of the Bible is dictated by God; so it is completely free from any error.

<sup>22</sup> C. H. Dodd, *The Authority of the Bible* (London: Fontana Books, 1960), 136.

<sup>23</sup> A. M. Mundadan, *History and Beyond* (Aluva, Jeevass Publications, 1997), 79.

<sup>24</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *Faith and History: A Comparison of Christian and Modern Views of History* (New York, Charles Scribner's, 1949), 114.

of *avatar* are contrasted. In Indian religions the *avatar* is seen as a temporal appearance of the divine in anthropomorphic or zoomorphic form. So *avatar* is not fully or truly human. An Indian Protestant theologian sheds more light to this discussion by saying that, “an *Avatar* may take place at anytime, anywhere, and is constantly occurring, the historicity of any such event scarcely obtains any serious considerations in Hinduism. In Christianity everything hangs on historicity. The incarnation is not a concept; it is an event.”<sup>25</sup> Jesus is fully human and fully divine. In Christ the end of history and a new beginning is envisioned. For Niebuhr, “the affirmation that Christ is the end of history signifies that in His life, death and resurrection the meaning of man’s historic existence is fulfilled. The divine sovereignty, which gives it meaning, is revealed to have an ultimate resource of mercy and forgiveness, beyond judgement, which completes history despite the continued fragmentary and contradictory character of all historic reality.”<sup>26</sup>

## 5. God’s Kingdom: End of Human History

History as a conflict between Satan’s earthly kingdom and God’s heavenly kingdom was a theme found in Christianity from the time of Apostle Paul himself. This theme was logically formulated by the Church Father St. Augustine in his monumental work *The City of God*. Augustine wrote this book to comfort Christians in a situation in which the political power of Rome went through perilous times. The Protestant Reformers too had difficult political situations. If we see the lives of Martin Luther, John Calvin, Zwingli, the Anabaptists, and the Puritans and so on, we can see a background of similarity. They all had unstable political situations and persecutions. This made them to be closer to the Augustinian style of historizing.

Protestants are similar to the belief of Christians of other denominations when it comes to eschatology. They have a linear understanding of history. As God created history, He will be the agent who consummates history. M. M. Thomas the Indian theologian and a statesman sees a common ground in the understanding of the kingdom of God in the Semitic religions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam. That is, “God is one. God created the world to fulfil God’s purposes, and revealed himself to the world. God acts in history. On the day of last judgement kingdom of God will be established in the world”<sup>27</sup>. Reinhold Niebuhr says, “The idea of a source and end of life, too transcendent to the desires, capacities, and powers of human life to be either comprehended by the human mind or easily manipulated for human ends, represents the radical break of Biblical faith with the idolatrous tendencies in all human culture.”<sup>28</sup>

Majority of the Protestant Christians believe human history will end in the literal second coming of Christ to this earth. In formulating this belief contemporary Protestants are divided in to amillennialists and premillennialists. The term millennium in Protestant historizing speaks about a thousand year reign of Christ. Traditional Protestants like the Lutheran and the Reformed (Calvinist), Anglican Christians are amillennial. Amillennialism is a view in Christian end-times theology named for its rejection of the theory that Jesus Christ will have a thousand-year long, physical reign on the earth. That means they believe that just after the

<sup>25</sup> S. Kulandran, *Grace in Christianity and Hinduism* (London: Lutterworth, 1964), n. p. Cited in J. C. Hindley, ‘The Jesus of History: An Appraisal from India,’ in *Indian Voices in Today’s Theological Debate*, eds. Horst Bürkle and Wolfgang M. W. Roth (Lucknow: LPH/ISPCK/CLS, 1972), 12-13.

<sup>26</sup> Niebuhr, *Faith and History: A Comparison of Christian and Modern Views of History*, 139.

<sup>27</sup> M. M. Thomas, *In Jesus the Kingdom of God is Near: Luke 9-19* (Tiruvalla: CSS, 2007), 24.

<sup>28</sup> Niebuhr, *Faith and History: A Comparison of Christian and Modern Views of History*, 103.

second coming of Christ, the human history will come to an end and the eternal kingdom of God begins with the ending of human history and time as such. For them millennial kingdom refers to the spiritual reign of Christ reflected on the earth through the Church and the Christians as a whole. These Protestants see the world as getting better for human living because of the presence of Christ in this earth through the existence and growth of the Church. The Church is the kingdom of God in this earth. The Church can bring forth political peace and social prosperity through the Spirit of Christ working in the world through the Church. Both Luther and Calvin believed in the magisterial of the Church in the world on behalf the King Jesus Christ. This group of Protestants believe that Jesus as the risen Lord reigns the universe sitting on the Davidic throne, being at the right hand of God, the Father.

Another major group within Protestantism are known as Dispensationalists. They comprise of denominations like Baptists, Methodists, Pentecostals, and Charismatics. They are premillennialists. Premillennialism is based upon what is claimed to be a literal interpretation of Revelation 20:1-6 in the New Testament which describes Jesus' coming to the earth and subsequent reign at the end of an apocalyptic period of tribulation. They also widely hold to the pretribulational return of Christ. It is believed that Jesus will return to take up the true Christians into heaven by means of a rapture immediately before a seven year worldwide Tribulation. They believe in a literal 1000 years reign of Christ in this earth before the final consummation of human history. Dispensationalist theologian Charles C. Ryrie says, "Concerning the goal of history, dispensationalists find it in the establishment of millennial kingdom on earth. This does not mean dispensationalists minimize the glory of the eternal state, but they insist that the display of the glory of the God who is sovereign in human history must be seen in the present heaven and earth. This view of realization of the goal of history within time is optimistic."<sup>29</sup>

In dispensationalist understanding Christ will return bodily and will be ruler of the world. This kingdom of Christ will be established on the earth with Jerusalem as the capital city. Protestants with dispensationalist leanings try to see the Jewish history as fulfilment of biblical prophecy. Majority of these Protestant Christians have a fundamentalist mind which supports Jewish dominance over the Muslims of Palestine. One of the reasons behind this is a strong commitment to biblical prophecies. Current events of conflicts between the Jews and the Muslims are historized by having in mind the prophetic writings of the Old Testament, especially the prophecies of Daniel. Such Protestants support the Jews politically in the conflict situations. They also see the world as going through a process of moral degradation. They see a world which is preparing itself for its final destruction. Then the Messiah comes for his faithful remnant, saves them, and sets up the kingdom of God for thousand years. Then will be the end of human history, the judgement and a passage into eternity.

## **Conclusion**

Protestant Christian historizing is without doubt a religious historizing. Religions incorporate faith, myth, history and reality to give answers to questions raised by human experiences. Can we develop an objective history from religious historizing is an uncomfortable question to be raised. People who stand outside the Protestant tradition will surely deny that there is any objectivity in protestant religious historizing. It is also true that traditional Protestant historizing finds much difficulty in coping up with the contemporary developments in fields

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<sup>29</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Secunderabad: OM Books, 1995), 17-18.

of science, astronomy and anthropology. Protestants always try to stand within the circumference of the biblical narrations. But in the postmodern world Protestant Christian historizing too will exist as a little narrative in the midst of many grand narratives.

## HISTORIZING: ISLAMIC UNDERSTANDING

- Jose Pennaparambil

*Every religion has its own history and history is inseparable from the religion itself. Religious history and culture shape every single aspect of civilization as it existed, exists, and will exist in future. Precisely, historizing from an Islamic perspective means to explain Islam in the historical environment, considering its various traditional aspects of the Qur'an, Sunnah, and Hadith. There are different perspectives of history viz., cynical, providential and secular views. According to the Islamic view, history moves basically through the human will, not guided by the laws of nature, but by laws of God, and helped by nature: an open book. From the secular materialistic point of view, history moves by some materialistic power towards an end. With Islam, however, there is no end in history at all, except the 'Day of Judgment,' which is outside history. God is external to history; He guides history, but is not in it. In Islam, history lasts forever and within its realm man has freedom to choose. Islamic history, for Muslims, has an important religious and legal significance, since it reflects the working out of God's purpose for His community. The Holy Qur'an interprets history "neither a constantly moving equilibrium between self-developing spiritual forces nor as a constant clash between economic classes but as a peripheral tussle between forces of good and evil."*

### Introduction

Human writing is never a strict reproduction of reality. Even a news report includes certain information and excludes others, based upon the interest and outlook of the writer. Likewise, a historian, when constructing history, decides what to include and what to exclude as determined by his own philosophical background.<sup>1</sup> Today the common understanding of history, as a variety of non-fiction distinguished from 'literature,' or even an autonomous branch of learning, is relatively new and altogether narrower than the traditions from which it emerged. It would have confused most pre-modern writers, be they Muslim or non-Muslim. The English word 'history' comes via Latin from the Greek '*historia*,' and generally meant 'inquiry': it earlier described a variety of genres, including geography, folklore and ethnography, in addition to what we would commonly understand to be history.<sup>2</sup> Every religion has its own history and history is inseparable from the religion itself. Religious history and culture shape every single aspect of civilization as it existed, exists, and will exist in future. The English word 'history,' like Arabic '*ta'rikh*' has a two-fold meaning. It usually means the past, be it prehistoric, ancient, modern or even contemporary, such as is recorded in a diary. But 'history' can also describe our thinking, tracking and writing about the past, that is, a discipline or branch of learning. In this context we have to understand different terminologies connected with the term 'history' or '*ta'rikh*' such as chronography, biography, historiography, prosopography<sup>3</sup> etc., in order to get the precise meaning of the term 'historizing' from an Islamic perspective. The term "historize" means to

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<sup>1</sup>Mohammad and Abdel Whab El Masseri. "Islamic Concept of History." <http://www.muslimphilosophy.com/tvbk/ch30.htm>.

<sup>2</sup>Robinson, F. Chase. *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 6.

<sup>3</sup>'Chronography' here means, those genres that describe events as they occur in time, organizing them according to annual entries (in which case it is annalistic) or caliphal regimes. Universal histories, which begin with 'creation,' and cover the non-Islamic world generally in so far it relates to Islamic history, are conventionally chronographic, local history less frequently so, since it often takes one prosopographical form or another. The Islamic tradition produced biographical narrative of various sorts, but 'biography' here it means only single-subject that relate the life

interpret something as a product of historical development or treat from the perspective of history. Even better, it means to explain the social environment in history and speculate how this environment may have shaped the event. Precisely, historizing from an Islamic perspective means to explain the religion of Islam in the historical environment in which it sprang up and spread, considering its various traditional aspects of the Qur'an, *Sunnah* (trodden path or the way of the Prophet or tradition), and *Hadiths* (the record of acts and words of the Prophet not recorded in the Qur'an). But the term "historicization" grew out of the feeling that many scholars analysed texts and art in a vacuum, ignoring the important influences of the historical situation. In this paper an attempt is made to present the Islamic perspective of history, the importance of history in the life and literature of Muslims, the Qur'anic understanding of historizing and the different stages of its development.

## 1. The Different Perspectives of History

The concept of history depends subjectively on the world outlook of the historian. Looking at different outlooks and views on history would throw light upon Islamic view. In cyclical view, history is understood as going in cycles. So there is no meaning. Things happen in a cyclical, nonsensical, meaningless way. There is no God or purpose behind events. In Providential view, history is completely guided and controlled by God. A group or species is chosen by God, as a chosen people, for instance in Judaism. This is similar to the cyclical view that there is no human influence at all. In secular determinist view (Hegelian, Marxist views), history is propelled by non-human forces, economic motives etc., for example, Freud's *Eros* (sexual drive), Hegel's idea of absolute state. Conflicts within matter manifest itself through human society.<sup>4</sup> In these three views the idea of the autonomous human individual who can choose, who is responsible and who carries moral burdens disappears altogether. There is no freedom of will.

Islamic world outlook, philosophy, or concept of history is entirely different from the aforesaid views. It is based on a basic duality. God created the world, but does not dwell in it. He cares for it and guides it, but is always beyond it: Transcendentalism (*muazza*), is not dualism but duality. It is not God versus world, but God beyond the world. We can interact with Him. God has granted us autonomy (*fitra*), rights and drives. He has given us a mind to judge. He gave us a message. We deserve to be the centre of the universe. He leaves us free to choose, after giving us guidance, a covenant. He gives us all the tools. He has given history and history is the realm of freedom. We can save or damn ourselves. In the opinion of Mohammad Islam and Abdel Wahab El-Messeri, the idea of "Seal of the Prophets" (*Khatam al Nabi*) must be introduced in history because, history includes various events of the lives of Prophets of Allah (God in Arabic) like Hazrat (holy) Adam, Nuh (Noah), Ibrahim (Abraham), Yusuf (Joseph), Musa (Moses), Isa (Jesus) and Muhammad. It is central in the Islamic view of history. According to the Islamic

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of a person, the coverage usually being representative rather than comprehensive. In Arabic it is conventionally called *sira* ('the way of acting), which clearly expresses the paradigmatic force of biographical writing. Here biographic precisely means the Prophetic biography. Islamic 'historiography' means writing about the past precisely about the rise and spread of the religion of Islam, comprising the life and deeds of prophets and the rightly guided caliphs etc. Islamic historiography is both indecorous and pleonastic. Islamic historiography would become polyglot, but it had always been a collective endeavour. 'Prosopography' here means writing about social groups, rather than the collective study of social groups, as the term is commonly understood by modern historians.

<sup>4</sup>Mohammad and Abdel Whab El Masseri. "Islamic Concept of History."

<http://www.muslimphilosophy.com/tvbk/ch30.html>.

view, history moves basically through the human will, not guided by the laws of nature, but by laws of God, and helped by nature, an open book. From the secular materialistic point of view, history moves by some materialistic power towards an end. With Islam, however, there is no end in history at all, except the 'Day of Judgment,' which is outside history. God is external to history; He guides history, but is not in it. In Islam, history lasts forever and within its realm man has freedom to choose.<sup>5</sup>

According to Lenn E. Goodman the overarching framework of creation-history-judgment remains unquestioned and unquestionable for most adherents of Islam. Nonetheless, the idea that creation frames the most fundamental question for the historian and the 'Day of Judgment' frames the ultimate answer to that question is quietly but decisively set aside by Muslim historical writers. Even where their works rise above the local and parochial, their standpoint is more earthbound than that. Judgment is sought within history, not just at its end. That is true even of Mohammad and of many others who took on the role of prophet before them. It is true of universal historians. However, in contrast to the above said views, Goodman opines that, Ibn Khaldun a famous Muslim historian of fourteenth century (1332-1406), holds a cyclical view of history and the starting point of Ibn Khaldun's historiography is a critical methodology for the discernment of historical facts. But to this end, he brings a theorist's regard for pattern and the practical orientation common to *falasifa* (philosophy), physicians, jurists, Sufis, and statesmen of Islam. Holding fast, on a sophisticated plane, to the scriptural view of history as an array of object lessons, Ibn Khaldun entitles his history, *al-'Ibar*-the Lesson. His aim is to weld the practical to the theoretical in a single discourse. Goodman, drawing together the works of many predecessors further states that Ibn Khaldun takes his problematic from the ways of life he finds on earth. He finds the meaning that he seeks in history not in any final denouncement but in the very cycles of power that fill the span of human life and mark the rise and fall of societies as he knows them. Goodman clarifies this view that, in Ibn Khaldun, as in all the best of Muslim historians of the classic age, the search for a moral shape and trust in history cunningly intertwines with naturalism, nationalism, and voluntarism that the Greek philosophical outlook fostered, and with the chronological and ethnographic universalism that grew from the Biblical outlook. Thus Khaldun history has become an enduring process rather than inevitable process.<sup>6</sup>

## **2. The Importance of History in Islam**

The Muslims like any other section of humanity, are affected by the major factors of life that influence us all; economics, political power, ethnicity, gender, nationality, location, language, and above all history.<sup>7</sup> The Muslims, like everyone else in the world, are shaped by their history, but unlike some they are keenly aware of it. Islamic history, for Muslims, has an important religious and legal significance, since it reflects the working out of God's purpose for His community, those that accept the teaching of Islam and obey its law.<sup>8</sup> The emergence and spread of Arabic in the Middle East countries are not merely as one of the achievements of early Islamic rule, but as an exceptionally creative moment in human history. It would produce a volume and variety of literature that rival any other linguistic tradition. Early Islamic scholarship was initially

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<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup>Goodman, *Islamic Humanism*, 205-210.

<sup>7</sup>Ernst W. Carl. *Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World* (North Carolina: Edinburg University Press, 2004), 28.

<sup>8</sup>Lewis, Bernard. *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2003), xix.

concentrated in centres of the post-conquest Arab settlement and administration, particularly the Iraqi cities of Barsa, Kufa, and, somewhat later, Bagdad itself, which was founded soon after the Abbasid branch of Quraysh overthrew the Umayyad branch in 750 C.E.<sup>9</sup>

We regard history as a useful and important thing, in some measure because we have rooted our national identities in it. We dedicate to it a variety of institutional forms, such as museums, local historical societies, specific sections in bookshops and libraries, and university departments. Now, history was very important to Muslims of the classical period. Pre-modern Muslims wrote many books of history, filling their libraries with volumes after volumes. But most learned Muslims of that period accorded the historian far less authority than we do, and envisioned his activity not so much as a discipline independent from other disciplines, but as a kind of narrative practice.<sup>10</sup> Medieval Muslim historians, unlike modern Western ones, rarely insisted that they were doing something special. What distinguished a Muslim historian, usually called *akbhari* (one concerned with past events, historian) or *muarrikh* (chronographer) from others, was not that he belonged to a history department but paid dues to some association. Not even he saw himself primarily as an *akbhari* or *muarrikh*. Muslim historians made their living doing something other than history, especially tutoring, teaching (particularly law) and writing, everything from copying out books to drafting letters for a patron.<sup>11</sup> In fact, we shall see that for much of the classical period Muslim historians kept their heads low, choosing to follow the cultural and academic patterns set by those who did enjoy enormous social authority, the jurist out of whose ranks they frequently came, especially the ninth and tenth centuries. What made an author a historian was that he chose to arrange accounts of events past (*akhbar*) in one or more distinctive ways that, unlike those of other purveyors of written narratives, were explicitly or implicitly chorographical.<sup>12</sup>

In the view of Bernard Lewis all that Muslim historiography knew of the great civilizations of the ancient Middle East was what was related in the Qur'an, with some additional explanatory matter, mostly derived from Jewish and Christian informants. The rest of the ancient past was forgotten and, often literally, buried beneath the ground. Perhaps even more remarkable was the almost total disregard of Europe which characterizes Islamic writings in Arabic, Persian and Turkish from the beginning of historiography until the nineteenth century, when the advancing power of Europe demanded, and finally received attention.<sup>13</sup> He explains that in the vast and rich historiographic literature of Islam, there are basically three kinds of historical topics. Firstly, there are universal histories, meaning, with few exceptions, the history of Islamic *oecumene* (community) and the caliphs and sultans who rule over it. Secondly, there are dynastic histories, focused on ruling family and covering the often extremely variable territories over which it ruled. Finally, there are local or regional histories, most commonly of a city and immediately surrounding district. These last are primarily topographical and biographical.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, xviii.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, xviii.

<sup>13</sup>Lewis, Bernard. *Islam in History* (New Delhi: Aryan Books International, 1998), 104.

<sup>14</sup>Lewis, Bernard. *What Went Wrong? The Clash between Islam and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 102.

The contemporary Islamic literature paid little attention to classical Islam, and had no place in the universities or in the research and teaching carried out under their auspices. The universities of the time were not interested in modern languages like Turkish, any more than they were interested in French or German; they were not interested in the history of Turkey, any more than the history of France or Germany. The only history worthy of the attention of academic scholars was ancient history, based on classical and scriptural sources, and it was to this aspect of Islam that, in due course, scholars in European universities began to devote their attention.<sup>15</sup>

While referring to the development of Arabic language and Islamic history in the Middle Ages Bernard Lewis comments that, the first chair of Arabic in France was established by King Francis I at College de France in 1529, and the first chairs of Arabic in England at Cambridge and Oxford in 1633 and 1636. Others appeared at about the same time in the German states and, notably, at the University of Leiden in Holland, which from the seventeenth century onwards became a major centre of Arabic and Islamic studies. Those engaged in these and similar studies came to be known as Orientalists, a term coined on the analogy of the Hellenists and Latinists whose intellectual discipline and rigorous philosophical method they adopted to the study, and later to the edition, translation, and annotation of Oriental texts. These texts were principally in Hebrew, Syriac, and Arabic and the third led naturally and inevitably to the study of scriptural and then classical Islamic history that is, the life of the Prophet and the history of the medieval caliphate.<sup>16</sup> In this respect Mohammad Arkoun opines that the teaching of the history of Islamic cultures is all too often left to the department of so-called Oriental language, where one exists. This observation, which holds for most universities in the West, demonstrates the extent to which an ideological vision of the history of the Mediterranean area has been translated administratively and institutional into the universities themselves. And the field is open to essayists and journalists to construct imagery of Islam and Muslims based on current events and looked into short-term perspective dominated by Nasserism, Khomeinism, Israel and Palestine.<sup>17</sup>

Like the Jewish scholars who helped the first Christian Hebraists, so also Christian Arab scholars from the Middle East contributed significantly to the early development of Arabic scholarship in Europe. These early modern scholars performed a task of the greatest importance in discovering, editing, analysing, and interpreting the original sources for early Islamic history. In doing so they laid the foundations of virtually all modern scholarship in this field, in the Arab lands as well as in the West.<sup>18</sup> At first they published most of their work in Latin, still at that time the common language of European scholarship. But soon, especially but not exclusively in Protestant countries, they began to use their own languages. By the nineteenth, and still more the twentieth century, the serious student of Islamic history acquired a wide range of linguistic equipment, giving him access not only to the indispensable original sources but also to scholarly monographs in the entire major and several of the minor languages of Europe.<sup>19</sup>

### **3. The Qur'anic Interpretation of History**

According to classical Arabic historiographers, history is “knowledge pertaining to a country, customs and manners of a people, remains of the people of yore, as well as account of the actions

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<sup>15</sup>Lewis, *Islam in History*, 106.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>17</sup>Arkoun, Mohammad, *Rethinking Islam*. Trns. Robert D. Lee (Oxford: Westview Press, 1994), 10.

<sup>18</sup>Lewis, *Islam in History*, 107.

<sup>19</sup>Lewis, *Islam in History*, 107.

of those alive.”<sup>20</sup> The early dogmatic view of the purpose of writing history was to ‘obtain pleasure of Allah.’ But the Qur’an stresses the need of historical knowledge as a moral exhortation of the faithful when it says: “Have they not travelled in the land to see the Nature of the Consequences for those who disbelieved before them? They were mightier than these in power and (in the) traces (which they) left behind them in the earth; yet Allah seized them for their sins and they had no protector for Allah” (Surah 40:21).

Parry Tauseef Ahmad states that, the Holy Qur’an interprets history “neither a constantly moving equilibrium between self-developing spiritual forces nor as a constant clash between economic classes but as a peripheral tussle between forces of good and evil.”<sup>21</sup> This is a theme to which Qur’an frequently refers and quotes instances from history, both the past and contemporary. The Qur’an asks the human being again and again to go through the world with open eyes and diligent hearts. Nisar Ahmad Faruqi, writes about ‘Islamic concept of History, in his book *Early Muslim Historiography*, that the Qur’an, while referring to the bygone nations and extinct civilizations has, in its own way, presented the idea that ‘Nature’, or in Islamic terminology ‘the Will of Allah,’ does not work blindly and arbitrarily. There are certain historical reasons leading to every change or revolution which the Qur’an calls the ‘*Sunnah* of Allah.’ The Qur’anic way of referring to ancient peoples, and their civilizations and of exhorting the faithful to learn a lesson from their history, clearly show that “Islam is a religion essentially history conscious.”<sup>22</sup>

From the historical point of view the Holy Qur’an is the first and most authentic available source of the history of Islam. As we have already viewed it covers various events of the lives of Prophets of Allah like Hazrat Adam, Nuh, Ibrahim, Yusuf, Musa, Isa and Muhammad. It also covers accounts of the battles fought by the Prophet and the circumstances in which certain commandments of Allah were revealed unto the Prophet. Indeed, historical studies started in Islam as a necessary adjunct of theological development.<sup>23</sup> Various Qur’anic verses were interpreted in historical perspective and were given a historical colour. The truth is that with the thoughtful study of the Qur’an, a particular world-view takes place giving birth to a particular behaviour. In this regard Muhammad Munawar in his book ‘*Iqbal and Qur’anic Wisdom*’ argues that, the study of the Qur’an brings us to the conclusion that the “fountain head of several sciences and disciplines is ‘the Book’(here it refers to the Qur’an) itself and history is one of them.”<sup>24</sup>

The Holy Qur’an repeatedly refers to the rise and destruction of nations as a phenomenon to be studied for guidance. It urges men to sojourn through the world and see for themselves the fate of those who were once powerful and proud, but rebelled against Allah and were eventually destroyed for their wickedness.<sup>25</sup> Various verses of the Qur’an like *Surahs* 20:128, 22:45-46, obviously contain a ‘great lesson’ for humanity. If a nation goes astray, it can only learn from

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<sup>20</sup>Parry, Tauseef Ahmad. “Concept of History in Islamic Perspective.” <http://www.studying-islam.org/articletext.aspx?id=1266>.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>22</sup>Faruqi, Nisar Ahmad. *Early Muslim Historiography* (New Delhi: Idarahi-Adabyath-i, 1979), 45.

<sup>23</sup>Parry, Tauseef Ahmad. “Concept of History in Islamic Perspective.” <http://www.studying-islam.org/articletext.aspx?id=1266>.

<sup>24</sup>Munawar, Mohammad. *Iqbal and Quranic Wisdom* (Lhahore: Iqbal Academy, 1981), 75.

<sup>25</sup>Parry, Tauseef Ahmad. “Concept of History in Islamic Perspective.” <http://www.studying-islam.org/articletext.aspx?id=1266>.

history of the earlier nations which were destroyed in punishment for their evils. In most cases their habitations became desolate and they now lie buried beneath the earth.

To sum up, from the above mentioned views regarding the concept of history in Islamic perspective, it is clear that the Holy Qur'an is replete with verses which refer to the remains of ancient civilizations and the purpose of these verses is to remind human beings of the deeds and misdeeds of their predecessors so that they may give thought; they may ponder; they may understand; they may know what is truth; they may know what is reality; the right and the wrong; the good and the bad; the virtue and the vice; transgression and submission; unity and idolatry; monotheism and polytheism; justice and oppression; truth and falsehood; and above all, "their hearts and minds may thus learn wisdom."<sup>26</sup>

#### **4. The Nature of Islamic History**

In the Islamic world historians like Ibn-Khaldun in the fourteenth century and Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr of present time Iraq, made serious efforts in the development of Islamic history. According to T.M Aziz, a famous Muslim historian of our time, Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr's interpretations of history can be considered as a part of his effort to prove that Islam, through the *ulema* (teachers or scholars) of the traditional religious schools, is still capable of contributing to the advancement of knowledge and resolution of problems facing in this temporal world.<sup>27</sup>

Since historizing in Islamic perspective means to explain the religion of Islam in the historical environment, T. M. Aziz explains the nature of Islamic history and views history as a causal process and as working to a well-defined pattern. This understanding of history grows out of his general Islamic beliefs. Man and his environment exist by virtue of divine creativity and thus must have a meaning. History unfolds according to a specific set of rules and its natural processes are not random, for God's actions are not without meaning. Thus, the historical process, is considered as a totality, and is shaped according to the will of God. It is true that history follows a dialectical course of development, but it operates according to a divine pattern.<sup>28</sup>

#### **5. The Development of Historical Process**

Muslims were heirs to the classical and monotheistic traditions of the Near East, and these traditions brought with them attitudes towards historiography. The translation movements of the eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries made available to Muslim thinkers Aristotle's disdain for history. In Arabic prescriptions that follow an Aristotelian model, historiography scarcely figures at all. Since it generated no truths, it was considered dispensable. The philosophers' disdain for history cannot explain very much, however, because their ideas remained marginal to the mainstream Islamic tradition. Far more important was Islamic traditionalism. It is within this traditionalist culture that history was understood and recorded, and in part because of traditionalism that a discrete discipline of history took so long to develop. Even more than training in the law or rhetoric conditioned the historical perspectives of lawyer-historians writings in Greek and Syriac, training in traditionalism tended to condition the way that the most

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<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup>Aziz, T.M, "The Meaning of History: An Islamic Perspective."  
<http://www.imamreza.net/eng/imamreza.php?id=3011>.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*

Muslim historians viewed their task, particularly in the early period, when perspective attitudes were being formed.<sup>29</sup>

Urwah Ibn al-Zubayr (ca.643/44- ca. 712) seems to have written the first connected accounts of Mohammad's life and early career. His accounts include the Prophet's first revelatory experience. He also wrote the later developments: the wars of Riddha and the battles of Qadisiya and Yarmuk, in the end covering all the important events connected with the rise of Islam.<sup>30</sup>

Islamic civilization itself has passed through several stages, and undoubtedly most of its material achievements were not realized during its early period. Major achievements came in the third and fourth centuries of Hijrah calendar (Arabic calendar). Islam and faith has inspired them with feelings of superiority, self-confidence, and independence, both spiritual and intellectual. This is significant because it represents the first correct step in the direction of establishing a new civilization, God willing.<sup>31</sup> It is important to note that the Muslim historian does not judge any civilization on the basis of its material achievement only; he also takes into consideration the extent to which it has realized the basic objective ordained by God, for His creatures.

Thus, a noble civilization is one which creates a suitable environment—political, social, economic, cultural, and material—that will enable man to direct himself towards the worship of God alone and to adhere strictly to his commandments in all his activities, unimpeded by the institutions of society.<sup>32</sup> In his book “*Destiny Disrupted*” Tamim Ansary considers history of the world through Islamic eyes. Starting from the same cradle of civilization, he explains how Western and Muslim perceptions of civilization diverged into two separate universe- and how they are merging in today's geopolitical scene.<sup>33</sup>

There are different stages of development in the Islamic historical process. T.M. Aziz presents three stages, viz., 1) the stage of rearing (*Hadanah*), which started with the creation of Adam and ended with their dependents on earth; 2) the stage of unity or solidarity (*Wihdah*), which preceded the rise of social differences between men; and, 3) the stage of dispersion or discord (*Tashtut*), which will last until the coming of *Mahdi* (Messiah).<sup>34</sup> In the first stage the first men were protected from facing any physical needs or environmental difficulties and he was provided with all kinds of facilities to fulfil his earthly mission. Because of his freedom man was able to acquire knowledge and make decision on his own, even to obey or disobey God, his creator and to face the reward or punishment, and is responsible for his actions. Accordingly the three features; knowledge, free-will, and reward or punishment, are to enhance the progress of man in his life on earth.<sup>35</sup>

Parallel to the first, the second historical period, the stage of social life, is the life of cooperation with his fellow beings for his survival on this earth. Man possesses the natural instinct of self-

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<sup>29</sup>Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 85.

<sup>30</sup>Goodman, *Islamic Humanism*, 164.

<sup>31</sup>Akram Diya Al-Umari. “General Features of the Islamic Interpretation of History.”

[http://www.load.islam.com/artical\\_det.php?artical\\_id=137&section=wel\\_islam&subsection=Discover%20Islam](http://www.load.islam.com/artical_det.php?artical_id=137&section=wel_islam&subsection=Discover%20Islam).

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>33</sup>Ansary, Tamim. *Destiny Disrupted* (Lahore: Perseus Books, 2009), 37.

<sup>34</sup>Aziz, “The Meaning of History: An Islamic perspective,” <http://www.imamreza.net/eng/imamreza.php?id=3011>.

<sup>35</sup>Aziz, T.M, “The Meaning of History: An Islamic Perspective.”

<http://www.imamreza.net/eng/imamreza.php?id=3011>.

love. This instinct makes him dependent on others to secure his needs and interests. Finally, the third stage is the spread of the community (*ummah*) all over the face of the earth. This stage culminates, as we have seen, in the coming of Mahdi or saviour to establish justice all over.<sup>36</sup>

## Conclusion

Islam came into history as a society governed by moral principles based, not only on faith in a sovereign God to whom all beings must answer on a day of judgment, but also on time-honoured customs which embodied certain values capable of holding society together and preserving its moral fabric.<sup>37</sup> In the history of Islam, religion and politics were never separated. After the death of the Prophet Mohammad the Caliphs took both temporal and spiritual powers, but the Caliph's religious authority had been in decline from the middle of the ninth century. The Caliphs had nearly always delegated to subordinates in the provinces, but the provincials had begun to control the caliphates. But in the modern Islamic world neither caliphates nor provincial governors wield power, but autocrats, monarchs and oligarchy do. How are Muslims to conduct themselves in this new world? According to Robinson the historians had a part in answering this question.<sup>38</sup> Universal history continues to be written, but now, in a particularly fragmented and culturally competitive world of provincial states, its horizons grow narrower. Universal historians in Iraq such as Ibn al-Jawzi, would present far less breadth in their pre-Islamic sections than had al-Yaqubi and al Tabari, and their Islamic history would focus on Iraq, just as universal historians such as Ibn Kathir, would increasingly focus on Damascus. Meanwhile local chorography, biography and prosopography would serve to anchor dynasties and institutions within the cultural and legal commonwealth of late Abbasid rule.<sup>39</sup> Hence it is the first and foremost duty of the present Islamic historians to uphold the Islamic identity of historizing and historiography and to hand it over the generations to come without giving any prominence to a certain nation or region, gender, economic class, colour or ethnicity, that means partial interpretation of history. According to Carl M. Ernst, regardless of claims of absolute authority, there is no one perspective that is recognized throughout Muslim countries. He adds there is no religious concept, symbol, or practice is self-evident; in every case, one needs to ask about the situation in which a particular aspect of Islam is being invoked.<sup>40</sup> I presume this view is very well applicable in the sphere of history too.

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<sup>36</sup>Aziz, T.M, "The Meaning of History: An Islamic Perspective."

<http://www.imamreza.net/eng/imamreza.php?id=3011>.

<sup>37</sup>Ayoub, M. Mahmoud. *The Crisis of Muslim History: Religion and Politics in Early Islam* (Oxford: Oneword Publications, 2006), 1.

<sup>38</sup>Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 139.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup>Ernst, *Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World*, 35.

# **SUBALTERN HISTORIZING: A Study on Iyothee Thass' *Indirar Desa Charithiram***

- **John Peter Vallabadoss**

*As history is always written by dominant forces, subalterns became victims of history with their lost identities. In any historiography, subalterns have been neglected and rejected as human beings once significantly living in the past. Subalterns long for freedom and search for a space to be what they are. Their negated self and lost identities earnestly strive to create a platform to narrate their stories. In recent times subaltern historiographies have contributed to a greater extent for creating and occupying an autonomous space. Analysing the story of the struggle of subalterns the paper envisions a subaltern historizing in concrete existential situations of downtrodden, in a representative figure of Iyothee Thass, as a champion of depressed class in Tamil Nadu in the beginning of the twentieth century. He not only problematized the caste issue in his work, 'Indirar Desa Charithiram,' but moved beyond the discourse of oppression and domination into a project of identity formation for the marginalized and the discriminated. His emancipatory project may throw some light on subaltern historizing. As subjects of history subalterns author their own history, creating a way of restoring their dignity, self-respect and identity.*

## **Introduction**

Dominance and oppression of one over the other is as old as human history itself. Termed differently as depressed class, scheduled castes/tribes, secondary citizens, periphery, people away from mainstream society, primitive, uncivilized, etc, the subalterns long for freedom and search for a space to be what they are. In Indian context, they sincerely have a quest for a way out of oppressive caste-hierarchy firmly established as socio-religious structure, divinely sanctioned with scriptural approval and as interpreted by brahmanical hegemony. Their negated self and lost identities earnestly strive to create a platform to narrate their stories. The elitist/colonial/brahmanical historians have systematically ignored the creation of an autonomous domain.<sup>1</sup> However, subaltern historiographies have contributed to a greater extent for creating and occupying the autonomous space, although opposed constantly and defeated sometimes by dominant narrations. This paper hovers over the story of the struggle and narrates sympathetically the success and failures of it. Envisioning a subaltern historizing in concrete existential situations of Dalits, Tribals, Women and Minorities, our reflection turns to a representative figure of Iyothee Thass. In the beginning of twentieth century, as a champion of depressed class in Tamil Nadu, he problematized the caste issue. He moved beyond the discourse of oppression and domination into a project of identity formation for the marginalized and the discriminated. His emancipatory project may throw some light on subaltern historizing.

## **I**

### **Subaltern Historiography and Historizing**

In recent times, subaltern studies have made a considerable leap from subaltern historiographies to historiographies of/by the subalterns. No doubt that the subaltern historiography as an alternative to all other historiographies, colonial, nationalist and Marxist, all termed as elitist, made substantial contribution to recover the voice of the subaltern.<sup>2</sup> However, certain sceptical and critical observation brought to light the intent of those who engaged in subaltern project – to still uphold the dominant position in such project, although one cannot neglect a genuine intent of many for the cause of the subaltern. In all such attempts as subaltern historiographies, the only difference has been in the methodology, view from below.<sup>3</sup> The overall purpose of all recent subaltern studies has been to create an autonomous political consciousness of the subalterns.<sup>4</sup> A fresh history for newly

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<sup>1</sup> V.V. Thomas, *Understanding Subaltern History: Theoretical Tools* (Bangalore: Sathri, 2006), 10-11.

<sup>2</sup> Ranajit guha, "On Some Aspects of historiography of Colonial India." *Subaltern Studies*. Vol. I (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982), 4 & 8.

defined/identified people is purported to occupy rightfully the autonomous socio-cultural, political and historical space, hitherto neglected or denied in any grand narrative. Engagement in such a discourse to rehabilitate the consciousness and agency of the subalterns has potentiality to dismiss thoroughly the claims of certain elitist historiographies, for instance, revolts of the subalterns as spontaneous reactions. "The subaltern history project with its growing corpus of writings has been faulted as yet another bourgeois project on behalf of the subaltern."<sup>5</sup> Negating the caste factor as a defining feature of subalternity in the Indian context, subaltern studies become yet another brahmanical project. Even if caste is analysed, there is a distance maintained as outsiders, with a language of 'they and theirs'<sup>6</sup> Any attempt to dissolve the autonomous vision and initiative of subalterns, even in subaltern historiographies, are thus, vehemently resisted.<sup>7</sup>

The past is never a dead past in any case, be it elitist, colonial, brahmanical historiography or in subaltern historiography. It is alive with present and future implications. Any looking back is for strengthening the present 'claims' or 'status' and for moving ahead in the future. It treats seriously the open-ended record of the human predicament of the past and the present. The past is not merely objectified records of an individual or a community, but a record of marks left in the form of memories, experiences, scars and adaptive resources within personalities. These reconfigured memories are the stuff to contemporary subjectivity.<sup>8</sup> It is all the more true of the contested past, as in the context of struggle to take hold of Indian antiquity.

Subaltern historiographies do not just speak on behalf of the victims of history but pave way for the overawed to speak and the silenced to be heard.<sup>9</sup> 'That we have written enough about the victims; now let them speak for themselves,' is the genuine attempt. It is not that they are deprived of faculty of speech. They have been silenced to speak, systematically denied of recognition that they have mouths to speak, tongues to utter words of wisdom and throats to raise voice. They have been categorised and labelled as people having mouths that cannot speak, tongues that cannot utter, throats that cannot produce sounds. Ironically, they have been speaking their own language, which the others did not understand, or did not hear even though able of doing so. The other often pretends to be deaf. Although one can hear one deliberately communicates, 'I cannot hear you because you do not speak, or you do not speak my language. You think you are speaking but nothing can be heard, you have no capacity to speak. Were you to possess that capacity we would have heard you.' Now the subalterns speak and assert that they have the capacity and in fact speaking. They say, 'If you are not hearing, the problem is yours. You have no capacity of hearing.' Such new and astute voices are actually negation of the other's own pronouncements that determined the subaltern identity. Subaltern historizing aims at asserting one's own true identity and denying the false identity created viciously by others.

### **Specificity of Subaltern Historizing**

The process of moving ahead from writing of history of/by subalterns to subaltern historizing opens up new vistas, insights and possibilities. It enables/ennobles the subalterns to be truly and authentically humans. Historizing ignores not the past but makes the event happened in individual or community's existential situations as historical and uses these contents linked with the everydayness of their life, for historiography. Historizing differs in its approach and method from the idea of

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<sup>3</sup> K.N. Panikkar, "Alternative Historiographies: Changing Paradigms of Power," in *The Struggle for the Past: Historiography Today* (Chennai: University of Madras, 2002), 17-18.

<sup>4</sup> Jose D. Maliekeal, "Historiographies of/by the Subalterns: Few Methodological Signposts for the Onward Journey," in *Subaltern Perspectives: Philosophizing in Context*, Ed. George Thadathil (Bangalore: ATC Publications, 2005), 76.

<sup>5</sup> George Thadathil, Introduction, *Subaltern Perspectives: Philosophizing in Context*, Ed. George Thadathil (Bangalore: ATC Publications, 2005), 3.

<sup>6</sup> MSSS Pandian, "Kumbakonam Encounters Subaltern Studies," in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 32 (1997) 8, 398-399.

<sup>7</sup> Jacques Puchepadass, "Subaltern Studies as Post Colonial Critique of Modernity," in Sujata Patel, et.al., *Thinking Social Science in India* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2002), 87.

<sup>8</sup> Ashis Nandy, *Time Wraps: The Insistent Politics of Silent and Evasive Pasts*. (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2002), 1.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

history – a dead and monumental past, which is mostly formalised and exhausted, with its records neatly arranged as a museum, to be visited, admired and if needed, re-visited for any reference.

Subaltern historizing is the story of the conquered and the victims more than a passionate analysis of domination and oppression and an outcry, but takes seriously the impact of them in their existential realms of being. For instance, the meaning of the term ‘Dalit’ reflecting the existential situation of subalterns with the experience of being split, torn, broken, destroyed and so on, secondly indicates an assertion that anymore attempt to crush by the dominant would not be allowed.<sup>10</sup> Subaltern historizing is not being historical in the sense of a dead label. It is one of the essential ways of human existence. Subaltern suffering and oppression, their struggle for freedom become historical as far as they exist as historizing which is living the possibilities by a choosing from the given. The possibilities are in the past, the already given.<sup>11</sup>

Historizing is a process of enabling the subalterns to identify themselves as persons, inevitable component of any history making, building up the individuality and the community on one’s rootedness and depth. In such case, looking at history is transformed from just weeping over the past suffering and being proud of the achievements.<sup>12</sup> “The study of the past becomes not merely a conversation with archives, but also the creation of new and unique dialogues with those who live with their distinctive pasts.”<sup>13</sup> Being conscious of one’s own historical roots that provide the fossils of lost identity, subalterns realise that as existing humans creating themselves and their communities as active agents and subjects of history.<sup>14</sup> Subalterns as historizing persons refuse to go along with the treatment of their personhood as objects of history, used, manipulated and exploited by others. Historizing becomes an ability of Subalterns to critically look at the existential givenness as they live their constructions of the past and deploy them creatively towards the future with a renewed understanding of themselves and their situations in order to create their unique identity. It is a creative interpretation of assertion and emancipation.

Subaltern historizing is more than just recognizing the subalterns as subjects. Subalterns historize by their existence. Subaltern historizing then moves beyond the chronological account of life of the individuals and communities, and delves deeper into the ontological sphere of human beings. More than the written records and documents, it depends on the oral and cultural expressions, folk stories, customs, proverbial sayings, religious and spiritual activities, etc. Not only in subaltern cases, even in brahmanical historizing have we found such directions. In the Vedas and Puranas historical myths were created to legitimize some of the prevailing aspects of social and religious life.<sup>15</sup> Most of the claims are from the pre-historical and oral traditions of *Rishis*, *Munis*, *Gurus* etc.

Subaltern historizing is a bunch of creative ventures from the present into the past for the future. Hence, the attempts look more mythical than ‘logical’ and ‘rational.’ “... Time travel to the past is a play with the boundaries of self. This is more so in societies where non-historicised pasts – myths, legends, epics and unofficial memories – predominate, and where clues to the future lie scattered in diverse pasts created by human ingenuity.”<sup>16</sup> As spontaneity of life as creative, is primordial historizing, “it involves mobilising the inner resources and technologies of the self to rework personal and collective biographies, to fathom the present resilience and future potentialities of our selves.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Prakash Louis, *The Political Sociology of Dalit Assertion* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2003), 144-147.

<sup>11</sup> Johnson Puthenpurackal, “Philosophizing from Dalit Perspective,” in *Subaltern Perspectives: Philosophizing in Context*, 37.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>13</sup> Ashis Nandy, *Time Wraps*, 1.

<sup>14</sup> James Massey, *Roots: A Concise History of the Dalits* (Bangalore: Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, 1991), 7.

<sup>15</sup> Priyadarshini Arunajyothi, “Historiographical Critique on the Dalit Movement.” In *Dalits: Assertion for Identity*, ed. Ambrose Pinto (New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1999), 19.

<sup>16</sup> Ashis Nandy, *Time Wraps*, 1.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

Reworking the personal or collective biographies include analytic frames and categories tinged with the experiences of those who withstand the worst of the social and political pathologies of our times. Subaltern historizing envisages for not mere bio-graphies of individuals and communities, but, if we roughly dare to qualify, 'onto-graphies' writing of their selves – creatively envisioned and cherished in and through their struggles and resistance. Then, historizing becomes more than mere text generation tactics, on/of/by Subalterns. It is not again converting and interpreting the data to protect one's own framed socio-religious-cultural theories and to promote their vested interest, as dominant Brahmanical forces always do.<sup>18</sup>

Subaltern historizing treats the unhistoricised pasts as life-defining moments. Contemporary situation makes them share the past historical sensitivities. Constant dialogues with the past and revisiting them thus become a way of accessing their own tacit wisdom, unspoken word and unstated statements of their collective personhood. It is a recovery and an assertion of the self-identity, along with the denial of categories that allowed others to cut their person to fit into. Eventually, historizing comes out as redefining their self and reformulation of their own categories, which accommodates their self and the others very well without suffocation and mutilation.

Subaltern historizing carry alternative formulations of the past and present with passion. There is nothing as 'immutable past.' They are constructed pasts. New formulations are ways of coping up with the past. They are meant to be 'self'-destructive – negation of the subaltern 'self' constructed by dominant forces, a denial of the non-'self.' It is a project of authentic self-construction of one's own. It is a self-congratulatory public discourse, creating a space in the public sphere, a play of self-definitions, gathering identity-fragments with unleashing the potentialities of the subalterns.

## II

### Iyothee Thass: Person and Phenomenon as Historic

Iyothee Thass (1845-1914) is a notable leader of the depressed class to embrace Buddhism. The Adi-Dravida movement in Tamil Nadu has rediscovered its Buddhist roots through Thass. His shift from his *Advaitananda Sabha* (1870) to Buddhism was a search for ideological foundation for emancipation of the downtrodden people. Having been convinced that reviving Tamil Buddhism would give an identity to subaltern and construction of collective consciousness for their empowerment,<sup>19</sup> he founded 'South Indian Sakhya Buddha Sangam,' and later in 1891 established the Dravida Mahajana Sabha. He edited and published a magazine '*Tamizhan*.' *Puttaratu Adhivedam* (1912) was his *magnum opus*, written to explain Buddhism to new converts. His *Indirar Desa Charithiram* (1931) narrates a new history that India came to be known as Bharat even before the advent of the Aryans and Buddhism was the religion of the rulers of this country. Thass as an enlightened person led oppressed people to embrace Buddhism in order to gain freedom from slavery and serfdom.<sup>20</sup> Later following Thass, Lakshmi Narasu, (1860-1934) has contributed to Neo Buddhism, as Engaged Buddhism, in the socio cultural situations. After these efforts, Tamil Nadu had witnessed the dawn of modern subaltern consciousness even before the emergence of Ambedkarian movement. After 40 years of Tamil Buddhist movement of Thass, Ambedkar popularized Neo-Buddhism in the North, namely *navayana* Buddhism. In many ways, Thass was a forerunner of Ambedkar.<sup>21</sup> "K. Ayothi Doss'... Buddhist Revival Movement in Tamil Nadu predates B.R. Ambedkar's Neo-Buddhist Movement in Maharashtra and his service in this direction and the publication of Tamil Books and periodicals of his movement deserve elaborate research and investigation."<sup>22</sup> The Oppressed groups in Tamil country had been politically mobilized by leaders such as Thass and Rettaimalai Srinivasan (1860-1945, who attended the Round Table Conference

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>19</sup> Gawthama Sannah, *Ka. Ayothidasa Pandithar* (in Tamil) (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2007), 37.

<sup>20</sup> D.C. Ahir, *Buddhism in South India* (Delhi: Satguru Publications, 1992), 149.

<sup>21</sup> Thirumaavalavan, *Uproot Hindutva: The Fiery Voice of the Liberation Panthers* (Kolkata: Samya, 2004), 227.

Although in writings of Ambedkar we do not have any direct reference to Thass, Ambedkar wrote preface to Narasu's book *The Essence of Buddhism*.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

with Ambedkar) and M.C. Rajah (1883-1947).<sup>23</sup> Though Iyothē Thass died before Periyar entered the political scene, the Dalits had become a political and intellectual force to reckon with much before the non-Brahmin, non-Dalit bloc had found its political moorings.<sup>24</sup> With him a new interest in Buddhism penetrated below the intellectual level to become an interest of some lower caste groups and as predicted by Lakshmi Narasu in *The Essence of Buddhism* in 1907 a popular revival of Buddhism in India began.<sup>25</sup>

What interests us in our discussion on subaltern historizing is Thass' interpretation of Buddhism in our times, as 'Neo-Casteless-Dravidian Buddhism.'<sup>26</sup> His *Puttaratu Adhivedam* (1912), in 28 chapters, contains basic teachings of Buddha and he claims it to be 'Light of Ancient Tamil – *purva tamizh oli*.'<sup>27</sup> His *Indirar Desa Charithiram* (1931)<sup>28</sup> explains that 'India' is derived from 'Indirar.' It is a history of India. Buddha is called *Indirar* – originally as *Aindirar* – a controller of five senses. India is a land of the Buddha. Those who followed *Indirar* are called 'Indians.'<sup>29</sup> The Buddha created scripts for *Pali, Sanskrit and Tamil*, sent his disciples to all the countries to preach *Dhammam* and Buddha *dhammam* was the religion, ethics and culture of all in the country. All who followed *Dhammam* were called *yathartha Brahmanas* – real Brahmins. One thousand seven hundred years passed after *parinirvana of Buddha* when the *Melechars* (Aryans) invaded the country, learnt the *Dhammam* for their survival, later called themselves as *brahmanas* (actually they are *vesa brahmanas* – false brahmins), interpreted the tenets of *Dhammam* as their own and suppressed the *purva Buddhists*.<sup>30</sup> They called the names of the indigenous people like *paraiyars*, and the people as untouchables.<sup>31</sup>

In fact, these are very tall claims. The empirical evidences and the correctness of the information are certainly lacking. He quotes few sources like *Narathiya Purana Sangait Telivu*, which was lost in his times itself. While he refers to several ancient Tamil texts and interprets them accordingly, he depends on many oral traditions, which are now not referable. In over-enthusiastic Thass to show that oppressed society had a glorious past, there are certainly exaggerations in making historical claims and strange interpretations of certain facts. All the same, there is more than these non-verifiable historical data, in as far as historizing is concerned. As a case for an emancipatory project through a specific subaltern historizing, in the following paragraphs we would deal specially on few claims as signposts; such as Adi-Dravidas as original inhabitants of the land, *Paraiyars* as ancient Buddhists,<sup>32</sup> as more morally and spiritually civilized community than *vesa brahmanas*, ancient Indian past having plural roots etc.

### **Adi-Dravida as Purva-Buddhists: Reclaiming Identity**

Thass' project is seen in the context of his engagement of Buddhist revivalism. Revival of Buddhism is placed in the context of general revivalist trend in colonial India as an adequate response to modernity of the times. Starting from the Vedic revivalism in the North and Tamil Śaiva-Vaishna

<sup>23</sup> G. Rengaraju, *Temple Entry Politics in Colonial Tamil Nadu* (Chennai: Pavai Publications, 2006), 121.

<sup>24</sup> Refer; V. Geetha, *Towards a Non-Brahmin Millennium: From Iyothē Thass to Periyar*. Kolkatta: Bhatkal & Sen., 2001; V. Geetha, *Re-making the Past: Iyothē Thass Pandithar and Modern Tamil Historiography*; Bergunder, Michael. "Anti-Brahmanical and Hindu nationalist reconstructions of Indian prehistory." <http://www.theologie.uni-hd.de/rm/online-artikel/bergunder-2004-contested-past>. accessed on 29/09/2009.

<sup>25</sup> N.K. Singh, *Contemporary Indian Buddhism: Tradition and Transformation* (New Delhi: Global Vision Publishing House, 2008), 5.

<sup>26</sup> Iyothē Thass, *Iyothēthasar Sinthanaigal – Thoughts of Iyothē Thass (Tamil)*, Vol.I, ed., G. Aloysius (Palayamkottai: Folklore Resources and Research Centre, 1999), 204 & 227

<sup>27</sup> Sannah, Ka. *Ayothidasa Pandithar*, 61.

<sup>28</sup> Thass, *Iyothēthasar Sinthanaigal – Thoughts of Iyothē Thass (Tamil)*, Vol.I, 600-679.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 600.

<sup>30</sup> Raj Gowthaman, Ka. *Ayothithasar Aaivugal – Essays on Pandit Ayothithasar (Tamil)*, (Nagercoil: Kalachuvadu pathippagam, 2007), 116-117.

<sup>31</sup> For short summary of this book, Refer Sannah, Ka. *Ayothidasa Pandithar*, 62-63.

<sup>32</sup> Thass, *Iyothēthasar Sinthanaigal – Thoughts of Iyothē Thass (Tamil)*, Vol.I, 142-146. Thass brought forth nine proofs regarding his assertion that *parayars* were Dravida Buddhists. Interestingly it is noted that even Maraimalai Atikal was said to be viewing Buddhism as a religion of Tamils. Cf. A. Mariappan, "Buddhist Themes in Modern Tamil Writings," in *Buddhism in Tamil Nadu: Collected Papers* (Chennai: Institute of Asian Studies, 1998), 403. Refer Maraimalai Atikal, *Tamilar Matam – Religion of Tamils* (in Tamil), (Tirunelveli: SISS, 1941), 147-148.

revivalism, there had been attempts of securely seeking refuge in the traditional belief systems, philosophical traditions and ideologies, to assert one's own identity and to create a nationalist spirit. Largely it was engineered in terms of Brahmanical hierarchical elitist ideology, at least as criticised by Tamil Dravidian movements, in their own context.<sup>33</sup> While such revivalism looked to reassert the hierarchical caste structure, Thass was convinced of revivalism of Buddhism as counter movement and as subaltern emancipatory project. Thass attempted to make a shift in focus in subaltern consciousness, from a consciousness of oppression and dehumanization to a consciousness of emancipation and specific identity.

His strenuous effort in converting the depressed classes to Buddhism and establishing Sakhya Sangams and *Viharas* - Buddhist worship places in then-Madras and in Kolar, are only to prove that Buddhism is a category of change, not just a revolt against for something. He saw Buddha as a gracious and great moral teacher.<sup>34</sup> Thass' emphasizing on the ethical perspective of Buddhism is for constructing a consciousness for the subalterns. To remove the widespread social stigma of immorality, impurity and illiteracy imposed on to them, his proposal of Buddhism as the religion of the ancient Tamils particularly that of the Depressed Classes is noteworthy. He supported his thesis with documentation and interpreted Tamil Literatures from this angle.<sup>35</sup> He placed Buddhist ethics against the background of Vedic Brahmanical and Śaiva Bhakti revivalism. By this Thass prepared a strong base for the subalterns to fight against oppression.<sup>36</sup> His presentation of Buddhism as pre-vedic needs to be further explored into as an antithesis of Vedantic claim/construction of Buddhism as anti-vedic.

Thass' move to urge the Government to register the so-called untouchables as 'casteless Dravidians' in the first Census (1881) is towards restoring their indigenous pre-Vedic, pre-Hindu identity and establishing Adi-Dravidas as Tamil Buddhists. In any identity, the process of self-understanding and self-defining play an important role as it addresses the existential question of one's being, providing meaning to one's existence.<sup>37</sup> Thass never used the term Dalit although Mahatma Jotirao Phule (1829-90) used it before him. He preferred '*Adi-dravida*' and '*parayars*' to terms like '*dalit*' and '*shudra*.' However, he used frequently low-castes, depressed class, untouchables, *haryans* and *shudras* only in places of reference as called by the *vesa brahmanas* and the government. In directly addressing them he deliberately called them as *Bauddha Brahmanas*, *Yathartha Brahmanas*, *Adi-dravida*, *Pazham kudigal*, *Baudha viveka kudigal* etc. While constructing a specific identity through religious/cultural terms of Buddhism, he emphatically used '*parayars*' as the drummers, in reference to what they are and what they do. It is a specific identity and their own - not in reference to somebody else. In giving an etymological meaning of '*parayan*' – one who beats the drum, *parai*; he asserts implicitly '*parayan*' is the one who beats his mouths, who speaks, proclaims. *Parayars* are proclaimers of *dhammam*, ethical principles.<sup>38</sup> Iyothee Thass is a case of Adi-Dravida historizing, pointing to the significance of the everydayness in life and society, bringing to surface the concerns of the oppressed and initiating a process of building a new people. Even though his account of the discovery of the *parayar* past was not chronological, and therefore dismissed as unhistorical and mythical, it was a cultural project, a project to recover and invest *Parayars* with history and to draw trans-historical moral values from the past to make a moral claim about the present, so as to critique the Brahmanical hegemony.<sup>39</sup>

In claims on the past through re-reading and interpreting Tamil antiquity, Thass rendered an account that Aryans were 'outsiders,' emphasizing on the story of the conquered, the 'Dravidian Buddhists.' He rendered the account of the conquered with a claim of moral superiority. Thass asserts their identity as Dravida Buddhists, once high in social status but later termed as low castes.<sup>40</sup> South

<sup>33</sup> MSS. Pandian, *Brahmin & Non-Brahmin: Genealogies of the Tamil Political Present* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2007), 3.

<sup>34</sup> Anbu Ponnoviyam, foreword, *Iyothethasar Sinthanaigal – Thoughts of Iyothee Thass (Tamil)*, Vol.I., xlv.

<sup>35</sup> S. Perumal, "Revival of Tamil Buddhism: A Historical Survey," in *Buddhism in Tamil Nadu: Collected Papers*, 530.

<sup>36</sup> N. Muthumohan, *Marxiya Katturaigal – Essays on Marxism* (Chennai: Kavaya, 2007), 1091-1092.

<sup>37</sup> Prakash Louish, "The Meaning of Subaltern," in *Subaltern Perspectives*, 66.

<sup>38</sup> Thass, *Iyothethasar Sinthanaigal – Thoughts of Iyothee Thass (Tamil)*, Vol.1., 34.

<sup>39</sup> Pandian, *Brahmin & Non-Brahmin*, 111-112.

Indian Dravida Buddhist considered the invading Aryans as aliens and polluting their dwelling places.<sup>41</sup> For him, the ancient Dravidian Buddhist society had many categories of people with specific names, of course, not in terms of vedic (*vesha*) brahmanical categorization of division of society, but based on purely the division of labour based on *Buddha-Dhamma*. In Thass' writings, we find a overvaluing of the productive labour constantly spent in the society, where as the occupations of priesthood, is undervalued.<sup>42</sup> It was Buddhists who developed many arts.<sup>43</sup> Indigenous Dravidians are labour oriented, producing people.<sup>44</sup>

In search for a specific identity - which is actually a lost, forgotten, erased identity - subalterns recourse to Buddhism is justifiably a historizing moment, as tenets of Buddhism are compatible with ancient Tamil/Dravidian antiquity. It is evident from the period of *Tolkappiyam* through all *cankam* classical Tamil literature. Learning from the historical success of Saiva-Vaishnava strategy on equating and claiming over Tamil language, literature, grammar, folklore and history, Thass juxtaposed the subaltern culture with Buddhism. To his support he had Buddhist teachings prevalent in *cankam* literatures, Tamil classics like *Manimekalai*. He interpreted all other classical Tamil literatures, *Tirukkural* and *Atticuvati* as Buddhist works from this angle.<sup>45</sup> Refuting the claim that Lord Śiva was the originator of Tamil, Thass considered that Buddha was the one who assumed the name Śiva and created Tamil.

He had lots of support of oral traditions in his claims on *parayar* past, during a period when oral traditions were not considered to be authentic and scientific. "For those at the peripheries of the nation, memory is their very mode of human survival and sustenance, in the struggle of the everydayness, in the hope of the fulfilment of their dreams. For them, history is in/of the future."<sup>46</sup> As Guha himself says since their culture is oral and leave no written documents, there is no alternative but to get to the accounts of popular rebellion.<sup>47</sup> Such view surely justifies Thass' extensive use of oral traditions for his claims.

### Implications of Adi-Dravida Historizing

1) With his commitment to work at the gross roots level, with the real life of people it is a reassertion of 'parayar self' from a world of bondage and oppression. Assertion of depressed class, through Government, with a name 'Adi-Dravida' 'casteless Dravidians' – realistic name identifying them separately as a community,<sup>48</sup> is clearly a moment of historizing. As 'adi' or 'purva' or 'pazham' do not solely refer to a chronological priority but of ontological priority, it implies that subaltern are original people, primordial, uncontaminated, essentially human with their touch of the earth, spontaneity in expression, genuineness in relationship, peace and joy of life. They exist and historize as genuine humans and are the real 'subjects' of history.<sup>49</sup> The *Adi Dravidas*, *Purva Buddhists*, *Pazham Thamizhar* are down to earth people, high in moral values, spontaneous and creative proclaimers of *Dhammam*. They are authentic humans and real subjects of history.

2) Due to various factors, the teachings of Iyothee Thass did not get due attention among the scholars.<sup>50</sup> The movement of Thass did not get prominence and gain a socio-political space in the history of Tamil nadu. Tamil Buddhism remained a construct, conceptual framework, like that of

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<sup>40</sup> Thass, *Iyotheethasar Sinthanaigal – Thoughts of Iyothee Thass (Tamil)*, Vol.I, 132.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 36 and 128. Thass gave an account of a custom among the downtrodden, *parayars*, to purify the places polluted by Aryans, with cow dung and water.

<sup>42</sup> Thass, *Iyotheethasar Sinthanaigal – Thoughts of Iyothee Thass (Tamil)*, Vol. 1. xxx.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol.II, 545.

<sup>44</sup> Gowtham, Ka. *Ayothithasar Aavugal – Essays on Pandit Ayothithasar*, 114.

<sup>45</sup> Thass, *Iyotheethasar Sinthanaigal – Thoughts of Iyothee Thass (Tamil)*, Vol.II, 10.

<sup>46</sup> Maliekal, "Historiographies of /by the Subalterns," 74.

<sup>47</sup> R. Guha, ed. "The Prose of Counter-Insurgency," in *Subaltern Studies II* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), 1-42.

<sup>48</sup> Ref. Iyothee Thass, *Iyotheethasar Sinthanaigal – Thoughts of Iyothee Thass (Tamil)*, Vol.III, 2.

<sup>49</sup> Johnson Puthenpurackal, "Philosophizing from Dalit Perspective," 39-40.

<sup>50</sup> G. Aloysius, ed., Intro. *Iyotheethasar Sinthanaigal – Thoughts of Iyothee Thass (Tamil)*, Vol.III, xi.

‘Hindu’ or ‘Tamil Saiva’ constructs, the only difference being the former was not successful politically and culturally as the latter. Nevertheless, Thass’ subaltern project was definitely carried on directly and indirectly by self-respect movement, Dravidian movement and even later Ambedkarian Neo-Buddhist movement. Self-Respect movement has been a Tamil Renaissance movement, with pure Tamil agenda, of scissoring the effects of Sanskritization from Tamil language and culture. Has it been able to successfully contest Tamil identity to emerge and to assume a political meaning and significance, the credit goes to Thass. Self-Respect and Self-esteem of the oppressed promoted by Thass in the emergence and triumph of Dravidian-Tamil consciousness could never be underestimated. It was a radical phase of the Non-Brahmin movement as a response to the politics of piety. Self-Respecters were always opposed to the holy alliance of caste, religion and nationalism. Self-Respect Movement creatively articulated a creed of *samadharmā* as a counter to *manudharma*.<sup>51</sup>

3) A determination to oppose outright the religious orthodoxy of Brahmanism, did not wrongly lead Thass to be considered non-religious. For him religious symbols are influential and authoritative. By reclaiming Buddhist religious identity, he created a new world of symbols and meaning, worldviews and ideologies. The construction of different worldview and religious identity happen in concrete living situations. The unjust, inhuman and oppressive caste structure stimulates the aspiration for constructing distinctive identity. Iyothē Thass projected ethical and philosophical ideals of freedom, equality and self-worth and proposed a socio-political philosophy of rights, power, equality and justice. It was possible for him through Tamil Buddhism, though unsuccessful.

4) The ‘Indian past’ which was a core issue of discussion, was approached and interpreted differently: a) English-educated reformists brushed aside it as mere uncivilized, superstitious, mythical and non-rational entity; b) Enthusiastic revivalists and Indian nationalists took pride in the glorious Vedic Indian antiquity. Iyothē Thass offered a third approach to Indian past which was never monolithic but characterized by a dialectical mixture of two major traditions, *Brahmanical* and *Sramanical*. The former had beliefs, spirituality and casteism as the foundations of society whereas the latter has rationalism, justice and equality as the foundations.<sup>52</sup> Approach and methodology of Thass were of a specific cultural critique of Indian history, culture and society. Thass opposed the move of Brahmanical nationalist leaders, as supported by British Oriental scholars, to project caste based society of *sanadhana* Hindu religion as the only monolithic Indian antiquity. He challenged the proposition that Hindu religion was ancient and emphasized the fact that Hinduism was a construct in the British period. Following Thass many scholars and critics of contemporary ‘*Hindutva*’ have arrived at a conclusion that ‘Hinduism’ was a discovery of the British and has been a cultural politics of the hegemonic Brahmanism, with less ‘religious’ than ‘political’ aspects.<sup>53</sup>

5) Recovering *Pazham kudi Tamizhar* and *Adi-Dravida* identity, the textual evidences in Tamil classical literature show the moment of historizing. The *sangam* literature ranging from 500 BCE to 300 CE describes how Nature is framed as the background of human behaviour and emotions in poetry.<sup>54</sup> *Akam* and *Puram* texts deal with ‘interior’ and ‘exterior’ human experiences. Interestingly as noted by Mu. Varatharasan, although Tamils have given so great a place for Nature in the literature, there is no mention of a term ‘*iyarkai*,’ or any equivalent term.<sup>55</sup> The interpretation of such non-mention of a particular term for Nature is rendered as ancient Tamils gave a non-exclusive treatment for Nature that they do not consider nature as something different from them. They have been infused with it that they regarded it as part of human nature. It also goes to an understanding that feelings of human hearts and the beauty of nature are so intertwined that ancient Tamils have

<sup>51</sup> Refer; V. Geetha and S.V. Rajadurai, *Towards a Non-Brahmin Millennium: From Iyothē Thass to Periyar*. Kolkatta: Bhatkal & Sen., 2001.

<sup>52</sup> G. Aloysius, ed., Intro. *Iyothēthasar Sinthanaigal – Thoughts of Iyothē Thass (Tamil)*, Vol.III, xi.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii-xiv.

<sup>54</sup> Xavier S. Thani Nayagam, *Landscape and Poetry* (Chennai: International Institute of Tamil Studies, 1997), 2-3.

<sup>55</sup> Mu. Varatharasan, *Pazhatamizh Illakkiyatil Iyarkkai – Nature in Ancient Tamil Literature* (in Tamil), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chennai: Pari Nilayam, 2006), 21. ‘*Iyarkkai*’ is the Tamil term for ‘Nature,’ which etymologically means that which is by its own essential substance, ‘*iyalpaka ullatu*.’ Refer, Devaneyya Pavanar, *Sollaratchi Katturaikal-Research Essays on ‘word’* (Chennai: Tamizh Mann Publications, 2003), 12-13.

forgotten that there is something out there.<sup>56</sup> The appreciation of nature arose not just out of interest to be associated with human events but to be viewed as the seeding ground for human emotion and action to emerge.

The ancient Tamils had conception of the world as ‘*nanilam*’ comprising of four types of lands.<sup>57</sup> As in *Tolkappiyam*, the landscape is divided into only four, namely *kurinci* (mountaneous), *mullai* (forest), *marutam* (farm land) and *neital* (coastal).<sup>58</sup> The fifth one, *palai* (dry land) is derived from *Kurinci* and *Mullai*. Pluralistic conception of reality in Tamil tradition has its foundation in such an interaction of nature and human mind. In the classical Tamil literature nature is portrayed as directly involving in the life of the humans and influencing the human living and thought patterns.<sup>59</sup> All the descriptions of Nature and its surroundings in both *akam* and *puram* poems deliberately speak of the intertwining of human life with that of nature. All these external aspects of Nature are very much reflected as the internal human aspects. The external material world, according to classical Tamil tradition, participates in the world of humans.<sup>60</sup> Such correlation adds strength to Thass’ claim of ancient Tamils as ‘original’ people of the earth.

6) Subalterns as historizing humans display rich variety of values in their life. Celebrating life in all its stages, be it pregnancy, child birth, puberty, marriage, death. Affirmation of life as dynamic and energetic is central to their philosophy. Their celebrations are mostly communitarian in nature. Whole community participates in the joys and sorrow of the individuals. It is typically displayed in *parayar* community as a dance in the funeral procession as a symbol of celebrating and honouring the deceased for what he/she had been in life. In understanding their Deities too, subalterns are unique. The Deities were once human who lived for the welfare of the community. It is the practice in subaltern culture to elevate human to Godly status. Deities protect their life from oppression and bless their labour and the nature for sustenance. They do not expect their deity to do things in unnatural or super natural ways. They journey together with people undergoing similar experiences. Subaltern culture of multiple colours in everything of their life reflects their connectedness to nature. The contemporary phenomenon of politics of colour gets reflected in the brutalizing saffron colour as a symbolic of the Hindutva ideology validates the caste hierarchy. In contrast to dehumanizing nature of the food culture and dress code of Brahmanism, Dalit communities dwell in the realm of science of wearing clothes and the aesthetic values of beauty.<sup>61</sup>

7) In critically analysing the fact of oppression and subjugation, subalterns’ quality of accommodation and acceptance along with their innocence comes out evidently. In contrast to the understanding of powerful dominant forces pushing them to the lower status, it is subaltern generosity and magnanimity to willingly and voluntarily giving in and accepting the others that leads them to such subservient status. The vehement opposition and resistance send this message clearly that if not willing they cannot be suppressed. Sometimes the general forgiving and reconciliation attitudes are taken for granted as powerlessness and dependency. Extending further cause for resistance beyond mere natural reaction to dominant forces, it is a basic human survival instinct to protect and safeguard one’s life and identity. It is a historizing in every resistance movement of the subalterns. In *Indirar Desa Charithiram*, Thass brings out clearly *Paraiyar* community’s resistance to invading brahmanical people.

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<sup>56</sup> Varatharasan, *Pazhatamizh Illakkiyatil Iyarkkai – Nature in Ancient Tamil Literature*, 21.

<sup>57</sup> M. Shanmugam Pillai, *Caṅkat Tamilar Valviyal – Philosophy of Life of Cankam Tamils* (Chennai: International institute of Tamil Studies, 1997), 212.

<sup>58</sup> *mullai kurinci marutam neitalenac coliya muraiyal colavum patume.*” *Tol. Porul*. 5. For an elaborate study on this, refer to Vallabadoss John Peter, “Philosophical Insights from a ‘non-philosophical’ *Tolkāppiyam*.” in *Indigenous Philosophizing: Indian Horizons*, ed. Saju Chackalakal. Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2010. 495-510.

<sup>59</sup> Ti. Su. Natarasan, “Tamizh Marapil Azhakiyal – Aesthetics in Tamil Tradition,” in *Tamizhar Cinthanai Marabu – Philosophical Tradition of Tamils*, ed., Deva Perinban (Chennai: Tenaka Aivu Maiyam, 2008), 61.

<sup>60</sup> Mu. Varatharasan, *Pazhatamizh Illakkiyatil Iyarkkai – Nature in Ancient Tamil Literature*, 45. Further, Varatharasan argues in the pages 45-52, that in classical Tamil literature human life is centric where the description of the nature serves only as a background and setting. Nature takes only the secondary position in the literature. Humanistic aspects emerge prominently in them.

<sup>61</sup> Ilaiah, Kancha. *Post-Hindu India: A Discourse on Dalit-Bahujan, Socio-Spiritual and Scientific Revolution*. (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2009), 73-74.

8) The labour-culture of the subalterns springs from their valuing the human manual power in contributing to the welfare of the humanity. It is a sheer contrast to lazy, luxury, non-productive leisurely culture of Brahmins. In *Parayar* community leather is vital for making drums. Processing of leather with keen techno-economic, proto-scientific process and creative philosophy is achieved by experimenting, proving and disproving until a common theoretical formula could emerge. People used their memory to transmit the formula to future generation verbally, as oral tradition. In subaltern culture song, music and dance are organic expressions of the process of labour and production. Work and song, *pani* and *pattu*, are part of life. Song and dance became a part of human existence. They are meant to lighten the burden of work and to re-energize people so that they could get back to creative and productive work once again. They are cultural instruments emerged in the productive communities and are part of organic process of expression of human productivity and creativity. The playing of the *Dappu* or *parai* (drum) is a collective process. It produces a melodious sound that spreads across the vast area, making the social atmosphere very sacred and sensitized. Used as an instrument of public announcements, *Dandora*, and as a tool of mass communication, especially of festivities or death of someone in the village, it calls for social participation. *Dappu* becomes a social mobilizer, an instiller of the energy lost in the routine work of production and reproduction, relieving people of their physical fatigue and mental stress. Everyone is to come back to life as production and procreation are fundamental and necessary part of life.<sup>62</sup> Thus, subaltern historizing in Thass' *Indirar Desa Charithiram* records the cherished heritage of the original humans.

### Conclusion

Subaltern historizing is a history of negating the 'self' constructed by others and restoring the negated authentic self. In the wake of human survival and sustenance, in the struggle of the everydayness, Thass had a wild dream, different dream of creating a way of restoring their dignity, self-respect and identity. He created a force against those who claim to be exclusive creators and controllers of history. As subjects of history subalterns author their own history, not remain mere objects of history. In Iyothee Thass, the forgotten historical content of *Adidravidas* is revisited narrating the story of the glorious era. It is a historic excavation of a ruined site, uncared, buried, dilapidated and conveniently or purposely neglected. The case of Iyothee Thass in *Indirar Desa Charitiram*, once an unnoticed signpost of subaltern historizing, is renovated and re-erected as a beacon today. Along with a cry against victimization and an analysis of domination and oppression, Thass' project of subaltern historizing is towards emancipation and identity making. In it, Thass is not merely tracing the historical roots of *Adi Dravidas* but pleads his fellowmen to be rooted in their identity. Thass emphasized greatly that present day so-called downtrodden, '*parayars*' were ancient Buddhists.

In Iyothee Thass one feels the subaltern speaking in and through the literary expressions. Thass established a genuine empowering history for the subaltern. He aims at not only to expose the cunningness of *vesha brahmanas*, but attempts at invalidating all their claims of supremacy. The existential situation of the *Paraiya* community is of subalternity. He takes that as given, but moves ahead towards a future for emancipation. Emancipation is by using the category of reclaiming the original. Thass made strenuous efforts in constructing a collective consciousness for the subalterns as '*purva buddhist*' and as original Tamils. He stressed the point on originality of the people. They are the original inhabitants of the land. Thass moves forward from the actual givenness, not projected givenness, the givenness as interpreted from the non-Dravidians. It is a 'reclaiming' from the inherited possibilities. The historical already, is taken for projecting the possibilities of extending oneself beyond their givenness.

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 32- 45.

## Historizing of the Tribals

- Mathias Toppo

*Although we have very few written documents available to us, we affirm that tribals too have their history. The past available record reveals us that most of the writings on them are by the non-tribals. However, these writings are only the late versions. Otherwise the culture and tradition of tribals have always come to us in oral form. Tribals passed them on orally from one generation to another. How do we come to know about tribals, their life and history? It is through their life and culture. Tribals historize by their very life. Their basic ways of historizing are through lokakatha, lokageeta and paintings-carvings. These are the mediums by which tribals have kept their history alive and passed it on through generations. Even today these things are found among them. They continue to carry them on. Hence we observe that tribals' historizing is very particular to them. Of late, they have also begun to write about themselves.*

### Introduction

Every group of people has its history and the tribals are no exception. Historizing may differ from person to person, but the manifestation or evidence of an event can never be denied. Through our observation we may comment on, who actually writes or makes history. It is the elite group which has the power, money and the means to make history. Having the power in their hand, these people may even have their preference in producing history, focusing only on the high class and neglecting the downtrodden. Sometimes they may also distort the facts and present them in a different manner for the sake of their maximum benefits.

Tribals are indigenous people. They belong to the primitive tribes. They have their own identity. They have maintained it in the long run of their tradition and culture. That is the reason even today they can easily be distinguished from non-tribals. They are easily recognized or identified by their way of living. Their life style itself makes them distinct from non-tribals. Since, the tribals differ from the non-tribals in their way of living or through their life style they also differ in their historizing. One way of their historizing is from life itself. They make their history from their life. Thus, their history can also be considered as life history. I affirm this because their life style has not much changed. They are very traditional. Their tradition and culture are yet very much alive.

Here in this paper, our main focus is on the historizing of the tribals. Hence, we would like to ask a basic question, 'How have the tribals ever historized their history and even today they continue to do so? Or what is the way or means of their historizing?' But before we focus on this point it is always good to know first a little bit of their history and then to point out some of the foundational means or ways of the historizing of the tribals. Thus, our prime task would be to find out how did the history of the tribals pass from one generation to another? In this line we would like to explore some of the basic and common means or mediums of the historizing of the tribals like *lokasahitya* (literature of the people): *lokakatha* (folklore), *lokageeta* (folksong), paintings –carvings etc.

### 1. History/origin of the Tribes in India

Tribes are aborigines or the indigenous people who first settled in the continents of Africa, America, Asia and Australia. Now they are found in the world wide. In the Indian context they are known as 'Adivasis', which means the first settlers of the soil. Stephen Fuchs, the anthropologist

calls them 'primitive tribes or adivasis'.<sup>1</sup> In the census of 2001, the tribal population of India numbering 80 million was recorded as Scheduled Tribes, which are 8% of the total population of India. They are divided into 692 recognized ethnic groups. But besides them, there are about three million aboriginal tribes which are not yet put into the category of Scheduled Tribes of India.<sup>2</sup>

Indian tribals can be classified on the basis of different aspects like territorial distribution, linguistic affiliation, physical and racial characteristics, occupation, cultural contact, and religious beliefs.<sup>3</sup> We will not go into details of all these classifications. Let us take one of them to have a general idea of the group or division of the tribals in India. On the basis of territorial distribution, we can divide the tribals of India into three regions- i) The Northern and North-Eastern zone ii) The Central or Middle zone and iii) The Southern zone. The tribals who come under the first zone are found in the states of Assam, Manipur, Tripura, Kashmir, Eastern Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland. The tribals who come under the second zone are found in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Bharat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, and Chotanagpur Plateau<sup>4</sup>. The tribals who come under the third zone are found in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu. Besides, we can also keep the tribals of Andamans and Nicobar islands in the fourth zone.<sup>5</sup> Of late, many tribals are migrating from one place to another, from one zone to another. Hence, there is no territorial restriction or barrier. For example, many tribals from Chotanagpur can be found in Assam who went to work in the tea gardens. They have settled there.

We have varied opinions on the origin or history of the tribes or 'adivasis'. We do not have enough writings or documents which provide us with absolute certainty. In the opinion of Fuchs, the anthropologist, almost all the tribes of North-East India have close racial links with the hill tribes of the vast region that extends from Tibet to Indo-China.<sup>6</sup> This helps us to guess that the tribes of this zone might have migrated or come from China, Tibet and Mongolia. But yet nothing can be said for certain. It is still difficult to know the origin of the tribals of the Central zone of India. We hardly have any written documents of their ancient past. We depend so much on mythical interpretations.<sup>7</sup> Various present jungle tribes of South India are probably descendents of Palaeolithic groups. It is said that most of the tribes belong to the Proto-Australoid race, except some who got mixed with different races.<sup>8</sup> In the words of Fuchs, "The Andamanese aborigines came to the islands from Burma many centuries ago when the islands were probably still connected with Burma by land."<sup>9</sup> It is also said that some migrated from India itself. To talk about all the tribes of India is too vast an area to cover. Hence, in our paper, we shall restrict ourselves only to the 'adivasis' or tribes of Chotanagpur.

## **2. History/ Origin of Chotanagpur *adivasi* tribes**

We shall limit ourselves only to the history or origin of some of the major tribes or 'adivasis' of Chotanagpur. According to Mahali L. Tirkey,

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<sup>1</sup> Mahali Livins Tirkey, "Historical Roots of the Tribals and their struggle for survival", in *Enigma of Indian Tribal Life and Culture*, ed. Vincent Aind, (Bangaluru: ATC, 2009), 23.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 25. The term 'Tribes' refers to *adivasis* or tribals.

<sup>3</sup> Nadeem Hasnain, *Tribal India* (Lucknow: New Royal Book Company, 2007), 21.

<sup>4</sup> Chotanagpur plateau includes Jharkhand, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, and West Bengal.

<sup>5</sup> Nadeem Hasnain, *Tribal India*, 22-23.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Fuchs, *The Aboriginal Tribes of India*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (New Delhi: Inter-India Publications, 1992), 202.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 132-133.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 234.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 275.

The major *adivasi* tribals of Chotanagpur are Santals, Oraons, Mundas, Kharias, Hos, Korwas and Asurs. They are divided into two groups by scholars-1) the Kolarian and 2) the Dravidian. The Kolarian group includes the Mundas, Santals, Hos, Kharias, Korwas, and Asurs. They have linguistic affinity and the austic accent in their pronunciation. It is for this reason the linguists put them in one group...the early Europeans who first came in contact with these aboriginals called them *Coles or Coolee* (labourer) and from this association of terms George Campbell appears to have coined the name Kolarian which we normally do not find in the history books of ancient India. Instead the historians prefer to use the term "Munda race"; this name we find being used also in the Vedic literature written between c.1500 BC-1400 BC. The Oraons of Chotanagpur are put by scholars in the Dravidian family because of the linguistic affinity of the Oraons' mother tongue *Kurux (Kunruk)*<sup>10</sup> with other Dravidian languages like Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, etc.<sup>11</sup>

After this brief sketch of the major tribals of Chotanagpur, let's now briefly talk about them individually. Traditionally, it is believed by Mundas and Oraons that their ancestors were once upon a time the masters of Rohtasgarh. About 600 BC-400 BC, they migrated from there to Chotanagpur.<sup>12</sup> According to S. C. Roy, ethnographer, the Mundas or Kolarian tribes originally lived in the mountain ranges of Aravali and Vindhayan, Later one group of Mundas moved to the east and reached Assam, the rest of them settled in Chotanagpur.<sup>13</sup> The ancestors of the Kharias formerly settled between Rohtas and Patna. After a quarrel with their relations, they fled into the jungles and wandered till they came to the Koel river. It is also said that they might have fallen back south from the Gangetic provinces, passed through the Vindhyan range and came to the southeastern watershed of Chutia Nagpur (present Chotanagpur).<sup>14</sup>

The Hos do not have any tradition of their origin or migration. They acknowledge themselves to be the members of the Munda family of Chutia Nagpur (Chotanagpur).<sup>15</sup> They are found in Singbhum, Chaibasa and Kolhan territory<sup>16</sup> of Jharkhand state. The Korwas are one of the tribes of Kolarian race or Munda tribe. They are found in Sirguja (Surguja), Jashpur and Palamau highlands. They have passed from Vindhyan to the Satpura range. They are said to be the lords of the soil.<sup>17</sup>

To the Asurs the epithet of Nag or serpent is frequently applied as found in some sacred writings.<sup>18</sup> We have different opinions about the Asurs. According to Ranendra, the Asurs of Jharkhand were present in the period between the Paleolithic age and the Iron Age. They developed the art of melting iron and also building houses. The remnants of their forts can still be seen in different places. According to Veerottam, the Asurs lived in buildings. They had their own villages. The remnant of Bichna village in Khunti (Jharkhand) is believed to be a castle or fort of the Asurs.<sup>19</sup> The

<sup>10</sup> The term '*kunruk*' / '*Kurux*' refers to the mother tongue of the Oraons (*Kunrkhar*). It is also presented by another word '*kurukh*'. By the way these all terms stand for the same reality. They are synonyms.

<sup>11</sup> Mahali Livins Tirkey, "Historical Roots of the Tribals and their struggle for survival", in *Enigma of Indian Tribal Life and Culture*, 26-27.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

<sup>13</sup> S. C. Roy, *Mundas and Their Country* (Calcutta: The City Book Society, 1912), 26-27. See also in Christopher A. B. Tirkey, *Aadim Dharam Ek Parichay* (Jabalpur: Hindi Theological Literature Committee, 1992), 143.

<sup>14</sup> Edward Tuite Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, 2<sup>nd</sup> reprint (Calcutta: Indian Studies, 1973), 163.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 184. See also in Aditya Prasad Sinha, *Ho Bhasha aur Sahitya ka Itihas*, 2<sup>nd</sup> reprint (Varanasi: Kishor vidya Niketan, 2006), 16.

<sup>16</sup> Christopher A. B. Tirkey, *Aadim Dharam Ek Parichay*, 152.

<sup>17</sup> Edward Tuite Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, 232-233.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 232.

<sup>19</sup> Ranendra Sudhir Pal, "Jharkhand ki Aadim Janjatiyan", in *Jharkhand Encyclopedia*, 4 (2008), 42.

Santhals are found in the Santal Parganas located in the eastern extremity of Chotanagpur plateau.<sup>20</sup> They are also in Bhagalpur, Mungher, Hazaribagh, Ranchi, Singbhum, Dhanbad and Palamau.<sup>21</sup>

Scholars have three views about the origin of the Oraons - Firstly, according to S.C. Roy the Oraons might have come from Coorg a state in South India. Secondly, According to Joseph Elfenbein, Oraons came from the North- West direction and settled around the river Narmada near Bharuch in Gujarat and later moved to Rohtasgarh. Thirdly, linguistic affinity and archeological evidence help us to trace the presence of *kunruk* speaking Oraons to Harappa. Some Indus scripts, signs ('♀' *al* means man, '♂' *min* means fish), and seals are deciphered by Asko Parpola who also claims the presence of *kunruk* speaking tribes in the Indus valley. Parpola opines, on the basis of the study of a sign of carrying pots, that the Oraons were present in Harappa. This sign reminds us of the celebration of the tribal feast called *Sarhul*. The sign is being interpreted as follows: the priest and his assistants each of them are carrying two pots on a carrying pole altogether bringing four pots full of water to a sacred grove (*sal/sakhua*)<sup>22</sup> Hence we may conclude saying that these are the places being recognized in order to confirm the origin of the Oraons. Later they migrated to Rohtasgarh and then finally moved to Chotanagpur (their present habitat).<sup>23</sup>

After this brief presentation of the origin or history of the major tribals of Chotanagpur, let us now articulate and analyze the very historizing of the tribals. Although we will study and find out the historizing of the tribals in general, our main focus will be on the historizing of the tribals of Chotanagpur.

### 3. Historizing of the Tribals

Scholars, anthropologists and archeologists try to interpret the very life of the tribals through their language, *lokageeta* (folksong), religious *gatha* (religious story), myths, cultures and religious practices. These are the first hand resources to know the tribals.<sup>24</sup> It seems to be true because the tribals hardly have written histories of their own. Even if we have some writings on the tribals, they are not by them but by non-tribals. Only some years ago the tribals have started writing and doing some research on themselves. Thus, we may ask, do tribals really have their own history? Do they have their own historical background? If at all, how is their history known? However, we cannot deny the fact. They do have their history or historical background as we have pointed out in the first part of our paper. This cannot be overlooked. But then how does their history have come to our present time? What is the methodology/means of their historizing?

One of the observations we can make is that they passed their history from one generation to another through their life itself. They transferred it by their cultural life. Their cultural life reveals many things about them. Their culture is the heritage which they have inherited from their ancestors. And they continue to abide by their culture. Thus, the first source to know about the tribals is their culture. On the basis of this, we can say, that, the history of the tribals has come to us

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<sup>20</sup> Christopher A. B. Tirkey, *Aadim Dharam Ek Parichay*, 149. See also in Horatio Bickerstaffe Rowney, *The Wild Tribes of India*, Reprinted (Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corporation, 1974), 69.

<sup>21</sup> Nadeem Hasnain, *Tribal India*, 119.

<sup>22</sup> Mahali Livins Tirkey, "Historical Roots of the Tribals and their struggle for survival", in *Enigma of Indian Tribal Life and Culture*, 35-38. See also in Edward Tuite Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, 250.

<sup>23</sup> Christopher A. B. Tirkey, *Aadim Dharam Ek Parichay*, 137. See also in Horatio Bickerstaffe Rowney, *The Wild Tribes of India*, 78. See also in W. G. Archer, *The Blue Grove: The Poetry of the Uraons*, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1940), 17. The term 'Uraons' and 'Oraons' are synonyms. They refer to the same tribe.

<sup>24</sup> Diwakar Minz, *Munda evam oraon ka dharmik itihas* (Delhi: Orient Publications, 1996), 3-4, 15. Here the author gives his views mainly about Munda and Oraon tribes.

through their culture. And therefore, the cultural life is the basic medium of tracing back the history of tribals from one generation to another. The very culture of the tribals manifests their identity. Thus, the very identity of the tribals is passed on through their culture. And that could be their life historizing or historizing by their cultural life. Hence, we conclude that their history is transmitted through their way of life.

The above mentioned factors like *lokakatha*, *lokageeta*, myths are prevalent even today in tribal society. They are part of their literature, called *lokasahitya* which means the literature of the people. According to Dr. Krishnadev Upadhyaya *lokasahitya* has no connection with the present or modern civilization. It is the expression of uneducated people<sup>25</sup>. It is the medium which reveals their happiness-sorrows, hope-despair, life-death, and joys-tragedies.<sup>26</sup> *Lokasahitya*, being the literature of the people, is known to the people. The people of the same community or society understand themselves by their common literature. They express themselves through the same language. They communicate to each other everything related to their daily living. They do this mostly through oral communication. Of late we have also some written form of communication. Initially the tribals had hardly anything in written form like documents or records in their past phase of life history. That is the reason their history too was passed on orally, in the oral tradition, because they kept it alive-by their daily living. This is what we may call the life history of the tribals. Here, we observe how important *lokasahitya* is! Dr. Vasudevasharan Agrawal confirms its value. According to him, there are many historical events expressed in *lokasahitya* from where an archeologist can look for the details. He can do the research because it is the expression of history, culture, tradition and the very life style of the people.<sup>27</sup> It possesses many valuable things and therefore the role of *lokasahitya* is very important among the tribals. The tribals express and communicate themselves through this means or medium.

We remain handicapped even today when we wish to do some research on the tribals or when we look for their written histories, and we hardly find some. We have only the collections of some recent years otherwise only the oral tradition has existed among them. Thus, on the one hand we are faced with the challenge that we have very few written records or documents about them but on the other hand we also observe that their history is still alive even today. Hence, we realize the importance of their *lokasahitya*, by which they kept their history existing. Though histories in the *Sahitya* may be expressed in different forms like *lokakatha*, *lokageeta*, *dantakatha*, faith, religious practices etc., they have the same value as the history written by scholars, historians etc. These things are imprinted in the mind and born in the heart of the people.<sup>28</sup> They have their natural flow from the very life itself. Then we understand how important they are! Let us explore some of these elements one by one.

### ***Lokakatha*<sup>29</sup> (Folklore)**

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<sup>25</sup> Probably Upadhyayaji refers this *lokasahitya* to Primitive tribe. Meaning to say that *lokasahitya* was very much practical among them. That is the reason he understands primitive people as uneducated people. However let us not limit this *lokasahitya* only to them because by term it means literature of the people and hence it can refer to anyone.

<sup>26</sup> Ignatia Toppo, "Adivasi lokasahitya, itihas evam kala-sanskriti", in *Jharkhand express*, ed. Kerobim Tirkey, Vol. 2 (Ranchi: Adivasi Charitable Trust, January 16-31, 2010), 10.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in *Ibid*, 10.

<sup>28</sup> Rajesh Kumar Singh, *Jo itihas mein nahin hai*, (New Delhi: Bhartiya Jnanpith, 2005), 12.

I still remember my grandmothers (the mother of my father & the mother of my mother) used to tell me some stories. I even heard from my father telling the same stories in my childhood. Now only, I realize and understand those stories and their significance. The stories I ever heard from them were not the fruit of their mere imagination or narration. They were the expressions of their life. Here, I notice how much their historizing differed/differs from others/ non – tribals. It is not the case of only my grandmothers rather all other tribal grandmothers and grandfathers do the same. As we know the main occupation of the tribals was agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry etc. They were very much satisfied with these occupations. They hardly thought of education. And therefore most of them remained illiterate. Even today, we know from statistics that a large number of the tribals are uneducated and they seem to be happy with their life.<sup>30</sup> The annual report (2010-2011) presented by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India gives us the figure or ratio of literacy of the tribals and non-tribals in India and the gap between them.

Literacy rate of Total population and Scheduled Tribes population and Gap in literacy rate India & States of Chotanagpur:- Annual Report 2010-2011/39-41<sup>31</sup>

| India/States   | Literacy rate in 1991 of total population | Scheduled Tribes | Gap between them | Literacy rate in 2011 of total population | Scheduled Tribes | Gap  |
|----------------|-------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------------------------------|------------------|------|
| INDIA          | 52.2                                      | 29.6             | 22.6             | 64.8                                      | 47.1             | 17.7 |
| Bihar          | 37.5                                      | 18.9             | 18.6             | 47.0                                      | 28.2             | 18.8 |
| Chhattisgarh   | 42.9                                      | 26.7             | 16.2             | 64.7                                      | 52.1             | 12.6 |
| Jharkhand      | 41.4                                      | 27.5             | 13.9             | 53.6                                      | 40.7             | 12.9 |
| Madhya Pradesh | 44.7                                      | 18.4             | 26.3             | 63.7                                      | 41.2             | 22.5 |
| Orissa         | 49.1                                      | 22.3             | 26.8             | 63.1                                      | 37.4             | 25.7 |
| West Bengal    | 57.7                                      | 27.8             | 29.9             | 68.6                                      | 43.4             | 25.2 |

Of course, there are other factors and elements affecting literacy, which we cannot deny. However, our aim is not to explain all the causes for being illiterate. Our focus is to underline how the tribals kept their identity alive in spite of their illiteracy? How did they transmit their history from one generation to another? Here, we observe the *lokakatha*. The tradition of *lokakatha* is even now very much prevalent among tribals. This is one of the channels of their historizing. Through *lokakatha* tribals tell about themselves, their histories, their forefathers' lives, their culture, their identity etc. They even mention about their origin and identity through *lokakatha*.

Here we can refer to one of the clans of the Munda tribe; mainly the clan of Sòe kili and its sub-division. The story speaks about the very origin of this clan. The story also identifies the particularity of this clan and makes it unique among the Munda tribe.<sup>32</sup> The origin and arrival of the

<sup>29</sup> Tribal *lokakatha* is related to god-godess, devil-demon, king-queen, animal-bird, tree-plant, river-mountain, earth, sea, clan, totem, heredity, family and the leaders of the society. These are told or presented through *lokakatha* in the form of stories (*kahani*). Gaya Pandey, *Bhartiya Janjatiya Sanskriti (Indian tribal culture)*, (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2007), 279.

<sup>30</sup> I say this because tribals lack the quest for education and not like the non-tribals who have it in the first place. We find most of the tribals in the villages busy with their agricultural works. The education becomes secondary for them. Their studies and classes in many cases remain only till the schools and colleges. Consequently, they limit themselves only to agriculture, hard labours in the fields, and as daily labourers. Now slowly they are changing their old mentality of '*padhtang to bhi dal-bhat khatang, nai padhtang to bhi dal-bhat khatang*', it means to say that even if I study or do not study I have always there dal-bhat to eat' and allowing themselves to the innovation.

<sup>31</sup> <http://tribal.nic.in/writereaddata/mainlinkfile/file1288.pdf>, referred on 24.08.2011.

Mijo tribe in North-East India too has its story.<sup>33</sup> The tribals also speak about their early presence, their migration from one place to another like the Sindhu valley, the bank of Ganga-Yamuna rivers, Rohtasgarh etc through *lokakatha*.<sup>34</sup> This is common among the Oraons. And thus, the same history is passed from one generation to another through *lokakatha*.<sup>35</sup>

Folklore or *lokakatha* was even communicated to a big group or assembly, to the young boys and young girls. According to S. C. Roy, “In every typical Mùndà village, there is a common dormitory or ‘*giti-òrà*’ for all the bachelors, and another for all the maidens of the village. This ‘*giti-òrà*’ is at once a sleeping-house, a club, and an educational seminary, for the young folk...where the only vehicle for instruction and culture known to the ordinary Mùndà is folklore or *kàhàni*, consisting of narratives or folktales, riddles, and proverbs. These are recited and learnt in the evening by young bachelors and maidens assembled in their respective ‘*giti-òrà*’, after the day’s work is over.”<sup>36</sup> But this system is slowly disappearing as the ‘*giti-òrà*’ too is vanishing. However, the *lokakatha* or folklore continues the same in the family.

## Folklore- Myth

Though we have already spoken something about the *lokakatha* or folklore in the above paragraph, I wish to develop this concept in another paragraph or another heading connecting it with the myth especially with the religious myth. According to Malinowski, “Myth is not merely a story told but a reality lived. He opines that the function of myths is to express, enhance and codify belief, safeguard and enforce morality and vouch for the efficiency of ritual. They contain practical rules for the guidance of human beings. They give a pragmatic charter of primitive faith and moral wisdom.”<sup>37</sup> The tribals narrate their histories, events, religious faith & practices in the form of folklore-myth. They even highlight the religious myth of the destruction of the world and the new beginning of the world. They mention it through the myth of ‘rain of fire’. This religious myth is told by Oraons, Mundas, Santhals and Kharias. Though each of these four tribes has slightly different versions to present it, each of them speaks about the destruction of the world through the

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<sup>32</sup> The story goes that “A munda had grown ‘*kàpàs*’ or cotton on his field close by a river named ‘*Chiluà Ikir*’. A large ‘*Sòe*’ or *Sòel* fish made a subterranean passage from the river up to this cotton field, and every night the fish would stealthily come to the field through this passage and damage the cotton. Unable at first to trace the thief, the owner of the field ultimately remained watching the field one night, and at length discovered the *Sòe* fish eating his cotton. Forthwith, with an arrow, he killed the fish. But the fish was so large and heavy that he had to call in the aid of all his ‘*hàgàs*’ or *bhàyàds* to carry the huge fish to the village. The fish was then chopped into pieces, and the meat distributed amongst all the *hàgàs*. The munda who had killed the fish with his arrow came to be called ‘*Tuing Sòe*’ and his descendents formed the ‘*Tuing Sòe kili*’. The man who chopped the bones came to be called ‘*Jang Sòe*’ and his descendents constituted the ‘*Jòng Sòe kili*’. The munda who divided the meat into different shares came to be called ‘*Til Sòe*’ and his descendents formed the ‘*Til Sòe kili*’. The munda who distributed the shares came to be called ‘*Or Sòe*’, and his descendents became the ‘*Or Sòe kili*’. The munda who brought the leaves on which the different shares of meat were placed came to be styled ‘*Pàtrà Sòe*’ and his descendents became ‘*Pàtrà Sòe kili*’. One of the ‘*Bhàyàds*’ had taken his own share of the meat in a piece of cloth dyed wit *gamcha* earth (a kind of ochre-coloured earth called *gerua mati*) and came to be called ‘*Gamchà Sòe*’ and his descendents came to constitute the ‘*Gamchà Sòe kili*’. The men of the ‘*Gamchà Sòe kili*’ will not use cloth dyed with ‘*Gamchà*’ earth and no munda of the different branches of the ‘*Sòe kili*’ will eat the *Sòe* fish.” S. C. Roy, *The mundas and their country*, Reprint, (Ranchi: Catholic Press, 1995), 255-256.

<sup>33</sup> Ignatia Toppo, “Adivasi lokasahitya, itihas evam kala-sanskriti”, in *Jharkhand express*, February 1-15, 2 (2010), 7.

<sup>34</sup> Ignatia Toppo, “Adivasi lokasahitya, itihas evam kala-sanskriti”, in *Jharkhand express*, January 16-31, 2 (2010) 10. Here Dr. Ignatia Toppo presents the views on the *lokakatha* brought by Dr. Bhalaria Lakra and Dr. Celine Kerketta. They speak the importance of *lokakatha*, and its prevalence among the tribals.

<sup>35</sup> Sushil Gautam, *Adivasi garh-Chhattisgarh* (New Delhi: Prakashan Vibhag, 2004), 115.

<sup>36</sup> S. C. Roy, *The Mundas and their Country*, Reprinted (Ranchi: Catholic Press, 1995), 317-318.

<sup>37</sup> Paraphrased in Francis Pereira, *The Faith Tradition of The Kunrukhar (Uraons)* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2007), 433.

‘rain of fire’ and procreation of the tribals (Oraons, Mundas, Santhals & Kharias) through brother-sister (the first couple).<sup>38</sup>

Thus, in addition we can say that a myth has a significant role in the life of the tribals. In the words of Van Exem, “Myth tells us a series of ‘events’: how God made the earth, man and plants, how evil started, and how there was a struggle between good and evil...it does not merely give meaning to what we know and see, but also brings within the range of our knowledge that which is beyond our vision...the myth is graphic, it appeals to our senses, but it describes that which is beyond description: it is symbolic...it reduces complexity to its immutable roots, which we can visualize, remember and learn by heart.”<sup>39</sup> But we may have some doubts and ask ourselves whether myths are true? Do they carry some facts, truth or they are merely related to a question of faith? According to Van Exem, “The myths are true because they are not history but sacred history. Their truth is real: it is deeper than what can be learnt by mere perception. But this truth is not obvious: to convey it, the myths must come to life, they must be lived...they are being recited, listened to and savoured. The munda myths are living.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> A. Grignard, *Hahn's Oraon Folk-Lore*, 144-146, (Patna: Superintendent Government Printing, 1931). This is an original version about Oraons. All the events, stories, realities are presented in the form of Folklore (*Lokakatha*). In these pages, the author speaks about the creation history of the Oraons. Even today we can hear about it from our elders. They tell us exactly as the author has described. The religious myth is like this: Long ago there was a giant man –eating monster. It used to wait with open mouth on the pathway on which the people used to walk. It was as big as a hillock. People were not aware of it, that's why they used to enter its mouth. Those people who went that way, they never returned. So God said, “I see many people going this way daily and do not see even one returning.” Then God came down to look for them. Then what does he see? The big enemy (monster) was there. Whoever went that way entered that monster's stomach. Then Dharmes took the form of a human person and set out on a big pack bull loading it with two hunting spears of nine *man* (about 360 kilograms) each. When they were about to reach the place he said, “Come on, pack bull”. So when Dharmes entered the stomach of that monster he pierced one spear to the top and another towards the bottom. So that monster died. When it began to decay its smell (foul) reached heaven. Then Dharmes said, “If I don't burn it by fire it will smell for a long time. “Having said this he sent fire, but before sending fire he said to *Halman* (Gorilla), “Hey nephew, I will rain down fire to burn that monster. It will burn. You watch it. If it burns and the fire spreads all over, then if you beat the drum, I will put off the fire”. So Dharmes sent down rain of fire and that monster was burnt and the fire began to spread all over the world. Meanwhile *Halman* climbed on an ebony (*tèlā*) tree that had a lot of ripe fruits. He was fully absorbed in eating the fruits so that he failed to notice that the fire had spread all over the earth and forgot to beat the drum. *Halman's* face too was burnt. So *Halman* rubbed his face against an ebony tree and the ebony tree became black and even today it remains black. Thus, all the people of the earth and everything that existed on it was destroyed. At that time two small children-*bhaiya-bahin* (brother-sister) entered a cave (crab hole) of Sirasita paddy field and were saved from the fire. Afterwards Dharmes took “*Caùra-Bhaurà*”, “*Tilkà-Lodhà*” dogs and went for a walk in the Sirasita paddy field. He did not get anything, everything was burnt. When the dogs were about to reach the place where *bhaiya-bahin* lived, those children ran to enter the crab hole. When Dharmes saw this he said, “Don't be afraid, don't be afraid.” So, he gave paddy to them and said, “Do agriculture”. From that day Dharmes used to visit them daily. Later on when those children grew up Dharmes brought a log of wood to them and said to the boy, “O boy, one of you sleep on this side of the log and the other sleep on the other side of the log, you don't go across the log”. Having said this Dharmes went away. So those children slept one on one side of the log and the other on the other side of the log as per the instructions of Dharmes. When they really grew up as adults, one day that boy crossed that log. Then that girl became pregnant and their children have filled the whole earth. About them people sing a song: “*Bhaiya-bahin* came out, o girl; live in the Sirasita paddy field. A crab hole is their house, o girl; they live in Sirasita paddy field.” For Mundas see in A. Van Exem, *The Religious system of the Munda Tribe* (Haus Völker und Kulturen: St Augustin, 1982), 41-43, 64-65. For Santhals see *Ibidem* 43-44. For Kharias see in Francis Pereira, *The Faith Tradition of The Kunrukhar (Uraons)* (Delhi: ISPCCK, 2007), 565-567, see also in Paulus Kullu, *Kharia dharm aur sanskriti ka vishleshan* (Ranchi: Satya Bharti, 1988), 37-41.

<sup>39</sup> A. Van Exem, *The Religious system of the Munda Tribe* (Haus Völker und Kulturen: St Augustin, 1982), 19.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 22. The great anthropologist Van Exem gives his view on myths and their importance among the Munda tribe but the role of myths can be seen also among other tribes. Myths reveal the facts. With reference to Oraon tribe, it is believed that Sirasita *nal*/ paddy field is found in Katkahi (Gumla,) in the state of Jharkhand. It is the place of brother-sister the first couple of Oraon tribals. It is only the mythical interpretation and hence it can be re-interpreted. However, it has become a pilgrim place for the Oraons, especially for Sarnas. They go there for pilgrimage.

## **Lokageeta<sup>41</sup> (Folksong)**

Through the *lokageeta* the tribals express their life, ups and downs, situations, miserable conditions etc. We can examine such situation in one of the Kharia *lokageetas*, “*Musa ko budha pe jo umbodij, betod bung ko ighay ro lata. Kuda kolong lade se budhiya, yongenang ro gita jomnanang.*”<sup>42</sup> They even acknowledge through *lokageeta* that their ancestors have done great works for them. They have enriched them with their culture and customs. They have left the treasures for them. Hence, tribals need to be grateful to their forefathers. A similar expression of gratitude can be felt in one of the pieces of *lokageeta* of the Hos, “*Singbhumu hasarebu jonom lena, sinhlekan paitibu rika geya. Jonom nenga dishum nelga, kilimilibu seba singareya.*”<sup>43</sup> At the same time, the tribals also require to be awakened by and acquainted with the changes taking place. They do not have to be blown away by the transition or change rather they have to be responsible to take care of the land which has all the treasures, minerals etc.<sup>44</sup> This is a call for each tribal to be aware of the present changing world. It is the time to think and re-think and then to decide for the present life and the life to come.

We also identify that many sufferings and hardships that our tribals have gone through are expressed through various popular or traditional songs. They even present the very sad stories of tribals.<sup>45</sup> Hence, we affirm that the songs reveal the very life situations, facts, events, hardships etc of the tribals. The tribals remind themselves of the facts, life and histories of their forefathers through songs. One of the pieces of Oraon *lokageeta* speaks about the event of the victory of the Oraon women over their enemies, “*Rohidas garhe nu singi dai rahcha, turkarin lawcha kudabacha. Kuk mainya pagri khekkha nu talwaer turkarin lawcha kudabacha.*”<sup>46</sup> The songs or *lokageetas* are popular, common and known to the people. According to Kishore Jadav, “A community whether agricultural or otherwise, expresses itself passionately and imaginatively through its folksongs. The songs are live human documents reflecting actual historical processes and phenomena of different

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<sup>41</sup> *Lokageeta* refers to the songs sung by the people. To sing a song is a cultural feature of a society. Gaya Pandey, *Bhartiya Janjatiya sanskriti (Indian tribal culture)* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2007), 280.

<sup>42</sup> The song presents a situation of a poor family. It is a dialogue between an old woman and an old man. The old lady says to her husband that today they do not have rice to cook. In reply, the old man tells her to prepare the bread (*Roty*) from the flour of raagi (*madua*) and that they will eat tonight and sleep. Ignatia Toppo, “Kharia lokageeton mein bimbit Kharia sanskriti”, in *Jharkhand Encyclopedia*, 4 (2008), 336.

<sup>43</sup> Aditya Sinha, *Ho Bhasha aur Sahitya ka Itihas*, 2<sup>nd</sup> reprint, (Varanasi: Kishor vidya Niketan, 2006) 11. This piece of *lokageeta* means- we are born in the land of lions or Singbonga region. We have to behave and act like lions. We need to work for our motherland of Singbhum. We need to decorate and beautify it.

<sup>44</sup> P. Lakra, *Kurukh Kattha Pandi* (Ranchi: Kurukh Bhasha Pradhyapak Sahitya Parishad, 1989), 204-206. This particular book is about the *Kunrukhar* (Oraons). This is originally written in *Kunrukhar* language. This is a collection of many events expressed in the form of stories and songs. This particular paragraph speaks about the very life of the Oraons. They have received this life from their ancestors. They have learnt many things from them and hence they need to continue with them and preserve the very tribal identity and values.

<sup>45</sup> AA.VV, *Tribal awakening – a group study*, edited by M.M. Thomas and R. W. Taylor (Bangalore: The Christian institute for the study of religion and society, 1983), 33-34. *Tribal awakening* is the fruit of group study done by Helmet Bareh, Dilbar Hans, Khrieleno Iralu, Moasosang, Nirmal Minz, Pakntein, Pradhan & Thumra. It is a group contribution.

<sup>46</sup> This *lokageeta* signifies that there was *Singi didi* (daughter of an Oraon king) in Rohtasgarh who fought against enemies and saved the fort and the people. She battled like a man putting a turban on her head and with a sword. The other women did the same. This particular event is commemorized and celebrated by the tribal women every twelve years and it is called ‘*Jani sikar*’ or hunting of the animals by women. It has its traditional connection. Ajay Tirkey, “Kurukh lokageeton mein yudh varnan”, in *Adivasi Sahitya Yatra*, ed Ramnika Gupta (New Delhi: Radhakrishna Prakashan Private Limited, 2008), 100. See also in Ajay Tirkey, “Kurukh Samaj aur Sanskriti”, in *Jharkhand Encyclopedia*, 4 (2008), 114. See also in Mahali Tirkey, “Kaun hai Singi dai?” in *Jharkhand Express*, Oct.16-31, 1 (2009), 5.

ages.”<sup>47</sup> *Lokageeta* is a common phenomenon among the tribals. It presents the identity and history of the tribals. Anthony Doongdoong points out, with reference to the Kharias, that legends and traditions are found in the oral poetry and the seasonal songs of the Kharias.<sup>48</sup> Here, he speaks about the origin and history of Kharias. The origin and history of this particular tribe is expressed through songs. One of the folk songs, with reference to the Munda tribe, reveals and expresses even the very meaning of the origin of life. The song expresses that it is God (*Singbonga*) alone who is the giver of life.<sup>49</sup> Besides, we have various other versions and collections of songs-seasonal songs, marriage songs, festival songs etc. *Mausami Raga* is a collection of seasonal songs by Johan Lakra.<sup>50</sup> We have quite a number of songs put together in this book.

As we know, the tribals have a symbiotic relationship with nature.<sup>51</sup> *Dharmes, Singbonga, Ponomosor, Thakur Jiu (Chando baba)*<sup>52</sup> has given everything to the tribals in nature. Thus, as their life moves ahead seasonally, they also express their gratitude to God for providing everything and also seek for His blessings on their families, agriculture, animals etc. They fulfill this through feasts and celebrations. And naturally singing and dancing are parts of the tribals’ celebrations. This is the reason we see tribals feasting and celebrating all through the year on different occasions seasonally. They express their gratitude, praise, thanksgiving and joys through songs. Singing is an art for them. The tribals explain themselves through songs. The songs are well known and are composed in a very simple form. Thus, they are easy to memorize. Initially the songs were only in the oral form. The tribals could keep the songs alive for centuries only by singing, and passed them from one generation to another. In this way the oral tradition of the songs continued. Now, *lokageetas* or songs of the people have been recorded in written form too.

## Paintings-Carvings

Painting also is a way of historizing of the tribals. We can find some paintings on the rocks. These paintings reveal the very life of the tribals. The tribals kept their identity alive through paintings as their records. Paintings drawn on rocks, express their life style. Paintings are the facts of their daily living, presented through different forms of realities as different animals, cultural dance, some tools/instruments used for protection, for agriculture, dance etc. Among these all, hunting and dancing are more historical and common. These two are very much identified in the very culture of the tribals.<sup>53</sup> Paintings reveal the identity of the tribals. Once upon a time, the tribals dwelt in the jungle. They built their houses in the forest. They cut the trees and cleared the jungle in order to make plots of land for cultivation. In this way, they continued their life with agriculture. As the number of people increased so also the needs of the people increased. That is the reason they cleared and finished off the jungle. Today, we see large plots of plain land, the land for agriculture, where once there was only forest. The tribals kept several things as their records through the paintings on the rocks like agricultural tools, hunting persons, dancing scenes, etc. These are expressions of the life of the tribals.

<sup>47</sup> Kishore Jadav, *Folklore and its motifs in modern literature* (New Delhi: Manas Publications, 1998), 65.

<sup>48</sup> Anthony Doongdoong, “The Kharias-Where do they come from?”, in *Sevartham*, 6 (1981), 106-109.

<sup>49</sup> “God gave us life, parents gave us birth. Such is the beautiful world of ours in which we live.” Quoted in John Lakra, “Tribal Theology”, in *Sevartham*, 35 (2010), 17.

<sup>50</sup> John Lakra, *Mausami Raag* (Ranchi: St. Albert’s College, 1983), 10.

<sup>51</sup> Mathias Toppo, “Dynamics of rootedness and openness in tribal life”, in *Tradition and Innovation- Philosophy of Rootedness and Openness*, 12 (2011), 410. See also in Mathias Toppo, “Tradition and Innovation: Dynamics in Tribal Life”, in *Sevartham*, 36 (2011), 29.

<sup>52</sup> Different names given to God (different addresses to God) by the different tribals: Dharmes by Oraons, Singbonga by Mundas, Ponomosor by Kharias and Chando Baba by Santhals.

<sup>53</sup> Sushil Gautam, *Adivasi garh-Chhattisgarh* (New Delhi: Prakashan Vibhag, 204), 36-37.

According to Krishna Chandra Tudu, “The walls of the house are polished by special mud. Then the ladies paint on the walls drawing different figures of a leaf, flower, fruit, sun, moon, plant-tree, pyramid etc. Actually they make these designs through the different colors of mud. Besides, many other useful tools are painted, related to their day to day life. They are part of their *lokakatha* and *lokageeta*. This is a culture still alive among the Santhals. Through this culture of paintings the Santhals transmit their history and identity to future generations. He also speaks about some other paintings like *khond* (altar/worshiping place) painting, *dag* (mark) painting, and *gudna* (a kind of tattooing) painting.”<sup>54</sup> These are expressions of their cultural life. Even today these aspects are prevalent in tribal society and hence they become documents for us of their history. And therefore this also becomes one way of their historizing. Besides paintings, carvings also are prevalent among the tribals. The tribals carve on the stones/rocks. Sometimes they make different designs of carved rocks/stones related to their cultural life. They even create an atmosphere of a garden of rocks. They finally become parks for visitors. We have some examples like – the Rock garden of Ranchi, the Agro park of Gumla, the Agricultural Scientific Research Centre of Demotanr (Hazaribagh). All these places are in Jharkhand. We may find carvings even in other places.

## Conclusion

On the basis of the study or analysis of the history or origin of the tribals and also on account of my own personal experience in the tribal society-culture & tradition as a tribal, interactions with other tribals, I am of the opinion that *lokakatha*, *lokageeta* and paintings-carvings are the mediums or means of the historizing of the tribals. By these means the tribals keep their history alive. They pass it on from one generation to another. These are the living elements of the literature of the people (*lokasahitya*). However let us not forget that it has come to us through an oral tradition. Even today the history of the tribals is channeled through *lokakatha* and *lokageeta*. Hence, these factors are still prevalent in the tribal culture, society and in the literature of the tribals (*lokasahitya*). But how long can they depend on this oral communication? Do they not risk losing them? Will the tribals of coming generations be faithful to their oral tradition which has a rich heritage of their language, culture, history, values and world views? This particular point draws some light and awakening that the tribals need to put those (oral treasures) in writing as records or documents. The situation was different in the past but at present it is different. Thus, accordingly they need to work on themselves, on their past, on their history, their culture, their tradition etc. This is my perception, my reading and my way of looking at the matter. Therefore, the door is always open to the reader for further readings, corrections, proposals, suggestions and discussions. Finally, I would like to conclude my paper by saying that the tribals do have their history, and their way of historizing is through *lokakatha*, *lokageeta*, and paintings –carvings. They are the valid means to transmit their history. According to Gaya Pandey, *Lokakatha*, *Lokagatha* and *lokageeta* have their traditions. We find them in the Vedic literatures. Panchtantra is one of the oldest collections of *lokakathas*. The structural analysis of various *lokasahityas* helps us to know the very life style of different small communities. It mainly helps us to know the cultural activities of the people.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Krishna Chandra Tudu, “Santhali lokajeevan ki wivin chitrakalayen”, in *Jharkhand Express*, July 16-31, Ranchi: Adivasi Charitable Trust, 1 (2009), 8.

<sup>55</sup> Gaya Pandey, *Bhartiya Janjatiya sanskriti (Indian tribal culture)* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2007), 274-276.

## **Roots of Indian Civilization: Historico-Philosophical Analysis**

- **Andrew Anbarasu**

Roots of Indian history and culture go back to to the beginning of human civilization along the banks of Indus. The history of India is punctuated by constant integration of migrating people with the diverse cultures that surround India. *The Harappan Civilization has significance for not only historians and archaeologists but for the common man also. It was best known for its spectacular city planning and had surpassed all other contemporary civilizations. The early civilization in India, Indus and Harappan, have contributed a lot in the development of later Hindu religion, along with advancement of mathematics, cultivation of cotton, maritime trade relations with neighboring countries, urban civilization with town planning, architecture and engineering and fine jewelry. Sufficient recognition to early achievements of ancient Indians in these civilizations would lead us to understand the antiquity of India was glorious and golden. Roots of Indian civilization have been deep and strong. The lengthy descriptive note of Indus valley and Harappan civilization form the first part of the paper and the second part discusses the claims of this early civilization belonging to Aryans or Dravidians, whether to qualify the roots of Indian civilization either as Vedic or Indigenous Dravidian.*

### **Introduction**

India's history and culture is dynamic, spanning back to the beginning of human civilization. It begins with a culture along the Indus River and in farming communities in the southern lands of India. The history of India is punctuated by constant integration of migrating people with the diverse cultures that surround India. Available evidence suggests that the use of iron, copper and other metals was widely prevalent in the Indian sub-continent at a fairly early period, which is indicative of the progress that this part of the world had made. History often narrates tales of fierce strivings that are integrally related with the establishment of a new empire. But amazingly, the inception of Indus Valley civilization is devoid of any kind of battles. The Indus Valley people rather made deals, not war, and created a stable, peaceful, and prosperous culture. The Harappan Civilization has significance for not only historians and archaeologists but for the common man also. It was best known for its spectacular city planning and had surpassed all other contemporary civilizations. The paper intends to dwell on the descriptive features of early Indian civilization namely, Indus Valley and Harappan civilizations. The second part would initiate a discussion on the claims of this early civilization belonging to Aryans or Dravidians, leading whether to qualify the roots of Indian civilization either as Vedic or Indigenous Dravidian.

### **1. Indus Valley Civilization**

As far as the origin of the word Indus is concerned, scholars are of the opinion that the name Indus is the origin of the word Hindu. The original Indian name of the river is Sindhu. The Greeks referred to the river as the "Indos," and later the Arabs referred to it as "al-Hind." Eventually the name came to be applied to the people of the subcontinent, namely, the "Hindi,"

the "Hindus" and the "Indians."<sup>1</sup> It is believed that the Indus valley civilization belonged to the copper age as the presence of iron tools and implements has not yet been established at any part of this civilization. The earliest mention of the Indus Valley Civilization is found in the works of Charles Masson in 1842. It was Alexander Cunningham, the director of the Archaeological Survey of British India, who presented to the world a seal from this ancient civilization. In the year 1920, Indian archaeologists Dayaram Sahani and R.D Bannerjee undertook excavations on one of these mounds in Harappa. The archaeologists expected to find something, but never imagined that a city lay beneath the earth. Further excavation at different places in India and Pakistan, led to discovery of another large city Mohenjodaro and the recovery of at least eighty villages and towns related to this newly discovered civilization.

This civilization was thought to have been confined to the valley of the river Indus, hence the name given to it was Indus Valley civilization. The Indus Valley Civilization which thrived in the northwestern part of the Indian subcontinent from 3300- 1300 BCE was the first major civilization in India. Indus Valley Civilization was named after the river along the banks of which the civilization thrived. Geographically, the Indus Valley Civilization covered Pakistan, the states of Rajasthan and Punjab, the valleys of Narmada and Tapti in Gujarat, with intrusions into the upper Ganga-Yamuna Doab. Together they constitute an area of about 8,40,000 square miles. Hailed as the land of urban culture, Indus Valley has captured the imagination of historians and common people alike. Mystery surrounds its origins, its culture and its decline. Roughly it is said to have existed between 3300-1700 BC.

### **Society in Indus Valley Civilization**

In Indus valley civilization, the society was divided into three distinct social groups, administrators, traders, laborers including farmers. The social conditions of Indus-Valley people were as follows:<sup>2</sup>

(a) Food-Vegetarian and non- vegetarian items of provisions were eaten by the subjects of Indus Valley Civilization. Significant stuffs of goods comprised wheat, barley, rice milk, fish, beef, mutton etc. , in addition to date, which was their proffered fruit.

(b) Dress- Cotton as well as woolen clothes were worn by the people Weaving was a substantial trade of the inhabitants of Mohenjo-Daro. However, plain clothes were also used. Men donned a kind of shawl for the upper body and a type of dhoti for the lower portion. Women wore a dissimilar kind of dress which elongated like a fan at the backside of their heads.

(c) Fashion- People of Indus Valley were highly stylish. Some kept beards and moustaches, whereas others were completely clean- shaven. Short as well as long hair was prevalent among the men folk. Objects like ivory combs, bronze, mirror etc., discovered, demonstrate that women too were fond of stylizing. They used fan- shaped headgear. From these refinements above mentioned, they appear to have been far more sophisticated in attractiveness and toilet culture.

(d) Ornaments- both men and women of the Indus Valley were partial towards ornaments, which were made of different metals like gold, silver, copper, bronze etc., and also from ivory and shell. Various kinds of ornaments donned by the comprised beads of carnelian, agate, amethyst, turquoise, lapis lazuli, bangles from shells, glazed faience and terracotta, necklaces, armlets, finger rings, earrings, bracelets etc.

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<sup>1</sup> S.P. Gupta, *The Indus-Saraswati Civilization: Origins, Problems and Issues* (Delhi: PratibhaPrakashan, 1996), 121.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

(e) Means of amusement- Dicing and some kind of chess were the usual pastimes of the inhabitants. As commented by Sri Padmini Sen Gupta, “Gambling was obviously a favorite amusement and various kind of dice have been found as well as countries somewhat resembling halma pieces or chessmen.” Men of Indus Valley loved hunting expeditions. This is adequately exemplified by the figures of men hunting as well as figurines of animals like wild goat, antelope, and tigers etc. children built toys of clay and played with them. People were also fond of keeping birds, possibly to witness their combats.

(f) Condition of women- condition of women was pretty good. They were entitled equal honor along with men in the society. The worship of mother goddess demonstrates that they were venerated in the form of mother.

(g) Means of communication- bullock cart was the primary resource of communication.

(h) Disposal of the dead- there were three ways of disposing the dead. Firstly, the dead body was buried. Secondly, after burning the corpse, the *remamanta* were buried underneath the soil. Lastly, the dead bodies were left for wild animals to scavenge on. According to Sir John Marshall, the second method was mostly used.

(I) medicines- not much is known however about the medicines used by people of Indus Valley. Nevertheless, *Shilajeet*, Coral and Leaves of *neem* (all these own medicinal qualities) have been identified.

### **Religion in Indus Valley Civilization**

Religion of Indus valley civilization has been a subject which has not been found in any documents but in the seals, images and other materials that have been unearthed by various archaeologists. The Harappan religion was polytheistic. Scholars are unable to draw a conclusion regarding the religion of Indus people. However, some historians are of the opinion that Harappan people were Hindus. No temple, however, has yet been discovered. A stone figure has been discovered which is a white steatite head and bust. This figure has been clothed in a robe which is carried over the left shoulder. This has been considered as a sacred symbol. The figure has a short beard and the upper lip is shaved. The hair has been cropped and is parted in the middle. A necklace was also worn. The eyes are half-shut that suggest yogic contemplation.<sup>3</sup>

Several pottery figurines suggest that female deities had been worshipped. Probably it represented the mother-goddess, which symbolized fertility, worshipped in the near and middle east in ancient times. Clay figures resemble the horns of a goat or bull that suggests that animal worship was common. The seal amulets and talismans of stone and pottery do indicate the religious attitude of the Harappan people. A nude image of a deity with horns and three faces, seated on a stool with heels closely pressed together suggest some ritualistic posture. The early archaeologists called him *Pashupati*, the lord of cattle, as animals like deer, antelope, rhinoceros, elephant, tiger and buffalo surround him. His arms are adorned with bangles.

Another seal-amulet shows a horned goddess in the midst of a *Peepul* or sacred fig-tree before which another horned deity is kneeling and doing obeisance. A row of female deities occupy the whole of the lower register of the seal-amulet, each figure wearing a spring on the head, a long pigtail behind. Stone objects suggest that veneration was paid to phallic symbols as well. Few of the phallic remains closely resemble the Hindu symbol of Shiva lingam. Tigers with a goddess

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<sup>3</sup> Shikaripura Ranganatha Rao, *Dawn and Devolution of the Indus Civilisation* (New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, 1991), 132.

seated on them have been found on seals. Carved figure of a snake has been discovered. Many seals reveal the symbol of swastika, which is also found in other religions like Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism etc.

Dove was considered a sacred bird. Demons and demigods are suggested from figures fighting with animals. Sun was regarded as one of the greatest gods. People believed in magic and superstitions also and wore amulets for some protection. A bronze figure of a dancing-girl has also been found suggesting ritual dancing in the temples.

Evidence shows that the Harappans not only buried their dead but they also conducted cremations and kept the ashes in urns. The discovery of pottery items and ornaments in the burial grounds suggest that they might have believed in life after death. Temples or any kind of religious buildings have not been discovered yet. Though there are possibilities of a temple and Buddhist shrine towards the eastern region of the 'great bath' site.

Evidence suggests that many of the features of modern Indian cults are derived from very ancient sources. In the Indus civilization worship of the Shakti, lord Shiva and his consorts, worship of *peepal* tree and the *neem* tree were practiced. The unicorn god probably represented 'Ma', while the cattle god probably represented goddess kali or Uma, the mother goddess. It has been suggested that four-armed deities are anticipated to be gods like Lord Brahma and lord Vishnu, while the standing deities suggest Jain yogis in the posture of yoga known as *Kayot-sarga*.<sup>4</sup>

### **Economic Life of the Indus People**

Modernized cities like Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa are evidence of the effective economic conditions of the Indus Valley citizens. A picture of the economic life of people of Indus Valley is illustrated below;

- (a) Agriculture- the Harappans were agriculturalists. Their economy was entirely dominated by horticulture. The Indus River valley was quite fertile when the Harappanas thrived there. Agriculture was their chief line of work. Main agricultural products comprised wheat, barely, rice, cotton, vegetables etc. there were vast storehouses to gather food grains etc. sickles and other types of agricultural equipment have also been found.
- (b) Domestication of animals- this was another means of sustenance of the Indus Valley civilization. The seals identified, depict that primary animals were cow, bulls, buffaloes, sheep, goat, camels etc.
- (c) Hunting- besides being a means of entertainment, hunting was also a means of sustenance. They merchandised the skins, hair and bones of different animals. Fishing was also admired.
- (d) Weaving and spinning- various objects excavated, establish that weaving and spinning were admired among the community. Cotton as well as wool was used for designing clothes.
- (e) Pottery- Indus Valley inhabitants were skilled in manufacturing pottery of very lofty standard and it is "the earliest example of its kind in the ancient world." It was constructed on a wheel. Numerous statuettes on the pots have been excavated. Domestic vessels like heaters, store- jars, offering stands etc., were manufactured. Glazing vessels of copper, bronze silver and porcelain were also created.

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<sup>4</sup> S.P. Gupta, *The Indus-Saraswati Civilization: Origins, Problems and Issues*, 123.

- (f) Metals and minerals- gold, silver, bronze and lead were utilized. Most of the pots unearthed were made from copper and bronze. The use of these metals itself establishes the economic conditions of the people. However, iron was possibly alien to them.
- (g) Trade and commerce- this ancient civilization had trade relations with other countries. Gold, silver, copper and other precious stones which have been excavated in Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa must have been fetched from foreign countries, because till then they were not found here. Trade of cloth was accomplished with other countries. Particular objects of Indus Valley Civilization discovered in Sumeria, corroborates the trade relations with foreign countries. There were trade dealings with West Asia also. The trade was achieved through river routes. The designs of boat substantiate it.
- (h) Weights and measures- particular weights and measured were excavated during diggings in Harappa and Mohenjodaro. Some of the weights were so large that they were hauled by ropes. Others were of a small size, normally used by jewel makers. Besides the measure of cubic system, foot system was also in vogue. Thus, it can be seen that there was rapid economic activity in the Indus Valley and citizens were affluent.<sup>5</sup>

### **Occupation and Trade in Indus Valley Civilization**

Various researches suggest that agriculture and allied activities were the main occupation and trade in Indus valley civilization. Like other civilizations of Egypt, Greece and Mesopotamia Indus valley civilization also grew on the floodplains of Hindus River. Many of the towns were also built upon the shores of this river. The Harappans were agriculturalists and their economy was entirely dominated by horticulture. It is also believed that there were massive granaries in each city and Indus river valley was pretty fertile. Many of the Harappa seals have pictures of animal that imply a wet and marshy environment, such as rhinoceroses, elephants, and tigers. They also had a large variety of domesticated animals. Their agricultural activities were supported by heavy rainfall.

There is evidence of the cultivation of wheat, barley, peas, mustard, Cotton and rice. Horse bones have also been discovered at *surkotda*, indicating the usage of the animal. The main diet consisted of wheat, barley and milk products and fruits, vegetables, fish and meat were also consumed. The discovery of various equipment made of bronze and copper indicted metal work as the major profession of the people living in the cities. Their occupations were spinning, pottery and weaving. Further, the discovery of several seals made of clay fibers more information of the importance of the domestic animals in the Harappa society. The site of granaries near Indus River, where the civilization flourished was an important feature.

The Harappa cites were connected with rural agricultural communities and distant resource and mining areas through strong trade systems. They used animals, river boats and bullock carts for transport; this trade is reflected in the widespread distribution of exquisite beads and ornaments, metal tools and pottery that were produced by specialized artisans in the towns and cities. The major commodities in internal trade consisted of cotton, lumber, grain, livestock and other food stuffs. The Indus valley people had also close commercial relation with central Asia, the Arabian gulf region and the distant Mesopotamian cites, such as Susa and Ur Excavation at Lothal reveals the existence of dock supporting the activities of trade in that period. Trade also edited with northern Afghanistan from where the Harappa bought the famous blue gemstones.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 125.

## **Town Planning In Indus Valley Civilization**

The most characteristic feature of the Harappan Civilization was its urbanization. The cities show evidence of an advanced sense of planning and organization. Each city was divided into the citadel area where the essential institutions of civic and religious life were located and the residential area where the urban population lived. In the citadel, the most impressive buildings were the granaries which were store-houses. Near the granaries were the furnaces where the metal workers produced a variety of objects in metals such as copper, bronze, lead and tin. The potters also worked in this part. The workers lived together in small quarters near the factory. Another well-known building was the Great Bath. It might have served the purpose of ritual bathing vital to any religious ceremony in India. In Mohenjo daro there is also a large building which appears to have been the house of the governor. Another building nearby was either a meeting hall or a market place. Below the citadel in each city lay a town proper. The town was extremely well planned. The street ran straight and at right angles to each other following the grid system. The rectangular town planning was unique to the Harappans and was not known in Mesopotamia or Egypt. The streets were very wide and the houses built of burnt bricks lined both sides of the street. In Egypt and Mesopotamia dried or baked bricks were used. The houses were of varying sizes which suggest class differences in Harappan society. A well laid drainage system kept the cities clean. The Harappan people knew the measuring tools of length, mass, and time. They were the first in the world in developing a system of uniform weights and measures. Their measurements were extremely precise. Their smallest division, which was marked on an ivory scale found in Lothal was approximately 1.704mm, the smallest division ever recorded on a scale of the Bronze Age.<sup>7</sup>

## **Cultural Elements in Indus Valley Civilization**

It is difficult to be sure about the language that the Harappan people spoke. The scholars have not been able to decipher the language of the Harappans. Sir John Marshall was the first to suggest that the language of the Indus Civilization was Dravidian. Most scholars agreed with Marshall. On the other hand, Piero Meriggi suggested that they used Brahvi language. This is still used in Baluchistan. It is believed that their writing was a pictographic script, or at least seems to be. The script seems to have had about 400 basic signs, with many variations. The sign probably stood forwards and for syllables. The direction of the writing was generally from right to left. Most of the inscriptions were found on seals. The seals were probably used in trade and also for official and administrative work. So the Harappans seem to have used writing mainly for these sorts of things. A lot of the inscribed material was found at different Harappan site.<sup>8</sup>

Art and craft of Indus valley were of astounding utilitarian character with equality of plan and construction. The buildings comprised houses, markets, storerooms, and offices; many of these structures consisted of a brick ground-storey with one or more added floors in wood. The constructions of Mohenjodaro also replicate an urban spirit where this ancient lacks architectural splendor. The baked brick construction is perhaps the feature most suggestive of the building methods of the ancient cities of Mesopotamia, but the bricks of Mohenjodaro and Harappa are fire-baked, and not sun-dried. Several architectural features, such as the use of narrow pointed

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<sup>6</sup> D.K.Chakrabarti, *Indus Civilization Sites in India: New Discoveries* (Mumbai: Marg Publications,2004), 65.

<sup>7</sup> Jane McIntosh, *A Peaceful Realm: The Rise And Fall of the Indus Civilization* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001),113.

<sup>8</sup> S.P. Gupta, *The Indus-Saraswati Civilization: Origins, Problems and Issues*, 125.

niches as the only forms of interior ornamentation along the Indus are indicative of a relationship with the ancient near east. Among the more attractive structures at Mohenjodaro were the remains of a great public bath.

The Indus valley artists and crafts persons were masters of the miniature. The bronze statuette of the dancing is barely four inches high. And yet it speaks volumes of a metal caster's superb skills. One of the most remarkable pieces of sculpture found in the excavations of the Indus valley civilization is a minute male torso made out of limestone and found at Harappa. Another broken statue from the same place complements this torso in its striking forecast of iconographic and stylistic elements of the historical periods of Indian art. This image is carved in grayish limestone and reflects a dancing male figure with four arms and three heads. It is at times assumed that this statue is a probable prototype for the later Hindu conception of lord Shiva. On the other hand the copper figure of the dancing girl from Mohenjodaro is prophetic of metal-work of the Chola era. The Indus valley civilization is considered as one of the most developed and first urban civilizations famous for its arts and crafts.

Two other statues of Indus valley civilization which commonly catches up the attention are the sculpture of the bearded man made of a soft stone steatite and a little sandstone torso. The styles of the two sculptures differ widely but they are both remarkable in their own way. Seals are another significant aspect of the Indus art and craft. These are engraved in a 'pictographic script' often used as amulets, carried as modern day identity cards to the owners, this gives an insight into this system which was an essential part in the social practices. Models of animals were used as pin-heads and beads. Terracotta toys with movable heads were also prevalent. One thing evident from the Indus art and craft in general is that both the women and men wore ornaments. Ornaments of various materials like gold, silver, ivory, bones, shells were common. These archaeological findings help in summarizing that these people were also quite fashionable with diverse hairstyles, beards, cosmetics and so on.<sup>9</sup>

By far the greatest numbers of the Indus valley seals are carved with figures of bulls, either the *zebu* or the *urus* ox, some of them with objects resembling altars or mangers before them, although the iconography can't be properly identified, it appears likely that this popular bovine emblem is related to the cult of the bull as a fertility and lunar symbol in ancient Mesopotamia and perhaps as a proto type of Shiva's attribute the bull, *Nandi*. From the aesthetic point of view the designs of the animal seals of the Indus culture are priceless. They appropriately complement the perfection of the human statuettes from Harappa. In fact these artifacts narrate a lot about the civilization and its culture. Indus art and culture was well developed and much improved even in those times. The objects tell about the prevalence of art and craft and the imaginative prowess of the natives and the flourishing trade that they had with others.

The Indus valley craftsmen are known for their expertise. They made beads of carnelian, agate, amethyst, turquoise, lapis lazuli, etc. they manufactured bangles out of shells and terracotta and carved ivory and worked shells into ornaments, bowls and ladles. They cast copper and bronze for weapons, all types of tools, domestic objects and statues; they also worked silver and gold with great skill, especially for ornaments. Of course, they baked pottery in large quantity-to the delight of archeologists, since the different shapes, styles, and painted motifs are among the best

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<sup>9</sup> D.K.Chakrabarti, *Indus Civilization Sites in India: New Discoveries*, 68.

guides in the evolution of any civilization. The Harappans also excelled at stone-carving, complex weaving and carpet-making, inlaid woodwork and decorative architecture.

The costumes of Indus valley civilization have been revealed from unearthed figurines. The dress on the clay figurine can be considered as the normal attire of the female of the time. The waist is bare and a very scanty skirt is worn. The skirt is held by a girdle that is made of beads or of bands of woven material secured by a pin or fastening of some kind. One figure wears a cloak which is wrapped around the upper part of the body. Head-dresses are used which are made of stiffened cotton cloth. A tight collar that gives an appearance of greater lengths to the neck is worn by a few of the figurines. The male figures are generally seen to be nude. Probably a robe with or without embroidery was worn over the left shoulder and under the right arm. The figure of a man at Harappa might be wearing a close-clinging dhoti. Footwear as such was not found. Cotton as a fabric was used but no evidence was available as far as use of linen and wool are considered.<sup>10</sup>

The dress on the clay figures can be considered as the normal attire of the female population. These figures are bare to the waist and wear only a scanty skirt. The skirt is held by a girdle either of beads or of bands of woven material. There are also head-dresses probably made of stiffened cotton cloth. The male figures are generally nude. There is probability that robes with or without embroidery were worn over the left shoulder and under the right arm. No footwear as such is to be found. It seems that people were fond of jewels and hair-dressing. Various types of jewelry have been unearthed made both of stones and of gold and silver. Men had varied styles of hair-dressing, for instance, one wears his hair parted in the middle and the short locks at the back of head are kept tidy by a woven fillet. Curling hair is also found. Beards were trimmed in various fashions. The metal ornaments were made of gold, silver, copper and bronze. Stones used were like lapis lazuli, turquoise. The ornaments are girdles, necklaces, bracelets, pectorals, nose-rings, finger-rings, anklets, bangles.

### **Decline of the Indus Valley Civilization**

By about 1700 B.C. the Harappa culture was on the verge of decline. The causes of its decline are not certain. The physical existence of the civilization ended due to various factors. Ecological changes led to the decline of land and agriculture, thereby enforcing the need to evacuate to other areas. It might have been the reason for the disintegration of the Indus valley. Shifts in the monsoon pattern and changes in temperature led to the area becoming even more arid. Increase in population, excessive deforestation, decline in agriculture etc. might have created economic problems leading to the gradual decay of the culture. The marked decline in the quality of building and town planning indicates that the authorities were losing control. The changes in the river flow patterns and correspondent widespread flooding would have disrupted the agricultural base. The invasion of the Aryans is the other view that is said to be another reason which might have also led to the decline of the Indus valley.<sup>11</sup>

## **2. Aryans and Dravidians – A Controversial Issue**

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<sup>10</sup> S.P. Gupta, *The Indus-Saraswati Civilization: Origins, Problems and Issues*, 128

<sup>11</sup> Nayanjot Lahiri, *The Decline and Fall of the Indus Civilisation* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2000), 78.

According to general Indian legend, the Aryans arrived in north India somewhere from Iran and southern Russia at around 1500 BC. Before the Aryans, the Dravidian people resided in India. The Aryans disregarded the local cultures. They began conquering and taking control over regions in north India and at the same time pushed the local people southwards or towards the jungles and mountains in north India. According to this historical fact the general division of Indian society is made. North Indians are Aryans and south Indians are Dravidians. But this division isn't proper because of many reasons. Many Indians immigrated from one part of India to other parts of India and not all local people of north India were pushed southwards by the Aryans. Some stayed and served the Aryans and others moved to live in the forests and the jungles of north India. Before the arrival of the Aryans there were also other communities in India like Sino-Mongoloids and Austroloids. There were also other foreign immigrations and invaders who arrived in India, from time to time. There are many that completely doubt that there was ever any Aryan invasion in India. This skepticism is based on the dating of the Aryan invasion of India and the fact that Hinduism and the caste system are believed to have been established as the result of the meetings between the intruding Aryans and original residents of India, the Dravidians.

Until the discovery of the Indus Valley Civilization, the development of literature and culture in India was always credited to the Aryans. In 1920, archaeologists announced the discovery of extensive urban ruins in the Indus Valley has caused scholars to re-examine their views on the different phases of Indian culture. The Rig Veda speaks in such derogatory terms of the enemies subdued by the Aryan tribes. The Vedic tradition for centuries has degraded the original inhabitants of India with the intention of self-elevation, preservation and oppression. These ancient dwellers in India were Dravidians, and in fact, their culture had developed a highly sophisticated way of life. The existence of the Brahui tribe in Baluchistan, to the west of the Indus, who speak a Dravidian language like South Indian Tamil, gives evidence that a migration of people or culture did occur. Also the Harappa religion shows many similarities with those elements of Hinduism which are especially popular in the present Dravidian culture. Archaeological evidence shows that the Indus Valley culture moved from west to east, with sites towards central and southern India flourishing after Harappa and Mohenjo-daro had declined. This civilization is one of the three great early civilizations that arose in the late fourth and third millennia BC around the three large alluvial systems of the Tigris-Euphrates, Nile and Indus rivers.

### **3. Indus Valley Civilization of the Dravidians**

Different views are expressed in the world of research on Indus Valley Civilization. Some say it is of the Aryans while others opine that it is of the Dravidians. On the basis of the four Vedas, the theory that the Indus Valley Civilization is of the Aryans was built up. If Indus Valley Civilization is of the Aryans, mother goddess worship that plays an important role in the Indus Valley Civilization should be described in the Vedas. But in the Vedas only minor female deities are mentioned. The Indus Valley deities normally have horns, whereas the deities of the Vedas are not portrayed with horns.<sup>12</sup> *Sivalingas* which are found in the Indus Valley Civilization are later on degraded in the Vedas. The Vedas describe the wheels of the Chariots with spokes, but

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<sup>12</sup> I. Mahadevan, *Indian Express*, Madras edition, 5, August 1994.

the wheels that are seen on the seals and vehicles of clay in Indus valley do not have wheels with spokes.<sup>13</sup>

Following the analysis of Sir John Marshall on the Indus Valley Civilization here are given some clues.

1. The picture of Indo-Aryan society portrayed in the Vedas is that of a partly pastoral, partly agricultural people, who have not yet emerged from the village state, who have no knowledge of life in cities or of the complex economic organization which such life implies, and whose houses are nondescript affairs constructed largely of bamboo. At Mohenjo-daro and Harappa, on the other hand, we have densely populated cities with solid, commodious houses of brick equipped with adequate sanitation, bathrooms, wells, and other amenities.
2. The metals which the Indo-Aryans used in the time of the *Rigveda* are gold and copper or bronze; but a little later, in the time of the *Yajurveda* and *Atharvaveda*, these metals are supplemented by silver and iron. Among the Indus people silver is commoner than gold, and utensils and vessels are sometimes made of stone - a relic of the Neolithic Age - as well as of copper and bronze. Of iron there is no vestige.
3. For offensive weapons the Vedic-Aryans have the bow and arrow, spear, dagger, and axe, and for defensive armour the helmet and coat of mail. The Indus people also have the bow and arrow, spear, dagger and axe, but, like the Mesopotamians and Egyptians, they have the mace as well, sometimes of stone, sometimes of metal; while on the other hand, defensive armour is quite unknown to them - a fact which must have told against them in any contest with mailed and helmeted foes.
4. The Vedic-Aryans are a nation of meat-eaters, who appear to have had a general aversion to fish, since there is no direct mention of fishing in the Vedas. With the Indus people fish is a common article of diet, and so, too, are turtles and other aquatic creatures.
5. In the lives of the Vedic-Aryans the horse plays an important part, as it did in the lives of many nations from the northern grasslands. To the people of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa the horse seems to have been unknown.
6. By the Vedic Aryans the cow is prized above all other animals and regarded with special veneration. Among the Indus people the cow is of no particular account, its place with them being taken by the bull, the popularity of whose cult is attested by the numerous figurines and other representations of this animal.
7. Of the tiger there is no mention in the Vedas and of the elephant but little. Both these animals are familiar to the Indus people.
8. In the Vedic pantheon the female element is almost wholly subordinate to the male. Among the Indus cults. The female elements appear to be co-equal with, if not to predominate over the male.

The above points of differences demonstrate how wide the gulf between the Indus and Vedic Civilizations is. It is argued also that the difference between them is a difference of time only - that the Vedic civilization was either the progenitor or the lineal descendant of the Indus civilization. On this hypothesis the progress from the village to the city state and from the nondescript houses of the Vedic period to the massive brick architecture of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa would find a logical explanation, though we should have to postulate a long interval of

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

time in order to account for the evolution. Yet there are other cultural features that are to be accounted for.

If the Vedic culture antedated the Indus, how come that iron and defensive armour and the horse, which are characteristic of the former, are unknown to the latter? Or how come that the bull replaces the cow as an object of worship in the Indus period, only to be displaced again by the cow in succeeding ages? Or, again, how come that the Indus culture betrays so many survivals of the Neolithic Age - in the shape of stone implements and vessels - if the copper or bronze and iron culture of the Indo-Aryans intervened between the two? Clearly these considerations put out of court any solution of the problem which postulates an earlier date for the Vedic than for the Indus Civilization. But if it was not earlier, are there any grounds for supposing that it was evolved out of the latter? In other words, could the Indo-Aryans have been the authors of the Indus as well as of the Vedic Civilization?

Here, again, we are faced with a like dilemma. For, though on this assumption we could account for such phenomena as the introduction of iron, of the horse, and of body armour, all of which might have signalized merely a later phase of the same culture, we are wholly at a loss to explain how the Indo-Aryans came to relapse from the city to the village state, or how, having once evolved excellent houses of brick, they afterwards contented themselves with inferior structures of bamboo; or how, having once worshipped the linga and the Mother Goddess, they ceased to do so in the Vedic Period, but returned to their worship later; or how, having once occupied Sind, they subsequently lost all memory of that country of the Lower Indus".<sup>14</sup>

Opinions of Asko Parpola regarding Indus civilization and the review of Mahadevan on Asko Parpola's view are given as follows; The Survival of Brahui; a Dravidian language, spoken even today by large numbers of people in Baluchistan and the adjoining areas in Afghanistan and Iran, is an important factor in the identification of the Indus Civilization as Dravidian. Brahui belongs linguistically to the North Dravidian group with several shared innovations with Kurukh and Malto; no dialectal features connect it with the South or Central Dravidian languages. Hence Parpola concludes that Brahui represents the remnants of the Dravidian language spoken in the area by the descendants of the Harappan population.<sup>15</sup> Survival of place-names is generally a good indicator of the linguistic pre-history of a region. Parpola points out several place-names in the north western region like *nagara*, *Palli*, *Pattana* and *Kotta* with good Dravidian etymologies.<sup>16</sup> Parpola also points out that syntactical analysis of the Indus inscriptions has revealed Dravidian like typological characteristics, especially the attribute preceding the headword. It has often been pointed out that the complete absence of the horse among the animals so prominently featured on the Indus seals is good evidence for the non-Aryan character of the Indus Civilization.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Sir John Marshall, *Mohenjo-daro and the Indus Civilization*, Vol.I (Calcutta: Indological Book House, 1973), 109-112.

<sup>15</sup> Alexander Harris, 'Holes in Vedic Valley Theory,' *The Week*, August 9, 1998.

<sup>16</sup> Mahadevan, 'Review - An Encyclopaedia of the Indus Script,' by Asko Parpola, *International Journal of Dravidian linguistics*, Vol.xxvi, number 1, January 1997, 110.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*.

An article titled 'Looking beyond Indus Valley' published in 'The Week' magazine dated July 26, 1998 was written on the basis of the Vedas and trying to prove that it was of the Aryan civilization; The Vedas, which were nomadic worship songs were compiled, classified and written in Sanskrit as the four Vedas only in the post-Christian era by Veda Vyasa, a Dravidian. History of epigraphy reveals that Sanskrit was not prevalent in the pre-Christian era. Since the Vedas were written by a Dravidian, non-Aryan elements and ideologies occur in the Vedas.

The following statement of Parpolo on the Vedas is to be keenly observed. That some Dravidian loan words can be recognized in the Rgveda. The number of Dravidian loan words increases dramatically in post-Rgvedic literature. The Rgveda is assumed to contain not only Dravidian loan words but also phonological and syntactic Dravidians, in particular the development of 1) retroflex phonemes 2) the gerund and 3) the quotative 4) onomatopoeic constructions, all of which are absent from the closely related Iranian branch of the Aryan languages. We must bear in mind that the Rgveda was largely composed in the plains of the Punjab relatively late and redacted even later. The language as well as the contents of the Yajur Veda reflects an entirely different tradition, which probably evolved in Punjab and was incorporated in the Veda only during the acculturation that may be assumed to have taken place after the descent of the Rgvedic tradition from the Swat Valley.<sup>18</sup>

The response given by Dr. Alexander Harris on the above article titled 'Looking beyond Indus Valley' was published in the same magazine under the title 'Holes in Vedic Valley theory' and it is given as follows; The focus and motive of the article 'Looking beyond Indus valley' (July 26) seem to be to elevate the Vedas and the people associated with them rather than to edify and bring to light the truth of our past. Archaeologist Ravindra Singh Bisht, described as a Sanskrit scholar calls the Rig Veda "the world's oldest literary record". If what he says is true then how is it that the first epigraphic evidence of Sanskrit occurs only in AD150? The earliest epigraphic evidence on languages employed in India comes from the inscriptions of Ashoka inscribed in third century BC. Ashoka took care that his messages were intelligible to all and he used a particular kind of Prakrit. Even more remarkable is the fact, which has been recently discovered, that for those people who at the time lived in Afghanistan his message was given in Greek as well as Aramaic. One of the Greek inscriptions is a translation of the Kalinga Edict, and the Greek of the inscriptions is not inferior in style to classical Greek. In such circumstances neglect of Sanskrit by Asoka, if the language were in use, would be contrary to all his practice. So, the absence of Sanskrit in his inscriptions indicates that it did not exist at that time.

An inscription dating around AD 150 in the Brahmi script attests to the first evidence of classical Sanskrit. It records the repair of a dam originally built by Chandragupta Maurya and contains a panegyric in verse, which can be regarded as the first literary composition in classical Sanskrit. It is at Girnar in Kathiawar and was inscribed by Rudradamana, the Saka satrap of Ujjaini, on the same rock on which the Fourteen Rock Edicts of Asoka were also found. It is significant that Rudradamana employed classical Sanskrit in a region where about 400 years before him Asoka had used only Prakrit. This definitely proves that in the second century AD Sanskrit was replacing the dialects. Even so the language did not replace Prakrit anywhere, but it continued to be used in inscriptions for another hundred years or even more. However, from the fifth century AD classical Sanskrit is seen to be the dominant language in the inscriptions.

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 109.

From the bibliographical evidences we find that the Vedas were written rather late and, thus, the entire correlation in the article lacks credibility. Also, as renowned historian A.L. Basham puts it. "The Harappan religion seems to show many similarities with those elements of Hinduism which are specially popular in the Dravidian country". He further states, "Some Indian historians have tried to prove that they were the Aryans, the people who composed the Rig Veda, but this is quite impossible."<sup>19</sup> Hence, the historical analysis on Indus Valley Civilization implies the historical fact that it is of the Dravidians and this truth is hidden through the ages.

### **Conclusion**

Since the dawn of human history, civilizations have risen, reached the top where they gravitate for some time, achieving their enduring excellence and then slowly began their descent towards extinction. At a particular time, they had lost the vitality and the inner obedience to their particular genius, which they had possessed at the time of their peak and which had protected them. While this could have been a natural process of growth and decline, the external forces of power have played an important role in the evolution of humanity. The process ensured that civilizations did not stagnate but die many times before it has realized its fullness. The tracts of the Indus civilization did not become extinct with the decline of this civilization. There was no complete break-up after the Indus Civilization and many of its features were adopted in the later cultural developments. The early civilization in India, Indus and Harappan, have contributed a lot in the development of later Hindu religion, along with advancement of mathematics, cultivation of cotton, maritime trade relations with neighboring countries, urban civilization with town planning, architecture and engineering and fine jewelry. Sufficient recognition to early achievements of ancient Indians in these civilizations would lead us to understand the antiquity of India was glorious and golden. Roots of Indian civilization have been deep and strong.

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<sup>19</sup> Asko Parpolo, *Deciphering the Indus Scripts* (Philippians: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 168 & 169.

## Physical History of the Universe

- Mathew Chandrankunnel

*Scientific researchers have enabled humans to almost certainly pinpoint the beginning of our universe and the beginning of life and its evolutionary stages on the earth. To follow the history of the universe is indeed fascinating. History of the universe is understood in terms of quantum mechanics and the theory of relativity. These two together explain the origin or the history of the universe. The first section of this paper deals with how Lemaître and Hubble worked on the General Theory of Relativity of Einstein and proposed the origin of the Universe from a primeval atom through a Big Bang, and the development of relativistic cosmology. section deals with all the modern works based on the Big Bang relativistic model of the Universe. It has two subsections and in the first section we deal with the latest scientific works beginning with that of George Gamow, followed by Penzias-Wilson and Martin Bojowald's Big Bounce theory. The section also sees certain new concepts like String Theory, Parallel Universes, Extraterrestrial Intelligence and the fate of the Universe. The relativistic cosmology which started its growth in full swing with Lemaître and Hubble made further advancements with numerous other hypotheses. One of the remarkable episodes of this phase of development of relativistic cosmology was that the cosmologists started coupling relativity theory with quantum mechanics in order to study relatively short distances. Thus the scope of expanding cosmology enlarged and it became all the more relevant when religion exerted its influence and philosophers started to philosophize the astrophysical concepts. We shall also see what philosophical and religious significance have some of these theories got.*

### Introduction

Now scientific research advanced in such a way that we can almost certainly pinpoint the beginning of our universe and the beginning of life and its evolutionary stages on the earth. The history of the universe began 13.7 billion years ago. Or the history of the universe began 13.7 billion years ago. With a huge explosion, space and time began and the tiny cosmic atom began to expand. The energy soup gradually formed into granules of matter such as quarks, then to particles, to electron, proton and neutron. Then to atom and atoms into elements, into trivial matter which in turns to gaseous systems consolidated into stars, grouped into galaxies and galactic clusters. From a tiny atom, the universe expanded into these gigantic cosmic proportions. To follow the history of the universe is indeed fascinating. History of the universe is understood in terms of quantum mechanics and the theory of relativity. Quantum mechanics explains the behaviour of the microcosm like subatomic particles while the theory of relativity explains the macrocosm like the galactic clusters. Theory of relativity is single handedly developed by Albert Einstein while quantum mechanics is developed by a group of scientists. These two together explain the origin or the history of the universe.

### I

#### The Discovery of Expansion

Extensive research works were taken up by cosmologists based on the General Theory of Relativity of Einstein. Most of them took up independent works and later found that it coincided with the works of Friedmann to a large degree. Expansion of the Universe became a widely accepted concept toward the middle of the twentieth century and the forerunners of this theory were Belgian priest George Lemaître and Edwin Powell Hubble. When Lemaître through his theories proposed that the Universe is expanding Hubble did it through his observations using his 100-inch telescope at the Mount Wilson observatory.

Lemaître was one of the pioneers who applied Albert Einstein's theory of General Relativity to cosmology. In a 1927 article that preceded Edwin Hubble's article by two years, Lemaître derived

what came to be known as Hubble's law and proposed it as a generic phenomenon in relativistic cosmology. Lemaître also predicted the numerical value of the Hubble Constant. Both Friedmann and Lemaître proposed relativistic cosmologies featuring an expanding universe. However, Lemaître was the first to propose that the expansion is explained by the red-shift of galaxies. He further concluded that an initial "creation-like" event must have occurred.<sup>1</sup> It became possible for Lemaître because he quickly absorbed Einstein's equations during the years 1920-1922 and he was well acquainted with the works of other astronomers also. There are also evidences for Lemaître having visited Hubble at the Mount Wilson observatory to discuss their observations<sup>2</sup>. Thus he was all set to apply the field equations of Einstein to his own cosmological deliberations. His first task was to reveal the drawbacks of Einstein and De Sitter models and suggest solutions for it.

In his first paper "Note on De Sitter's Universe" which was published in 1925, Lemaître pointed out the errors in the model of De Sitter<sup>3</sup>. To be precise, he indicated the mathematical discrepancies that had crept into his equations which made De Sitter propose the model of empty space Universe. Lemaître by bringing to light the mathematical flaws of De Sitter put an end to an eight year long debate between De Sitter and Einstein which started way back in 1917. Till 1925, Einstein and De Sitter had kept on publishing papers to criticize the other's view and to affirm personal analysis. It was at this juncture that Lemaître entered the tussle with his 1925 paper. Lemaître observed certain side effects for the De Sitter model which in the hindsight were very clear indication that any truly useful model of the cosmos in General Relativity had to be dynamic and static. Lemaître was wise enough to observe a certain phenomenon in the De Sitter model which the proponent himself was unaware of. De Sitter's solution showed that any particle introduced into his empty static Universe would appear to recede from any other particle and show some red-shift<sup>4</sup>. This concept of red-shift later became widely accepted with Lemaître's theories and Hubble's observations. Lemaître also noticed that De Sitter made a mistake by picking up a 'preferred frame of reference'<sup>5</sup> for his argument. Where both Einstein and De Sitter actually assumed a homogenous and isotropic Universe, the latter made the mistake of assuming a lack of homogeneity in the space. This made him draw wrong conclusions according to Lemaître. Lemaître on the other hand showed how we can preserve this homogenous and isotropy by changing the coordinates.

Another significant contribution of Lemaître is his viewpoint that the scale factor, or radius of the Universe need not be constant, as was the case in both Einstein's and De Sitter's original models<sup>6</sup>. It was a momentous and crucial discovery as far as the concept of an expanding Universe was concerned. Radius and time are interrelated. So by keeping that the radius factor irregular Lemaître showed mathematically that radius is a time-increasing function and that the distance between all points in the space is constantly increasing. More to this, Lemaître also showed that if Einstein kept his Universe homogenous, it would no longer remain spherical instead an ever extending space. Thus the stable Universe of Einstein was written off for good<sup>7</sup>. However, Lemaître chose to depict the De Sitter model as an incomplete replica of an expanding Universe which could predict even the concept of red-shift, as I earlier said, without the proponent himself knowing about it. In Lemaître's own words "De Sitter's work was pointing to something more momentous than he realized"<sup>8</sup>. In the 1925 paper, Lemaître also gave indication for a law which would be later called Hubble's Law. Lemaître's model involved an evolving Universe, with red-shifted nebulae illustrating space-time expansion and expanding with nebulae receding at radial velocities directly proportional to their distances<sup>9</sup>. This law which later came to be called Hubble's Law can be mathematically

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<sup>1</sup> Anonymous, "Lemaître." [Online].

<sup>2</sup> John Farrel, *The Day Without Yesterday: Lemaitre, Einstein, and the Birth of Modern Cosmology* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2006), 78.

<sup>3</sup> Farrel, *The Day Without Yesterday*, 80.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>5</sup> 'Preferred frame of reference' means a reference point that is 'special' or 'privileged'; for example considering an impermeable horizon beyond which one cannot see and at which all the processes of nature come to a standstill.

<sup>6</sup> Farrel, *The Day Without Yesterday*, 85.

<sup>7</sup> Donald Goldsmith, Robert P. Libbon, *The Ultimate Einstein* (New York: Byron Preiss, 1997), 184.

<sup>8</sup> Farrel, *The Day Without Yesterday*, 87.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

represented<sup>10</sup>, when  $v$  is the radial velocity,  $D$  is the distance and  $H$  is the Hubble Constant, as:  $v = HD$

Between 1925 and 1927 Lemaître worked on a paper which contained the details of a complete solution to Einstein's equations that would fully model an expanding Universe. The paper was published in 1927 and it had the lengthy title of "A Homogenous Universe of Constant Mass and Increasing Radius Accounting for the Radial Velocity of Extra-Galactic Nebulae"<sup>11</sup>. At the very beginning he worked out cosmological solution that would embrace both Einstein's and De Sitter's solutions as limiting cases of a larger model. His theory was thus firmly footed on the previous two models but he accommodated into his equations data from the existing astronomical observations of red-shifted nebulae in order to establish the fact that the Universe has been expanding. He gathered these data from his talks with Slipher<sup>12</sup> and Hubble.

About Lemaître many of the twentieth century books give erroneous information that his 1927 paper suggested the Big Bang, an explosion of matter from nothing. His initial interest was only in proving that the Universe is expanding from an initial static Einstein state. Lemaître's concern was in establishing that the present model of the Universe owes its origin to Einstein's static solution. Using Hubble's estimates of time and with the help of Einstein and De Sitter models he even obtained a radius for his own model of the Universe at:  $R_E = 8.5 \times 10^{28}$  cm which equals  $2.7 \times 10^{10}$  parsecs<sup>13</sup>. His theory of the primeval atom from which the cosmos originated came only as his next interest. When Lemaître completed his next paper again in 1927, which contained the notion of the primeval atom, he chose to publish it in an obscure Belgian journal not wanting to draw the attention of all; for he was sure that it was quite provocative and speculative. This paper remained rather unnoticed until Hubble published his findings in 1929. Though Lemaître handed over a copy of the paper to his former mentor Arthur Eddington he misplaced it somewhere. When in 1929 Hubble came up with his observations, Lemaître reminded Eddington that he had already submitted the solutions to him, which he had not considered seriously. Eddington having understood his mistake took the first step to translate and publish Lemaître's work in 1930.

Eddington again was Lemaître's inspiration for the primeval atom hypothesis. Eddington tried to extrapolate backward from the present condition of the Universe and stated that after a specific point "to go back is impossible...we have to come to an abrupt end of space-time which we call 'the beginning'...and *philosophically, the notion of a beginning of the present order of nature is repugnant to me*"<sup>14</sup>. Lemaître retorted back to this argument of Eddington, that there is no primeval atom, in his paper "On the Beginning of the World from the Point of View of Quantum Theory" (1931). This paper is said to be the groundwork or the first declared proposal for what would become a Big Bang theory.<sup>15</sup> Based on Quantum Physics and the laws of Thermodynamics, Lemaître argued against Eddington's position and proved that a primeval atom did exist at the beginning of the Universe. He began his 1931 paper as cited below: Eddington states that, *philosophically, the notion of a beginning of the present order of nature is repugnant to him*. I would rather be inclined to think that the present state of quantum theory suggests a beginning of the world very different from the present order of nature. Thermodynamical principles from the point of view of quantum theory may be stated as follows: (1) Energy of constant total amount is distributed in discrete quanta. (2) The number of discrete quanta is ever increasing. If we go back in the course of time we must find fewer and fewer quanta, until we find all the energy of the Universe packed in a few or even in a unique quantum.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>10</sup> E.A. Tropp, et.al., *Alexander A. Friedmann: The Man Who Made the Universe Expand* (Cambridge: University Press, 1993), 217.

<sup>11</sup> Farrel, *The Day Without Yesterday*, 89.

<sup>12</sup> Vesto Slipher, an American, was the first astronomer to measure the Doppler shift of a nebula. He measured the receding velocities of almost forty galaxies.

<sup>13</sup> Farrel, *The Day Without Yesterday*, 90.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> (*Nature* 127. May 9, 1931) as cited in Farrel, *The Day Without Yesterday*, 107.

However, Lemaître was really troubled with the philosophical confusion of talking about something - the primeval atom - that is said to have come “before” time. He in 1950 referred to this ultimate origin as “the now without yesterday” which became popularly quoted as “the day without yesterday”<sup>17</sup>. Thus Lemaître propagated his idea that the General Theory of Relativity did indeed imply a moment of creation in a small compact region from which it blew up and evolved and will continue to evolve over time. After having developed this model of the Universe Lemaître was in look out for the physics that would support his theory of cosmic creation. He came across the cosmic-ray physics. There were evidences already existing for highly energetic particles existing in the outer space<sup>18</sup>. Lemaître was also aware of the process of radioactive decay, in which large atoms such as Uranium break down into smaller atoms, emitting particles, radiation and energy. By extrapolating backward in time, Lemaître envisioned all the heavenly bodies squeezed into a super compact primordial matter which he called the ‘primeval atom’. Then all at once there was this moment of creation and the single atom suddenly decayed generating all the matter in the Universe. Here Lemaître made the speculation that the cosmic rays observable today might be the remnants of this initial decay<sup>19</sup>.

To summarize, Lemaître was the first scientist to give a reasonably confident and comprehensive explanation of what we now mention as the Big Bang model of the Universe. He maintained that this was not just ‘a’ model but ‘the’ model of the Universe. He started with Einstein’s General Theory of Relativity, developed a theoretical model of the cosmological creation, and then integrated it with known observations of phenomena such as cosmic rays and radioactive decay. In nutshell, the theory of Lemaître could be abridged in Lemaître’s own words as: “the primeval atom hypothesis is a cosmogenic hypothesis which pictures the present Universe as the result of the radioactive disintegration of an atom”<sup>20</sup>.

### **The Obstinacy of Einstein**

Einstein was infamous for the kind of obstinacy he showed towards Friedmann and Lemaître when they approached him with the models of the Universe which they had developed based on the General Theory of Relativity equations. We saw in the previous chapter how stubborn Einstein was towards Friedmann. Here we try to look at the way Einstein dealt with the Lemaître model of the Universe. We do not know when and where exactly did both of them meet first. Anyhow Einstein brusquely dismissed the Lemaître’s idea saying that “Your calculations are correct; but your physics is abominable”<sup>21</sup>. He used ‘abominable’ not as a personal insult but he perhaps applied the word to the concept of expanding space. It is also said about Einstein that he refused even to consider the idea of Lemaître when the idea of the expanding Universe was brought to him first.

Einstein told Lemaître that Friedmann had made a similar discovery way back in 1922. So it was Lemaître who brought to the fore the theory of Friedmann after many years once Einstein had condemned it. Again it is interesting to note that Einstein, even after having found Friedmann and Lemaître to be not wrong, did not take the trouble of popularizing their theories. Einstein happily laid the matter to rest without being noticed by anybody. Many of the scientists of today say that Einstein remained obstinate simply due to his ignorance regarding the then astronomical observations carried out by Hubble and companions. Lemaître had to speak out about it in one of his radio addresses that “Einstein did not seem to be aware of these facts”<sup>22</sup>. Thus the man called the “Father of Bing Bang” encountered the obstinacy of a man known by the title the “Father of Relativity”.

Why should Einstein’s obstinacy be a matter of discussion at all? It is said, in the 1920s Einstein was a symbol of authority in physics and his blessing or criticism had the power to make or break a

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<sup>17</sup> Farrel, *The Day Without Yesterday*, 108.

<sup>18</sup> Simon Singh, *Big Bang* (New York: Harper Collins, 2010), 158.

<sup>19</sup> Singh, *Big Bang*, 159.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Farrel, *The Day Without Yesterday*, 10.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

budding theory with lot of potentials. Einstein interest, as we saw was in preserving the traditional static nature of the Universe and in order to achieve it he introduced the Cosmological Constant and rejected any other theory that would come as an obstacle in the path. This made many of the scientists continue to believe in the eternal, static Universe and the Big Bang or the primeval atom model was in the doldrums. Hence Lemaître's theory was dismissed until Hubble published his observational evidences in 1929. Only then was Einstein ready to relent, confessing that "fate made me an authority myself."<sup>23</sup>

### **Lemaître: The Influence of Religion**

Lemaître being a priest was always looked upon as someone who tried to slip in the account of creation in the book of Genesis into the cosmological considerations. But the fact is that he was seldom influenced by the priest in him. He found science and religion not contradictory but complimentary in nature. He who maintained parallel careers as a priest and a physicist used to say "There are two ways of arriving at the truth; and I decided to follow them both"<sup>24</sup>. The opponents of the primeval atom theory and the Big Bang theory always criticized Lemaître for his religious inclination. The British physicist William Bonner suggested that the Lemaître's theory was a part of conspiracy aimed at shoring up Christianity. He is quoted to have been said that "the underlying motive is of course to bring in God as creator." Fred Hoyle also condemned the theory for having built on Judeo-Christian foundations.<sup>25</sup>

The theory of Lemaître also influenced the Catholic Church as a whole. Many Catholic scholars of the time were of the opinion that the theory scientifically supported the idea of creation in the book of Genesis. They found positive relationship between the contemporary cosmology and God. Their main focus was on the cosmic singularity or in other words the primeval atom. Stanley Jaki, a priest and historian of science defended this view stating that "the singularity of the Universe is a gigantic springboard which can propel upward anyone ready to exploit its metaphysical resilience and catch thereby a glimpse of the absolute"<sup>26</sup>. The Church also officially supported the Big Bang theory because it agreed with the theological position that time itself began at creation. In 1951 Pope Pius XII said that the Big Bang of Lemaître and Hubble is a scientific interpretation of Genesis and evidence for the existence of God in an address entitled 'The Proofs for the Existence of God in the Light of Modern Natural Science.'<sup>27</sup>

But Lemaître, the cosmologist was not interested in the Church making religious conclusion out of his theory. He always discouraged the Pope from making such proclamations and firmly believed that scientific endeavor should stand cut off from the religious realm commenting that "such a theory remains entirely outside any metaphysical or religious question".<sup>28</sup> He was convinced of the fact that religion gave him comprehension of the spiritual realm and cosmology a grasp of the material world. However his critics never understood his stand and merely because he was a priest and the Church also supported his theory, they were of the assumption that Lemaître was led by religious motives. It was generally assumed that Lemaître was ultimately inspired by his Catholicism to look for a 'Genesis' in his fireworks theory.<sup>29</sup>

### **The Role of Edwin Hubble**

Edwin Powel Hubble (1887-1953) was an American Astronomer who established on his observational evidences that the galaxies are not at rest in space. Hubble is noted for having developed the theory of Big Bang to its full structure, the discovery of the Andromeda galaxy, the Hubble Constant and Hubble's Law and for his numerous other observations from his famous Mount Wilson Observatory. Hubble's views on the methodology of astronomy were very creative

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<sup>23</sup> Singh, *Big Bang*, 161.

<sup>24</sup> Singh, *Big Bang*, 157.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 361.

<sup>26</sup> Drees, *Beyond the Big Bang*, 18.

<sup>27</sup> Singh, *Big Bang*, 360.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 362.

<sup>29</sup> Farrel, *The Day Without Yesterday*, 153.

and it was made explicit in a number of his writings and the most important of them are: *The Realm of the Nebulae*, *The Nature of Science and Other Lectures* and “Points of View: Experiment and Experience” an article which appeared in *Huntington Library Quarterly* 3(April, 1939).<sup>30</sup>

### Red Shift and Receding Galaxies

It was in the year 1925 that Hubble astonished the astronomical world with his discovery of the Andromeda Nebula in his first paper “Cepheids in Spiral Nebulae.” The discovery was done based on the Cepheid variables<sup>31</sup> he had located in M31<sup>32</sup>. M31 which was later proved to be the Andromeda<sup>33</sup> nebula was said to be existing at a distance of eight hundred thousand light years away. In 1929, Hubble made a new discovery. He established that galaxies were not at rest in space, but moved quite quickly. The motion of galaxies reveals itself in the famous “red-shift.”<sup>34</sup> Red-shift<sup>35</sup> is a phenomenon in which the spectral lines of receding galaxies proved to be shifted perceptibly toward longer wavelengths i.e., toward the red end of the spectrum. When distance increases only the light rays with longer wavelength are perceived. Red being the light ray with the longest wavelength and when light from galaxies is found to be shifting more to the red end in the spectrum, it showed that the galaxies are moving away from us.

The phenomenon of red-shift was also observed by many other astronomers like Slipher and Eddington. Hubble and his assistant Humason noted the red-shift of a number of galaxies and found that farther the distance of the galaxy, greater is the red-shift. This showed that farthest galaxies are moving at a greater speed than the closer ones. They concluded that due to the expansion of the Universe stretching happens to the light waves from a distant galaxy. The galaxy is not receding through the space, but the expansion of the space itself causes the red-shift. Thus red-shift and the receding galaxies provided the proof for the expansion of the Universe. He published these results in the 1929 paper titled “A Relation between Distance and Radial Velocity among Extra-Galactic Nebulae”. He put the mean velocity of recession at 500 km/sec. He also determined the rate of expansion of the Universe as 525 km/sec per mega parsec. Assuming this rate to be constant we could apply it to the most distant nebulae and calculate backward to determine the point from which the galaxies emerged. This time which would help us to calculate the time in which the Universe began was called the Hubble Time.<sup>36</sup>

### Hubble’s Law and Big Bang

Hubble and Humason measured the red-shift of almost forty six galaxies and plotted a graph of Velocity of recession versus the Distance of galaxy and obtained a roughly linear graph. Hubble thus proposed that the galaxies were not dashing through the cosmos, but their speeds were mathematically related to their distances. This mathematical relation was of deeper significance because it made all the more obvious that at some point in history all the galaxies in the Universe compacted into a small region. Perhaps this was the first observational evidence for a moment of creation or what we call the Big Bang.<sup>37</sup> So everything in the Universe apparently emerged from a single dense region during the moment of creation. So if we travel backward in time, yesterday our neighboring galaxies were closer to us. A month back they were closer still. And thus in some point of history, as Lemaître predicted, there will be the presence of a highly condensed primeval atom from which, the entire cosmos emerged with a Big Bang.

<sup>30</sup> Michael J.Crowe, *Modern Theories of the Universe: From Herschel to Hubble* (New York: Dover Publications, 1994), 1.

<sup>31</sup> Cepheid variable is a type of variable star named after Delta Cepheus, whose brightness was seen to be changing over time. In 1925, Hubble discovered a Cepheid in M31 or the Andromeda nebula.

<sup>32</sup> M31: Charles Messier (1730-1813), an astronomer assigned numbers to 103 nebulae in 1780 as a common method of designating the nebulae. Andromeda was numbered ‘31’ in his list and for long it was referred to as M31.

<sup>33</sup> Andromeda is the closest galaxy to Milky Way

<sup>34</sup> Tropp, *Alexander A. Friedmann*, 151.

<sup>35</sup> Red-shift is otherwise called the Doppler Effect which can be explained as a change in wavelength when there is relative motion of the source and receiver.

<sup>36</sup> Farrel, *The Day Without Yesterday*, 110.

<sup>37</sup> Singh, *Big Bang*, 252.

The proportional relationship between a galaxy's velocity and the distance became known as Hubble's Law. Lemaître had already forecasted this relationship and Hubble with his observational evidences made it a law. Hubble's law, as we saw in the previous chapter, can be denoted by  $v = HD$  where  $v$  is the galaxy's radial velocity,  $D$  is the distance and  $H$  is the Hubble Constant. Hubble's law can be made use to predict the distance of a receding galaxy and even to calculate the age of the Universe. We try to make an attempt to calculate the age of the Universe. In order to do this we consider that at the time of Big Bang the Andromeda and the Milky Way galaxies were next to each other. Today they have separated to a distance of 2.2 million light years. It is an elementary law of motion that Distance ( $D$ ) equals Velocity ( $V$ ) X Time ( $t$ );  $D=Vt$ . Hence we also have  $t=D/V$ . Let us divide 2.2 million light years ( $2.2 \times 10^6$  light years) by the velocity of recession of Andromeda  $V=50.6\text{km/sec}$ . The length of a light year is  $9.46 \times 10^{12}$  kms. Consequently we have the age of the Universe =  $t = [(2.2 \times 10^6) \times (9.46 \times 10^{12} \text{ km})] / 50.6 \text{ km/sec.} = 4.11 \times 10^{17}$  seconds. To convert this to years, divide it by the number of seconds in a year, that is,  $3.15 \times 10^7$ . This gives the age of the Universe as about 13 billion years.<sup>38</sup>

## II

### Modern Studies in Relativistic Cosmology

George Gamow is noted mainly for his 1948 paper "The Origin of Chemical Elements" which he published along with his student Ralph Alpher. This theory was later called as Alpha-Beta-Gamma theory. The paper illustrated how the present levels of hydrogen and helium in the cosmos could be explained by reactions that occurred during the Big Bang. In this paper, he also predicted the presence of a residual Cosmic Microwave Background Radiation (CMB) as a support for Big Bang theory.

Before we deal in depth about the contributions of Gamow we take a look at what exactly is CMB or the Cosmic Microwave Background Radiation. With Big Bang the super-hot Universe expanded and cooled dramatically. After 300,000 years the Universe cooled down sufficiently to allow electrons to slow down and form atoms. This prevented any further scattering of the light, which ever since has been traveling through the space unhindered. This light has become known as CMB<sup>39</sup>. All these light waves might have got stretched because the Universe itself has been expanding ever since the recombination. This was similar to the stretching and red shift of light from the receding galaxies, as measured by Hubble. The stretched Big Bang light should now have a wavelength of roughly one millimeter.<sup>40</sup> These predictions were made by Gamow along with Ralph Alpher and Robert Herman.

Alpha-Beta-Gamma paper was a landmark in the Big Bang versus the Steady State theory. Ralph Alpher and Robert Herman worked extensively on the Cosmic Microwave Background Radiation and they called it a 'sea of light' emitted at the moment of creation. This light is a remnant or an afterglow of the Big Bang. According to Gamow, Alpher and Herman, detecting this light will certainly provide us with powerful evidences for a Universe that began with a Big Bang. On the other hand, if the light did not exist, the Big Bang model would collapse. However, in the Alpha-Beta-Gamma paper, no estimate of the strength of the present day residual Cosmic Microwave Background Radiation (CMB) was made. Ralph Alpher and Robert Herman later predicted that the afterglow of the Big Bang would have cooled down after billions of years, filling the universe with a radiation five degrees above absolute zero<sup>41</sup>. They worked further on Gamow's CMB radiation and guessed that the Universe should be full of a feeble microwave light, and it should be coming from all directions because it had existed everywhere in the Universe at the moment of the Big Bang<sup>42</sup>. They envisaged that anyone who could detect this CMB radiation would establish that Big

<sup>38</sup> Crowe, *Modern Theories of the Universe*, 337.

<sup>39</sup> Singh, *Big Bang*, 472-473.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 333.

<sup>41</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GAMOV>

<sup>42</sup> Singh, *Big Bang*, 333.

Bang actually happened. Though Gamow, Alpher and Herman tried to convince the scientific fraternity regarding CMB, they faced utter rejection owing to various problems. First of all many of the physicists were not happy with the Big Bang model of the Universe and so they did not bother at all to look for a CMB radiation that apparently emerged from a Big Bang. Secondly, Gamow and company could only predict and never was able to detect this radiation. Thus the contribution of Gamow to Relativistic Cosmology, though highly incredible, remained unnoticed and rejected till Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson made an accidental discovery of Cosmic Microwave Background Radiation in 1964.

### **Penzias-Wilson Discovery**

The Cosmic Microwave Background Radiation predicted by Gamow was first detected by Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson in 1964. Penzias and Wilson were radio astronomers who were working at Bell Labs in New Jersey. They were experimenting with a supersensitive, twenty feet horn antenna originally built to detect radio waves bounced off echo balloon satellites. In radio astronomy, the signals from a distant galaxy are so feeble and weak that the issue of noise is vital<sup>43</sup>. In order to determine these weak radio waves, the two radio astronomers had to eliminate all recognizable interference from their receiver. They removed the effects of radar and radio broadcasting, and suppressed interference from the heat in the receiver itself by cooling it with liquid helium to  $-269^{\circ}\text{C}$ , only  $4^{\circ}\text{C}$  above absolute zero.<sup>44</sup>

However, they were surprised when they discovered an unexpected and irritating level of noise emerging from the receiver. The two astronomers conducted many sensitive surveys in order to find out what exactly is the cause of this disappointing noise which would critically have an effect on the measurements that they were making. They were sure that the noise was neither an extraneous one nor something inherent in the equipment. What the radio astronomers had not realized was that they had tripped into one of the most important discoveries in the history of cosmology. This noise was actually the CMB radiation which was predicted by Gamow. The noise or the 'echo' was actually the remnant of the Big Bang or an 'echo' from the early phase of expansion<sup>45</sup>. The duo could only conclude that noise was coming from outside our own galaxy; although they were not aware of any radio source that would account for it. At the same time, Robert H. Dicke, Jim Peebles, and David Wilkinson, astrophysicists at Princeton University, were preparing to search for microwave radiation. Dicke and his colleagues claimed that the Big Bang must have scattered not only the matter but also must have released a tremendous blast of radiation. And this radiation, according to them, should be detectable. When Penzias was told about an unpublished paper prepared by Dicke and Peebles on the possibility of finding radiation left over from an explosion that filled the universe at the beginning of its existence, Penzias and Wilson began to realize the significance of their discovery.

The characteristics of the radiation detected by Penzias and Wilson fit exactly the radiation predicted by Robert H. Dicke and his colleagues. Penzias called Dicke at Princeton, who immediately sent him a copy of the still-unpublished Peebles paper. Penzias read the paper and called Dicke again and invited him to Bell Labs to look at the horn Antenna and listen to the background noise. Dicke, Peebles and Wilkinson interpreted this radiation as a sign and proof for Big Bang<sup>46</sup>. Both Penzias and Wilson were awarded with Nobel Prize for Physics in 1978 for their joint discovery of CMB radiation.

### **Big Bounce Theory**

Having gathered sufficient evidences for Big Bang origin of the cosmos, we are still not in a position to say that Big Bang explains all the mysteries regarding the origin of the Universe. There remains a question all the time, concerning what existed before the Big Bang. Model of the Universe based on Relativity theory runs into trouble because it considers space as a continuum; yet

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<sup>43</sup> Singh, *Big Bang*, 426.

<sup>44</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/penzias>

<sup>45</sup> Singh, *Big Bang*, 429.

<sup>46</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/penzias>

do not explain what existed before the Big Bang. This made scientists like Martin Bojowald put forward Big Bounce theory which says that our Universe may have started not with a Big Bang but with a Big Bounce- an implosion triggered by an explosion. He published his Big Bounce theory in October 2008 edition of Scientific American magazine.

This theory at the outset analyses the drawbacks of relativistic cosmology and tries to build up a new Einstein's general theory of relativity says that the universe began with the Big Bang singularity or the way of looking at the origin of the Universe based on quantum theory. According to Martin Bojowald, Cosmic Egg, a moment when all the matter we see was concentrated at a single point of infinite density. But the theory does not capture the fine, quantum structure of space-time, which limits how tightly matter can be concentrated and how strong gravity can become.<sup>47</sup> So, in order to figure out what actually occurred, physicists need a quantum theory of gravity. The proponents of Big Bounce theory makes use of what is called as the Loop Quantum Theory as a tool to predict the Big Bounce. According to Loop Quantum Gravity space is subdivided into "atoms" and has finite capacity to store matter and energy. In other word the space is a continuous chain or a mesh of atoms which prevents true singularities from existing.

Thus Martin Bojowald and other quantum physicists have explored areas strange and unknown even to Einstein using a mathematical time machine called Loop Quantum Gravity. They have shown that time may have extended before the bang. The pre-bang universe may have undergone a disastrous contraction that reached a point of utmost density and then reversed. In short, a big crunch may have led to a big bounce and then to the big bang.<sup>48</sup> Quantum physics did not exist during the days of Einstein. The Loop Quantum Gravity which combines Einstein's Theory of General Relativity with equations of quantum physics is the first mathematical description that systematically establishes the existence of the Big Bounce. This explanation deduces the properties of the earlier universe from which the present day Universe may have evolved. It would mean that the Big Bounce opens a crack in the barrier that was the Big Bang.<sup>49</sup> The Big Bounce theory in other words says that the present expanding structure of the Universe is just a fragmentary phase of the 'bouncing' cosmos. And without a singularity to distinguish the commencement of time, the history of the Universe may extend further back than cosmologists once thought possible. In short there must have been time before time.<sup>50</sup>

### String Theory

There is no doubt that Einstein's General Theory was monumental. Based on it we have the expanding Universe which began with a widely accepted Big Bang. Yet the General Theory of Relativity cannot be considered as the final word in unveiling the mysteries of the Universe in terms of gravity. We have already seen certain drawbacks of Einstein's theory in the previous section that it cannot be used as a tool to predict the evolution of the entire Universe. General Theory is a failure when we apply it to extremely short distances. But Quantum Theory on the other hand could be made use even at very short distances. This made some of the physicists to think of a new gravitational standard which they call as String Theory.

It is a fact that String Theory is not yet completely developed. And if it emerges to be a correct one, it would embrace the successful predictions of general theory, quantum mechanics and particle physics. It would also extend astrophysics to distance and energy domains that these other theories are not equipped to handle.<sup>51</sup> The theory is called String theory because it explains Universe in terms of particles that vibrate self-consistently. The essence of String Theory is that it can explain the nature of both matter and space-time.<sup>52</sup> According to String Theory, there is only one

<sup>47</sup> M. Bojowald, "Follow the Bouncing Universe," *Scientific American* (October 2008), 29.

<sup>48</sup> Bojowald, "Follow the Bouncing Universe," 29.

<sup>49</sup> Staff Writers, "Before the Big Bang." [Online].

<sup>50</sup> Bojowald, "Follow the Bouncing Universe," 31.

<sup>51</sup> Lisa Randall, *Warped Passages: Unravelling the Mysteries of the Universe* (New York: Harper Collins, 2006), 278.

<sup>52</sup> Michio Kaku, *Hyperpace: Scientific Odyssey through Parallel Universes, Time Warps* (Oxford: University Press, 1994), 152.

fundamental ingredient-the string-and the variety of particle species only reflects the different vibrational patterns that a string can execute. It is just like the mechanism of the strings on a violin. A violin string can vibrate in different ways and we hear each pattern as a different music note. The strings in the String Theory behave similarly; they too can vibrate in different patterns. If different patterns of vibration yield different musical tones, the different vibrational patterns of the strings in String Theory correspond to different kinds of particles.<sup>53</sup>

By subduing the hostility between quantum mechanics and general relativity, String Theory has got the capacity to unify all matter and forces by describing everything in terms of the vibrating strings. By means of such unification, this theory promises to take our understanding of the Universe to a whole new level. But one has to bear in mind that the strings are too small to observe and it is likely that no one will ever discover this so called basic ingredient of all matter and energy.<sup>54</sup> However, if String Theory is proven right it will be *the* theory that explains the Universe not just in broad outline but also in minute details.

### **Parallel Universes**

Astrophysicists of modern day make use of general relativity to predict the existence of other universes other than that of ours. In order to understand the concept of these parallel universes, we must have a clear knowledge of black holes. The General Theory of Relativity points to the existence of black holes, which are regions of space where space and time are distorted in such a way that stars, planets and not even light can escape. Black hole is usually defined as a collapsed star from which no light escapes.<sup>55</sup> The relativistic explanation to black holes comes from the works of Karl Schwarzschild. Schwarzschild's solutions to Einstein's equations contained many interesting features. First, a 'point of no return' surrounds the black hole. Any object that comes closer than this radius will inescapably be sucked into the Black hole, with no possibility of escape. Second, anyone who fell into this radius called Schwarzschild radius would come across a 'mirror universe' on the 'other side' of space-time. At the centre of the black hole we stumble upon an infinite curvature.<sup>56</sup> If at all a parallel universe existed, the bridge that connects both these universes is called the Einstein-Rosen bridge, named after Einstein and his collaborator Nathan Rosen. And black hole is just an opening to this giant bridge which connects two universes or two regions of space-time. In other words black hole is a gateway to other universe.

Einstein-Rosen bridge acts as a 'worm hole'. Worm hole is considered to be a hypothetical tunnel through the space.<sup>57</sup> Based on wave function, Stephen Hawking put forward that we can describe the set of all possible universes. So our Universe may be one of an infinite number of parallel universes, each connected to the others by a countless series of worm holes.<sup>58</sup> Travel between these worm holes is possible but extremely unlikely because anything that entered in the bridge would be crushed, thereby making communication between two universes impossible. Yet the present day astronomers firmly believe that other universes do exist and our universe is the most likely with the greater probability than all other Universes.<sup>59</sup> Stephen Hawking, who is the chief proponent of this 'baby universes theory', stimulated debates among the cosmologists and his theory raised philosophical and religious questions.

### **Extraterrestrial Intelligence**

Man has always been curiously looking for life forms similar to that of his own for quite some time. The relativity theory of Einstein comes as a boost in the human quest to discover extraterrestrial brains. Having opened up new horizons of parallel universes and string theories, the relativity theory offers new possibilities of venturing into the sphere of extraterrestrial intelligence. But most

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<sup>53</sup> Brian Greene, *The Fabric of the Cosmos* (Paw Prints, 2008), 346.

<sup>54</sup> Greene, *The Fabric of the Cosmos*, 352.

<sup>55</sup> Kaku, *Hyperpsace*, 223.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

<sup>57</sup> Greene, *The Fabric of the Cosmos*, 461.

<sup>58</sup> Kaku, *Hyperpsace*, 256.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.

of the investigations called as search for extraterrestrial intelligence (SETI) met with failures. For example, in 1978, astronomer Paul Horowitz examined all sun-like star systems within 80 light years of our solar system and found no traces of radio emissions from intelligent life. Similarly, in 1979, astronomers Donald Goldsmith and Tobias Owen took up a research in almost 600 such star systems. But all of them provided negative results.<sup>60</sup>

However, the probability of intelligent life emerging within our galaxy is astonishingly large. According to a simple equation derived by Drake, almost two lakh stars of our galaxy, which contains two hundred billion stars in all, will probably have some intelligent life form.<sup>61</sup> Thus SETI comes to a conclusion that based on the laws of probability, we can predict the presence of other intelligent life forms within our galaxy. And suppose there are other stars in our galaxy with hospitable or life favoring planetary system, we already know some things about those creatures, says Joel Primack, professor of Physics at University of California. They may not be truly tiny or gigantic organisms, because unless they are large enough, they cannot be intelligent for sure; and unless they are small enough their internal communication will not be fast and they will not be able to think. So the intelligent aliens are likely to be similar to us in size.<sup>62</sup> In order that these purely hypothetical propositions are proved, the SETI scientists have recently signed up over four million volunteers all over the world who are willing to donate their home computers' idle time help look for signals from intelligent life.<sup>63</sup>

### **Fate of the Universe**

That the Universe itself must die was known to the nineteenth century scientists and philosophers. Among the various theories regarding the end of the Universe, what pertains to us is the General Relativity explanation of the end of the Universe. According to Einstein's theory, the Universe will continue to expand forever in a Cosmic Whimper, in which case the Universe reaches near absolute zero temperature, or will contract into a fiery collapse, the Big Crunch.<sup>64</sup> This perhaps points to the Big Bounce existence of the Universe. Another possibility is an entropy death. The word 'entropy' features in the Second Law of Thermodynamics. Entropy marks the degree of disorder in the Universe. According to the Second Law, entropy is ever increasing in the whole of the Universe – in stars and in the planets. Eventually the stars, including our Sun, will exhaust their nuclear fuel and die, turning into dead masses of nuclear fuel. Depending upon the mass, all stars will become black holes, neutron stars or cold dwarf stars within the next  $10^{24}$  years as their nuclear furnaces shut down. Thus intelligent life forms if at all existing elsewhere in the Universe will face the prospect of extinction owing to the disintegration of proton and neutrons in their body.<sup>65</sup> Though this points to an unhappy future it gives us an assurance that the life on earth will not come to a sudden standstill in the near future as predicted by some unsubstantiated theories and Hollywood hits.

### **Conclusion**

The above two sections dealt how Lemaître and Hubble worked on the General Theory of Relativity of Einstein and proposed the origin of the Universe from a primeval atom through a Big Bang, and the development of relativistic cosmology. The relativistic cosmology which started its growth in full swing with Lemaître and Hubble made further advancements with numerous other hypotheses. One of the remarkable episodes of this phase of development of relativistic cosmology was that the cosmologists started coupling relativity theory with quantum mechanics in order to study relatively short distances. Thus the scope of expanding cosmology enlarged and it became all the more relevant when religion exerted its influence and philosophers started to philosophize the astrophysical concepts. A recent trend is that the religion tries to substantiate its faith matters by

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 282.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 282-283.

<sup>62</sup> Joel R. Primack, Nancy Ellen Abrams, *The View From the Center of the Universe: Discovering our Extraordinary Place in the Cosmos* (USA: Penguin, 2007), 224.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

<sup>64</sup> Kaku, *Hyperpsace*, 303.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 305.

relating it to some scientific theories and evidences. Though the question still persists why religion should look for scientific confirmations, this diminutive section analyses how the Big Bang theory has influenced Christianity and what striking similarities do we see between the Big Bounce existence of the Universe and Indian religious faith of circle of birth, death and rebirth.

We have seen in one of our previous sections that Lemaître's theory was largely misunderstood as a Christian theory simply because he was a Catholic priest. Though Lemaître himself did not want to give the Big Bang theory a Christian essence and touch, owing to the presence of a cosmic singularity and creation-like event in the theory, it was by and large considered to be a scientific explanation for the existence of God, for the doctrine of *creation ex nihilo* and for the creation narrative in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis.<sup>66</sup> One of the striking features of the Big Bounce theory is that it is marked by a phenomenon of 'rise and fall'. Every expansion of the Universe is a stage of rise and contraction is fall. This cosmic phenomenon must have some influence on its particulars as well. And we find that it is surprisingly true when we observe this 'rise and fall' phenomenon very much prevalent in our society. In human relationships, stock markets, success stories and almost in all aspects of life this 'big bounce' is perceived. This 'rise and fall' phenomenon is even more relevant when we consider the Indian perspective of the circle of birth, death and rebirth. Thus the cosmic dynamism observed in the Big Bounce theory is quite pertaining to the Indian view of life and rebirth, and it marks its religious significance.

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<sup>66</sup> Drees, *Beyond the Big Bang*, 18.

**Association of Christian Philosophers of India**  
**Annual Statement 2011**

**on**

**‘History and Historizing: Philosophical Reflections’**

We, the members of the Association of Christian Philosophers of India (ACPI), gathered for the thirty-sixth annual meeting at Good Shepherd Major Seminary, Kunnoth, Kerala, from 10<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> October 2011, to reflect on the theme, “History and Historizing: Philosophical Reflections,” hereby state:

1. History involves relationship between historians and events. It is not merely descriptions of past, but also interpretations, in order to revitalize the present and the future. History is not a linear progression of events. We recognize history is not exhaustive reporting of the past facts, rather a selective, interpretative and discontinuous recording of the past. History is performative act, involving both discursive and non-discursive practices. No history is static but evolving and dynamic.
2. We realize that there are varying and even contradictory and competing understandings of histories in general and particularly in our country. These various understandings of histories are based on different ontological and religio-ethical perspectives with individual and collective interests. Objective history remains an ideal.
3. The distinction drawn in the West between the mythical and historical, we as philosophers, find them inadequate. In our reflection, we confirm that the line drawn between *mythos* and history is ambiguous. There is no history without an element of the mythical and no *mythos* without the elements of history.
4. Humans do not exist as submerged in the here and now, but are able to relate to the past and transcend it by projecting to the future. Historizing is a way of being human in the world.
5. We realize that contemporary philosophical trends of postmodernism, deconstruction, hermeneutics, critical theories and subaltern studies can be of great help in understanding and analyzing various histories in the Indian context. These

philosophies can be employed as tools in our efforts of rectifying the deviations of the past and also further historizing in our land.

6. The task of historiographies is to affirm the ‘little narratives’ and not to emphasize the overarching grand narratives. Our wish is that various histories coexist like many flowers in the garden in our homeland.
7. We also realize that the grand narratives of histories are often narrated by the victors from their own perspectives leading to the rendering of various little communities voiceless. We resolve to support these communities for whom their identities as subjects of history are denied and their stories are suppressed.
8. This is also true of Media that often reports the ‘immediate histories.’ We note most often media become propagandist serving the interests of the media barons and ruling political and industrial classes.
9. The presence of multiple discourses makes us aware of play of differences. We propose that the conflicting and competing historical perspectives may find legitimate place through dialogical process based on critical reflection.

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