

Association of Christian Philosophers of India (7)

PLURALISM OF PLURALISM

A Pluralistic Probe into Philosophizing

Edited by

Johnson J. Puthenpurackal

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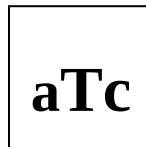
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INTRODUCTION

Pluralism has become the odour of the day; the myth of ‘uniformity’ has given way to a celebration of plurality in the postmodern today. Despite the culture of globalization trying to swallow up every *difference* under the ‘umbrella’ of the same—same culture, same religion, same morality, etc., of the powerful West—the ‘differents’ have become more *different* today, and pluralism is more evidently manifest. Gone are the days when differences used to send shock-waves and give surprises. Globalization with its powerful media has done at least this much of good: the ‘different ways’ in the various parts of the world are known to everyone everywhere, although these ‘differences’ are presented as something to be looked down upon and overcome. Today everyone at least ‘knows’ that there are people who ‘think’ and ‘act’ differently. Pluralism is the celebration of the postmodern culture.

While the West ‘academically’ celebrates pluralism, in India it is ‘really’ celebrated—pluralism is a *reality* in India. In the West pluralism is a notion to be reflected upon, to be investigated into, to be discussed about, etc. We, in India, *existentially* ‘live’ pluralism; India is perhaps the only nation where plurality of every kind harmoniously co-exists. Thus ‘pluralism’ in India is not merely an academic theme to be scientifically worked out, but an existential issue to be lived with. Pluralism being the specificity of Indian scenario, Association of Christian Philosophers of India (ACPI) has taken a right move in taking up the question of pluralism for its philosophical research. Although there is no dearth of books on pluralism, the research carried out in the present volume will have a difference, insofar as this book is the result of a concerted effort by some fifteen Indian Christian philosophers giving expression to their existential experience of pluralism from various perspectives. This explains the main title of the book: *Pluralism of Pluralism*. Pluralism is of various kinds: philosophical, cultural, religious, ethical, ecological, feminine, etc., and thus it is a *pluralism* of pluralism. The subtitle too—*A Pluralistic Probe into Philosophizing*—needs some clarification. The investigation that is carried out in the various articles of the book is ‘pluralistic’—from various perspectives. Besides, in every article there is concealedly present a plea to be pluralistic—a plea emerging from pluralism to be open to pluralism. Thus the tone of the book, which is both descriptive and prescriptive, is reflected in its very title: *Pluralism of Pluralism: A Pluralistic Probe into Philosophizing*.

* * * * *

The various studies in this volume are grouped under three parts: *Clarification*, *Specification*, and *Application*, and each part contains five articles each. The articles in the first part, *Clarification*, are intended to shed light on the general theme of the book, namely, pluralism. In the first article: “Pluralism: A Philosophical Clarification of the Notion,” Johnson J. Puthenpurackal dwells at length on setting the central theme of the book in the right perspective by specifying its meaning and differentiating it from others.

The author emphasizes that pluralism calls for an existential receptivity and sensitivity to radical diversity, which is possible only with a philosophical humility. George Panthanmackel, in the next study, finds a philosophical basis for pluralism in the plural possibilities offered in the philosophy of Heidegger. This article is largely a textually based authentic reading of Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*. The author conclusively shows the plural possibilities contained in the 'how' of Dasein's being-in-the-world. John F. Sequeira shows Gadamer's "Fusion of Horizon" as yet another philosophical basis for pluralism. The "fusion" is presented as a 'dialogue' between the different. It opens out a way for the pluralities to exist together. In the Indian thought there is a philosophical orientation for pluralism in the *Anekantavada* of Jainism. This is clarified in the next article by John Peter, according to which *Anekantavada*, being non-dogmatic in approach and relative in outlook, reconciles the variety without rejecting it. The study by Joseph Venattumattam, "Pluralism and Relativism," too is clarificatory in nature. The author defends pluralism by contrasting it with realism and relativism. The extremes—only one position is true and the rest are false, and truth is purely relative to the individual—are to be rejected. The study proposes neither uniformity nor pluriformity, but unity in diversity.

The five articles in the second part, *Specification*, shed light on some of the various kinds of pluralism—pluralism as specified to specific realms. We begin with the study "Cultural Pluralism: A Celebration of Difference," by Shailendra. After having clarified the meaning of culture, the author goes on to show that we are living in a world of multiculture, where one finds identity-wars and celebration of difference. In the context of India this study on cultural pluralism is of great relevance. Henry Kodikuthiyil, in the next study, looks into the emerging trends in *Ecological Pluralism*. The author, after having taken note of the various ecological pluralisms, finds the gradual shift from ego-centrism to eco-centrism. Pushpa Joseph, in her study: "Feminisms and Pluralisms: A Philosophical Perspective," argues that the emergence of feminism has been in close relation with that of pluralism. The first part of the paper is more of expository in nature, and then it becomes more philosophical, and eventually it moves towards investigating the challenges of a viable feminist pluralism. George Karuvelil looks at the question of Religious Pluralism from the epistemological perspective in his study, "Religious Pluralism: A Philosophical Critique." The author in this article is concerned about giving clarity to two issues: the nature of pluralistic discourse, and the epistemology of pluralism. The study is concluded with a suggestion of a new way of conceiving the epistemology of religious experience. Ashley Miranda reflects aloud with Alasdair MacIntyre on the movement "From Ethical Relativism to Ethical Pluralism." Disturbed by the moral catastrophe of the contemporary period, the author proposes an Aristotelian moral scheme rather than a Nietzschean one. Such a moral scheme provides a space for genuine ethical pluralism with the possibility of dialogue.

After having enlightened ourselves on the theme of pluralism with the help of the studies in the first two parts, we are prepared to move towards more of a practical realm. The studies in this third part, *Application*, are mainly focused on the way in which pluralism has to be 'applied' or 'lived' in different situations. We begin with the study, "Education as Openness to Reality," by Samuel Lepcha. The author refreshes our

awareness of the prevailing diversities in the world. How one has to respond to such a situation: this is the question that should challenge the system of education. Hence the larger part of the study is devoted to showing that education has to enable persons to be open to pluralism. One of the important areas in which education has to assert its presence is that of Mass Media. Robert Pen, in his article “Mass Media and Plurality of Values,” looks into this question of paramount importance. The new media-culture has affected and altered our value-priorities drastically. Keeping this scenario as the background the author makes an analytical study on the meaning of values and of media, on the positive and negative effects of media, and on the new challenges it offers. Another area of importance is religious pluralism. As India is the cradle of so many religions, the question of “Religious Pluralism” is not of purely academic interest but of vital importance. Scaria Varanath delves deep into this question in his article; “Religious Pluralism: Its Challenges to Christian Philosophizing.” The study is centred more on a critique of Christianity for its intolerance towards other faiths. The author is very emphatic in making a plea for a new Pentecost of welcoming differences. The next study, “Democratic Pluralism or Pluralistic Democracy” by George Thadathil, shows that democracy and pluralism imply and involve each other. The study on the plural spectrum of democracy is made more concrete by taking a close-up of a mountain people in Darjeeling area, and it is concluded with the observation that in Indian society a happy and healthy marriage is taking place between democracy and pluralism. The last article of the book, “Learning to Live in a Pluralistic Society” by Archbishop Thomas Menamparampil, was originally presented as the key-note address at the ACPI meeting; but we find it more appropriate to present it as the concluding reflection. The author shows with examples from history that the reality of pluralism can either be a source of mutual inspiration and learning, or a means of conflict. This concluding article, that makes an earnest plea to profit from differences, is a fitting finale to the book.

* * * * *

The various studies carried out in this book is summed up in the “After-Word,” and in the “ACPI Statement 2005,” which is a collective reflection on the question of pluralism. After having enlightened themselves with the research done in the fifteen different articles of the book, the members of ACPI think aloud into the future. These concluding thought and statement function as ‘pointers’ in the direction of a more *Christian* and *Indian* ‘way’ of response to the reality of pluralism.

The research carried out in this book, *Pluralism of Pluralism*, still remains shrouded in vagueness and darkness. ACPI does not claim to have made an exhaustive investigation into this question; it has made only a small attempt to throw some light onto ‘pluralism’—a question of great importance and relevance for the Indian Christian life and thought. It is our earnest desire and hope that the little attempt that we have made in this book enable people to be more open to the reality of pluralism, not by tolerating the differences, but by profiting from them.

This book on ‘Pluralism’ would not have become a reality, but for the help and cooperation of many a person and institution. The actual hard-work of research is done

by those who have written the articles; they are the real ‘authors’ of this book. Each one of them is competent in their respective field, and it is from their competence that these studies are born. Their scholarly contributions to this volume are gratefully remembered. ACPI—its members, and especially its Executive Committee—has been standing strong with its commitment to go ahead with the project of ‘ACPI Books’. In a very special way I am grateful to Dr. George Panthanmackel, the present ACPI Secretary, for his unfailing support and encouragement to me to keep this venture alive. We are very grateful to Asian Trading Corporation (Bangalore) for having published this volume with remarkable care and exquisite perfection. I cannot but make a grateful mention of *Missio*, Aachen, which financially helped ACPI to print the first six ACPI Books. This initial help has enabled ACPI to go ahead with the printing and publishing of further ACPI Books; the present volume is the first of this kind.

It is with a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment that I introduce and present this book, *Pluralism of Pluralism*, to the plurality of people with plural givenness and plural possibilities, with the hope that the study carried out in this volume will help at least the thinking some to be more open and respectful to those who think and act *otherwise*—those who have a different religion, language, culture, morality, philosophy, ...

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PLURALISM

A Philosophical Clarification of the Notion

Johnson J. Puthenpurackal

The Book of Genesis (11:1-9) gives the strange story of the tower of Babel: “...come, let us build a tower [of unity] ..” said the humans; “... come, let us confuse them and scatter them [into plurality]..” said God. Reflecting on this narration, Raimon Panikkar¹ says that mankind’s dream of building a tower of unity has been going on with greater intensity and velocity during the last six centuries—to build one single tower, one single ladder to heaven: one single culture, one single morality, one single language, one single way of worship... But God has his dream, his plan for the humans—a plan to make every individual a king, a microcosm, a plan to make different cities, a plan of *pluralism*! Still we continue the dream of building a ‘big city’ that swallows up every other city, a big super-power that disarms every other power, one super-religion that looks down upon every other religion, one absolute morality that considers every other morality as barbaric, one model culture that regards all other cultures as primitive...

This paper is an attempt to give a philosophical clarification of the notion of ‘pluralism’—a realm where one’s intellectual search finds itself rather insecure and runs the risk of capsizing.² Still we venture into it.

1. A Conceptual Clarification of the Notion

The term ‘pluralism’ has two uses in philosophy: pluralism of reality and pluralism of the approach to reality.³ In the first case, it refers to the philosophical position about the nature of reality, as opposed to monism. The second sense of pluralism refers to the phenomenon of philosophizing itself: the possibility of different approaches to reality. It is in this sense that today we take pluralism. But it is useful to have a cursory look at the notion of ‘pluralism’ as a philosophical position on the nature of reality.

¹ Raimon Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony: Essays on Contemplation and Responsibility*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), pp. 53-55.

² This apprehension seems to be in place, since rarely do we come across anyone dwelling on the theme of ‘pluralism’ as such. Digging through several libraries, hardly could I find any study exclusively on this theme. But numerous are the studies on pluralism with a ‘qualification’: religious, cultural, philosophical, political,...etc.

³ *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v., “pluralism, philosophical.”

With regard to the nature of reality the question can be asked: how many things are there? Or, how many kinds of things are there? When the answer to these questions is “only one,” it is monism; when the answer is “many,” it is pluralism.⁴ Apparently monism and pluralism are opposed; but on closer reflection we find that they do not always exclude each other. For instance, the weaker form of monism⁵ is quite consistent with the weaker form of pluralism: the position that there is only one *kind* of thing can go well with having many particular things. Monism is the philosophical view that stresses the oneness or unity of reality in some sense—in time (unchanging), or in space (indivisibility), or in quality (undifferentiatedness).⁶ In the 19th century ‘monism’ came to be given a wider application, with a consistent variation of meaning according to the context. But all the various theories of monism could be divided into two groups: substantival and attributive monism.⁷

The philosophical position that there is more than one kind of existent is called ‘pluralism’,⁸ or it may be defined as “the metaphysical doctrine that all existence is ultimately reducible to a multiplicity of distinct and independent beings or elements.”⁹ It emphasizes the qualitative diversity among reality. A rejection of any form of monism entails adopting the corresponding pluralistic viewpoint. One of the popular forms of pluralist position is called dualism, which holds to a contrast between two realms of being: material and spiritual, phenomenon and noumenon, real-world and ideal-world, body and mind, subject and object, the finite and the infinite, etc. Although superficially dualism can be seen as a special case of pluralism, it is in fact an expression of failed monism. The two (dualism) has to be considered as modes or aspects of the same reality (monism).

From a philosophical point of view, the conflict between One and Many, which has occupied the human mind from Plato in the West and Upanishads in the

⁴ Cf. *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed., Paul Edwards, 1972 Reprint edition, s.v., “Monism and Pluralism,” by Roland Hall.

⁵ Traditional philosophy makes a logical distinction between ‘strict’ monism and ‘weaker’ monism; the former considers that there is only *one* thing, the latter considers that there is only *one kind* of thing. But ‘strict’ pluralism is the position that there are *many kinds* of things, whereas the position that there are *many* things is ‘weaker’ pluralism. Cf. *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed., Paul Edwards, 1972 Reprint edition, s.v., “Monism and Pluralism,” by Roland Hall.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Substantival monism is the theory that the apparent multiplicity of substances is really the manifestation of one single substance (Spinoza, Bradley, etc.). Attributive monism is the philosophical view that all the substances, whether single or many, are ultimately of a single kind (the position of Leibniz that all monads are of one kind).

⁸ Christian Wolff uses the expression ‘pluralist’ in contrast to ‘egoist’; and one who is not a skeptic is referred to as a ‘dogmatic’ who can either be a ‘dualist’ or a ‘monist’; the latter may either be a materialist or an idealist. Cf. *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, published by Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, s.v. “Pluralismus,” by W. Kerber.

⁹ *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, s.v., “pluralism.”

East, continues to fascinate philosophical minds. For monism reality is one and being is univocal, and plurality of reality is only apparent. Dualism deals with the ultimate diversities in a genuine dialectical way. Here pluralism is *tamed*.¹⁰ In dualism the question of the One and the Many is solved by the rules of the mind seeking a balance, and eventually a synthesis between the one and the other, between the two.

Philosophizing today does not concern itself about such abstruse question regarding the qualitative and numerical nature of reality: whether one, two or many. Hence pluralism too is to be seen today not in the above-given objective or numerical sense of the nature of reality, but in the phenomenological sense of being constituted in the philosophical approach that the humans take towards any phenomenon. Our philosophical reflection on pluralism is going to be channelized in this direction.

2. The Problem of Pluralism: An Existential Look

Pluralism is no longer just the old schoolbook question about the One and the Many; it has become a concrete day-to-day dilemma occasioned by the encounter of mutually incompatible worldviews and philosophies. It is an existential problem that raises acute questions about how we are going to live our lives in the midst of so many options. Pluralism has to be lived, not by the victory of one group over the others, but by the dialogical tension with the variety. “Pluralism emerges when conflict looms unavoidable.”¹¹ We can no longer live cut off from one another in our geographical boxes, economical capsules, cultural areas, racial ghettos, religious sanctuaries, political castles, etc. The problem of pluralism is the problem of the other as different. Hence genuine pluralism consists neither in tolerating the different provided one can go on with one’s own particularities, nor in reducing the other to oneself—the Americans, the Christians, the Whites, the ‘civilized’, the ‘normal’...¹² All those who do not fit into our mode of life, thought and action are thrown into a single sack by an *undifferentiated consciousness*: the uncivilized, the pagans, etc. In this *et reliqua* approach to the other, the other does not exist as the other, but as *non persona*, unreckoned with and ignored. It is not genuine pluralism, but ‘centralized monism’ that follows the law of the jungle—those with stronger claws, greater intelligence, powerful weapons...win, and they establish One Empire, One Civilization, One God, One Church, etc.¹³ In such a worldview there is no place for pluralism, since here the

¹⁰ Raimon Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony: Essays on Contemplation and Responsibility*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), p. 63.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

¹² Michel Foucault, in his *Madness and Civilization*, shows that the deviants are branded as ‘mad’ and are excluded from the mainstream of society. They are to pass through the civilizing process of education, treatment, punishment, etc., in order to be included among the ‘civilized’.

other is just *tolerated*; and we tolerate or allow co-existence as long as the other does not question our existence. Thus pluralism implies a positive acceptance of diversity.

Raimon Panikkar goes to the extent of saying that pluralism “does not mean that we recognize many ways (plurality), but that we detect many forms which we cannot recognize as ways leading to the goal.”¹⁴ Thus from mere awareness of *difference*—the fact that there are different colours—we move to the recognition of *variety*—blue is different from green. Pluralism is not this either. It has to do with radical *diversity*. An existential recognition of and sensitivity to radical diversity can emerge only from a conviction that no single unit or group is capable embracing the totality of human experience.¹⁵ This does not mean that pluralism is mere multiplicity of unrelated individual units. “Pluralism stands between unrelated plurality and monolithic unity.”¹⁶ Identity and Difference¹⁷ are brought together in pluralism.

The little clarification, that we have arrived at with regard to the notion of pluralism, can be worked out more clearly in postmodern terminology.

3. The Reality of Pluralism: A Play of Difference

From the standpoint of modernity, a world-view has been considered either as a monolithic structure that tolerates no difference, or as a hierarchical structure with different thoughts or views placed one over the other or one around the other according to the priority of importance. In either case, modernity “was a ‘univalent formal system’ which suffocated all dissenting voices in an attempt to impose general principles of taste.”¹⁸

Postmodern thought has destroyed this myth of the higher and the lower, or the center and the periphery. Lyotard’s definition of postmodernism as “incredulity toward meta-narratives,”¹⁹ is indicative of this shift of thought. Jacques Derrida²⁰ has given greater clarity to it with his notion of the

¹³ Colonialism and imperialism are the polemical expressions of this attitude. Forced religious conversion is an expression of the imperialistic stance.

¹⁴ Raimon Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony*, p. 82.

¹⁵ Paul Adampukulam, *Religious Pluralism According to Raimundo Panikkar*, Rome: 1993, p. 28.

¹⁶ Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, p. xxvii; as cited by Paul Adampukulam, *Op. cit.*, 32.

¹⁷ Heidegger and Derrida have dwelt at length on identity and difference, not as opposed and exclusive notions, but as mutually constitutive and complementary.

¹⁸ Stuart Sim, ed. *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 79.

¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ Derrida is now considered as the central figure in postmodern thought. He was born in 1931 in Algeria. He came to France to study phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger in the company of Levinas and Ricoeur. During the 1960s and 70s he published numerous philosophically revolutionary books,

deconstruction of the binary opposites. According to him, Western thinking 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.²¹ Western thought and life has been exclusively built on the center, and the periphery is totally excluded.²² Such a structure is *deconstructed* in postmodernism, 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, of pluralism.

This postmodern perception is primarily applied to philosophy itself; philosophy becomes the first victim of deconstruction. Thus today no philosophy can claim to be universal, perennial and certain,²³ posing itself as superior to, and enveloping all the rest. Even the very idea of a same universal and perennial philosophy that is valid *everywhere* and *always* is obsolete. In Lyotard's terminology, there is no more a single philosophical 'grand-narrative,' rather there is a multiplicity of 'micro-narratives.'²⁴ Everyone accepted a center, an apex, a grand-narrative in philosophy, in religion, in culture, in morality; and this all-encompassing center or the grand-narrative has always been monotheism, Christianity, Western thought and civilization: the model and reference point for all the others.

If no one world-view can claim to be the norm for the others, if there are no meta-narratives in philosophy, religion or culture, what value have we to give to the variety of philosophical thoughts, cultural expressions, religious beliefs, moral behaviours, that we have in the world of today? There are no 'big stories' in human life and thought; the various individual units of expressions are but 'small stories'; every thought and expression has to be considered as 'under erasure' (*sous rature*). There are no 'texts', there are only philosophical-cultural-religious-moral 'footnotes'.²⁵ Thus we have a plurality of 'small stories'; these small stories

influencing philosophy, sociology, feminism, psychoanalysis and linguistics. Some of the important works of his are the following: *Of Grammatology* (1975), *Writing and Difference* (1978), *Dissemination* (1981), *Margins of Philosophy* (1982), etc.

²¹ 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.

²² 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.

²³ 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).

²⁴ Stuart Sim, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 25.

²⁵ The expressions: 'under erasure', 'footnote', 'small stories' 'perspectives' etc. are postmodern expressions to play down the dogmatic claim of philosophical thought in the past.

stand for the plurality of approaches to reality. All these ‘small stories’ are different from one another as they are spatio-culturally conditioned. Thus in today’s postmodern context the emphasis is shifted from a *universal* rationality to a *local* rationality. A ‘local’ flavour of difference in our outlook on world, rather than a ‘universal’ and ‘monistic’ sameness, is today highly desired and appreciated. Thus with the equally placed different approaches, we have different *perspectives* on reality—different ‘small stories’ or philosophical perspectives 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 any other. The scenario of world-view is but a *play of difference*, a play of pluralism.

4. Pluralism Implies Rootedness in One’s Own Identity

In this pluralistic playground of the world-view—philosophy, culture, religion, etc.—each player has to be well rooted in one’s own: one’s own culture and philosophy, one’s own unique pattern of life and thought, one’s own mode of worship and morality, in one word, in one’s unique ‘local rationality’.

To be ‘rooted in one’s own’ implies that one goes back to one’s own identity. ‘Going back to one’s own’ (*chez soi*) or ‘coming back to one’s home’ (*Heimkehr*) is a philosophically pregnant notion in the contemporary thought. The humans have lost their ‘identity’ that one can have only ‘at one’s own’ (*chez soi*). In the dehumanized world of today, characterized by ‘rootlessness or groundlessness’ (*Bodenlosigkeit*), they have gone far away from their very own selves, from their identity. The contemporary Western philosophers, spearheaded by Martin Heidegger, call the humans to come back to their ‘father-land’ (*Vaterland*) to speak their ‘mother-tongue’ (*Muttersprache*).²⁶ It means that one needs to dwell near one’s ‘Source’ (*Ursprung*)²⁷: a call to be rooted in *one’s own*—one’s own culture, philosophy, religion, language, morality, etc. ‘To be rooted’ has to be taken not in the sense of mere intellectual knowledge, but in the sense of ‘to be at home with’, ‘to be inspired by’, ‘to be nurtured by’, etc. Thus, for instance, one’s own philosophy, culture or religion has to become part of one’s own *being*, rather than one’s own *knowing*.

To be rooted in one’s own identity means that every member of the various pluralistic units has to be fully identified with the unique being of the particular

²⁶ Heidegger, *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung*, 5. Aufl., (Frankfurt am Main Vittorio Klostermann, 1981), p. 23. Heidegger uses in this book so many expressions to refer to the need of the humans to be rooted in their own, such as: *Heimkunft*, *Heimkehr*, *Ort der Nähe*, *Stimme der Mutter*, *Treue zum Ursprung*, *Rückkehr in die Nähe*, *Boden des Geburtslandes*, etc.

²⁷ Cf., Johnson Puthenpurackal, *Heidegger: Through Authentic Totality to Total Authenticity*, pp. 158-59, 200-01.

unit. For instance, it is not enough that a group of people harps on the different culture they have; they need to have an existential attachment to their specific culture to the extent of being identified with it.

5. From Rootedness to Integration: Identity to Alterity

Exclusive and exaggerated emphasis on rootedness in one's identity can end up in mere multiplicity of isolated units without any unity. "Man becomes aware of *both* the need for diversity and the need for unity."²⁸ We need to harmonize both without sacrificing any. In order to arrive at this harmony of unity and diversity, we have to open out the rootedness in our identity to the integration with the alterity.

Every 'rootedness' is for the sake of 'growth'. Every group (cultural, religious, political, etc.) of people are called to be 'rooted' in their identity, not because any particular identity is complete and self-sufficient in itself, but because of the awareness of the need of being complemented. Just as only a plant that is rooted can grow and be productive by extending its branches, so also is the case with the various individual units of any pluralism. For any thought or cultural unit really to be alive, it has to open out to the different through the process of 'integration' or complementarity.

The process of being rooted in one's givenness (of identity) and projecting to one's possibilities is better clarified with the help of Heideggerian notion of historicity. 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 social beings. This process is also referred to as the 're-claiming' or 'repeating' (*Wieder-holung*) from the inherited possibilities.²⁹ Heidegger insists that authentic historizing has to be a 'choosing' from out of one's 'rootedness'. 'Going back' to one's own, one goes ahead; "... in thinking back one thinks ahead."³⁰ Thus the purpose of being rooted in one's philosophico-cultural givenness is for the sake of growth by extending oneself beyond one's givenness. This we carry out by a process of integration with the other, with the different. One's 'very own' or *identity* becomes enriched and complete only when it is complemented or integrated with the *alterity*. "Identity presupposes alterity."³¹

²⁸ Raimon Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony*, p. 61.

²⁹ Cf. Johnson Puthenpurackal, *Heidegger, Through Authentic Totality to Total Authenticity*, pp. 74ff.

³⁰ "...Andenken denkt voraus.." Heidegger, *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung*, p. 84.

³¹ J. Derrida, "Deconstruction and the Other," in *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Philosophers*, ed., R. Kearney (Manchester: University Press, 1983), p. 117. S. Swamikannu has made a rather detailed study on the dialectics between identity and alterity in relation to nationalism and regionalism. Cf.,

Thus our rootedness in the identity of Indian culture calls for an integration with the ‘alterity’ of the non-Indian cultures.

The notion of ‘integration’ needs some clarification. Literally it means ‘making something complete’, which implies that it was incomplete or imperfect. In our use of this term we keep to this meaning of ‘making complete’ not in the quantitative, but in the qualitative sense. So it has primarily the meaning of ‘being enriched’, ‘being ameliorated’ etc. Integration of a cultural unit with another does not mean that one takes parts from the other, and inserts them into oneself. It means rather to be touched, to be coloured, to be influenced, to be inspired by the other without losing one’s identity. That is why integration has to be based on rootedness. In one word, integration is to be taken in the sense of ‘complementarity’.³²

Complementarity or integration with regard to the various units of the pluralistic groups is a real need. Thus, for instance, the insights of Indian thought are to be complemented with those of the Chinese, or of the Japanese, or of the Western thought. In short, at every level, starting with the individual differences of thought and ending with the great cultural division of world into Eastern and Western, there has to be the process of the integration of the different,³³ so that human thought and action are kept alive and growing. But for such an integration of the different, there would be a *stagnation* of the various units—different religions, cultures, philosophies, moralities, etc. Thus every philosophico-cultural unit, by being deeply rooted in its identity, has to extend itself to the alterity, to the different, so that it will grow in its depth and width. A paradigm-shift from the ‘purity’ to the ‘richness’ of each identity is an urgent need of the day. The ‘purity’ of a unit can be maintained by isolating itself from every other, whereas the ‘richness’ (depth and width) of a unit can be attained only by integrating itself with as many others.

6. Integration by Re-reading and Re-planting

How does one unit of a plurality integrate itself with the other individual units? It cannot be done by a blind acceptance of the other, which will end up in the destruction of the very identity of the one complementing the other. We need, hence, a *re-reading* of the other unit we want to be integrated or complemented

“Nationalism and Regionalism in Indian Constitution,” in *The Constitution of India: A Philosophical Review*, ACPI Book-3, ed., G. Panthanmackel (Delhi: Media House, 2003), pp. 73-90.

³² To emphasize this meaning, we use the term ‘integration’ in pair with ‘complementarity’.

³³ It is found true in the Nature, where from a merging of the different (male and female), the ‘new’ will emerge. Even in philosophy, Hegel and Marx hold that from the dialectics of the thesis and the antithesis, the synthesis emerges. If a political system allows an opposition, there will be development.

with. Postmodern thought, especially Derrida's philosophy of deconstruction,³⁵ is of help here.³⁵ In modernity a text or a thought was seen in its opposition to *the other*, and this other is excluded and marginalized. In this reign of the binary opposites, *the one* is the privileged center, and *the other* is the marginalized periphery. The center has been dictating what is truth and what is right. There was only one *reading* of the text—event, experience, person, reality, religion, morality, history, etc.—which was always from the perspective of the center, the powerful, the dominant. If we take a keen look at it, we can find that it is continued even today.³⁶ Derrida proposes a *different reading*, a deconstructive reading, a re-reading of the text or the thought. In such a deconstructive reading, the center does not have an exclusive monopoly. Every 'reading' is a perspectival reading; no reading can claim exclusive understanding or truth. Thus no unit can have monopoly over the others.

It is not difficult to understand the need of a re-reading of a unit—philosophical, cultural, religious, social, political unit—before integration, as every unit has its own spatio-temporal specificity. The presumption that the text (a thought, an event, etc.) is loaded with a single authoritative meaning can no more be held today. The *text* has to be understood in the *context* of the reader.³⁷ Thus a re-reading of any unit enables it to be presented in a new light and meaning, and with greater depth and relevance.

After being *re-read* in the light of the new context, a philosophico-cultural unit is prepared to be *re-planted* in the garden of the new situation. Every individual thought or way of life is born, nurtured and made to grow in a particular soil. The soil of its birth gives normally a conducive atmosphere for its growth and development. But this does not mean that it can grow, and be effective and productive only in the place of its origin. It can grow anywhere, provided it has been re-touched with a re-reading in the light of the new situation.

³⁵ There are numerous studies available on Derrida's "Deconstruction." The various studies in the book, *The Postmodern...: A Siege of the Citadel of Reason*, especially that of G. Panthanmackel, namely, "Deconstruction of Derrida's Différance: A Possible Way to Metaphysics," (pp. 81-96) will be of help to understand the meaning of deconstruction.

³⁵ We have no intention of going into the details of Derridean analysis, nor does the purview of this paper demand it.

³⁶ The vast majority of people are made to think that the Euro-American culture is the ideal, and the others have to struggle to reach this ideal. With globalization this single culture is marketed and distributed as the only way of living.

³⁷ Contemporary hermeneutics sheds much light onto the relation between the text and the context in terms of the fusion of the horizons (Gadamer). According to the traditional conception, there is only an 'objective' meaning for any text (object) inherent therein, and it is identical with the intention of the author. According to ontological hermeneutics, with the birth of the text its author dies. And so, the text speaks to the reader in his/her context.

It has been mostly followed that when a ‘foreign’ thought is introduced somewhere, it is presented as an ‘outside’ thought merely for one’s intellectual consumption; it is looked at as an imported ‘curiosity material’ to be preserved in a glass-case. In order to make any particular philosophy or culture relevant to another situation, it has to be re-read and made to ‘speak the language’ and to ‘wear the cultural garb’ of the place. Such a re-touched material can be re-planted in the new situation.

When one is able to appropriate any other thought or pattern of behaviour after having subjected it to a re-reading, one becomes free from philosophico-cultural exclusivism and stagnation, and can widen one’s horizons. Only when one is prepared to take another as seriously as oneself are convergence and growth possible. This demands that the claim to self-sufficiency of individual groups be replaced, and each be helped to come out of its closed shell of its traditions and structures of plausibility.³⁸ A greater recognition and realization of the value of pluralism and its richness helps one to transcend one’s little world of self-complacency.

7. Anyone’s Thought Is Everyone’s

Our reflection so far has emphasized the need to be *rooted* in one’s own, and the need to be *extended* to the different. Is one unit entitled to appropriate a ‘different’ or ‘foreign’ unit? Can any unit be considered so ‘foreign’ that there is an unbridgeable distance between the one and the other? Perhaps we need to give some thought to this question.

We are familiar with the expression: *Indian philosophy*. In this expression ‘philosophy’ is qualified by an adjective derived from the name of a nation, India. The question that poses itself here is this: does this adjective refer to any specific character of philosophy—as in the case of ‘structuralism’ or ‘phenomenology’—or does it merely point to the place of its origin? Primarily ‘Indian’—or any other similar adjectives such as Chinese, Japanese, German, French, etc.—is a demarcating term, specifying the boundary. All the various schools of thought that got developed within this boundary are given a ‘blanket-term’: *Indian*. At the same time, it is not merely by chance that certain schools of thought are born within a particular geographical boundary or a nation. The spatio-temporal situation contributes towards the birth of a particular type of philosophy or culture, and thus it gives a ‘colouring’ to its character. The various systems in Indian philosophy have an ‘indian colouring’ not merely because they got originated in India, but because of the ‘way’ of thinking that is propounded in

³⁸ Raimundo Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, p. 63, as cited by Paul Adampukulam, *Religious Pluralism According to Raimundo Panikkar*, p. 31.

these systems. Hence these systems cannot be thought to be born in any other spatio-temporal context. What is referred to 'Indian philosophy' here is equally true of any other specific philosophy, culture or religion.

Just because a thought or cultural pattern is born, nurtured and made to grow in a particular soil of spatio-temporal situation, can its place of origin claim to have an exclusive monopoly over it? It is our philosophical conviction that no unit can be considered as the exclusive property of the place of its origin; it rather belongs to humanity as a whole. Philosophy, art, poetry, religion, culture, morality, etc., cannot be considered in the narrow sense of some property, which we may *have* or possess; these transcend the limits of 'having', and thus they belong to the 'being' of humanity.³⁹ Thus, although the philosophical unit of *advaita* has its origin in India, it belongs to humanity. When a particular way of thought or existence is born somewhere, the very being of humanity is enriched. The *material things* may be claimed as the exclusive property or the *having* of a group of people or a nation,⁴⁰ but the *spiritual thoughts* (cultural expressions) belong to the *being* of humanity.

All cultural or Philosophical units have a universal character insofar as they belong to the *being* of humanity, although they are born and rooted in a specific somewhere. This gives an added reason for each unit to be integrated with every other—the *identity* with the *alterity*.

8. The Future Philosophy: A Philosophy of Pluralism

After the death of Hegel, Western philosophy has gradually been brought down from the ideal realm to the real and concrete realm. Philosophizing is now no more considered as an intellectual luxury of an elite group of intellectuals. From the twentieth century onwards philosophizing has begun to be contextualized, taking into consideration the 'local' rationality. Thus it is not preoccupied with developing a philosophy of the universal sameness. Pluralism has begun to be accepted and respected in all areas of life. It is a welcome change, a welcome beginning. This trend has to grow to the extent that philosophy becomes genuinely pluralistic.

The themes for philosophical reflection are not exhausted with those so far considered by the orthodox schools of thought. Philosophy has to enter deeper into

³⁹ We are referring here to Marcel's distinction between 'being' and 'having'. What I *have* is at my disposal, and I can dispose it of as and when I want without ceasing to be myself; whereas 'being' is that which is constitutive of me.

⁴⁰ It is a contended question whether even the material things can be considered as the exclusive property of a group of people. According to the theory of social justice, the whole wealth of the world cannot be considered as the property of the more powerful; everyone has a right to it.

human life and feel for itself the various gripping questions, experienced not only by the humans in the mainstream, but those in the side-streams as well. The questions that the ‘marginalized’ are struggling with are more important than the problems that the ‘centralized’ are puzzled about. The former consists of questions of vital importance; the latter consists of questions of intellectual luxury. Thus philosophy has to respect the varied approaches in philosophizing, giving priority for the questions of the marginalized, such as the questions of exploitation, injustice, starvation, over-population, fundamentalism, casteism, evil effects of globalization, victimization of Being, truth, goodness, rectitude, beauty, etc., by the powerful, unjust wars, *civilized* terrorism, etc. Such questions did not make their appearance in the monolithic Philosophy of the *sameness*, which tolerates no difference. Indian Christian Philosophers are to make a conscious effort to give priority to the problems of the pluralistic groups, especially of those in the side-streams, since those in the mainstream always get the priority, and the periphery is liable to be sidelined and forgotten.

The future philosophy must be a ‘cosmic philosophy’—and not a ‘universal philosophy’ of sameness.⁴¹ By *cosmic philosophy* we have in mind a twofold meaning. On the one hand, it refers to a philosophy that will take into philosophical consideration the whole *cosmic reality* with its multi-dimensionality of the Divine, the Human, and the Nature. These dimensions are to be considered as implying and involving one another; one cannot *be* apart from the other.⁴² In such a thought structure, the cosmic reality includes the secular and the sacred dimensions. Philosophy as openness to truth will enable the humans to be open to the *Cosmic Reality*—which is both secular and sacred at the same time.

By *cosmic philosophy* we refer here to a cosmic garden with different philosophical plants. The future philosophy must be like such a garden that is open enough to accept the various plants of philosophical thoughts. It must be a garden of unity and variety: a unity of complementarity, and a variety of uniqueness. When each of the various patterns of thought and modes of behaviour sees the other as complementing and enriching one another, there exists a unity of symphony—varieties of sounds make a beautiful piece of music, so also the various thoughts constitute a ‘cosmic philosophy’ of mutual enrichment, varieties of religions point to the primordial religiosity of the humans, the different cultural expressions constitute a cosmic culture of humanity. Such an interaction with one another is a ‘play’—a play *with* one another, rather than *against* one another.

⁴¹ The reference here is the philosophy of modernity, characterized by perennality, universality, certainty, as different from that of postmodernity.

⁴² Raimundo Panikkar, one of the creative thinkers of our times, considers such an approach as *cosmotheandric* vision, where God, humans and world are thought together.

The culture of ‘unity in variety’ is different from the culture of globalization. Globalization does not tolerate any difference or variety; it levels down every different to the level of the powerful center, in which case we have only uniformity; unity can be had only where pluralism is accepted and respected. What we are looking forward to is not a uniformity of sameness, but a cosmic garden of unity and variety, identity and difference.

9. Conclusion

We have made a quick search into the philosophical meaning of pluralism. Since the journey has been made not on any established path, the way that has come about—the proposed shift from a universal philosophy of *identity* to a pluralistic philosophy of *identity* and *difference*: a philosophy of unity and variety: a philosophy of pluralism—cannot claim to be totally coherent. A few ‘pointers’ have emerged from our philosophical reflections, and they can be summed up in a couple of thoughts. Philosophizing in future calls for, first of all, an attitudinal change—a change from the presumption of ‘exclusiveness’ and ‘self-sufficiency’ of one’s own to an openness and respect for the other. No thought is so ‘rich’ that it does not need to be complemented by the others, and no thought is so ‘poor’ that it has nothing to complement the others with. In other words, one needs a philosophical *humility* with regard to one’s own ‘identity’, and *openness* to other perspectives of ‘difference’. Secondly, the openness to the other presupposes one’s identity—one must be rooted in one’s own identity by one’s being and knowing. Thus *identity* and *alterity*, rootedness and integration, unity and diversity, go together.

Let us go back to the story of the tower of Babel, with which we started this paper. The craze to build towers of artificial unity has appeared today as a global-village-syndrome, manifested in the form of creating United Nations, ‘Esperanto’, globalization, multinationals, world-market, World-Wide-Web, etc.⁴³ These bring about only an apparent and artificial unity, eliminating all diversity. It is nothing other than mere ‘uniformity’—each one is just like everyone: a mass of likewise-persons!

Instead of the artificial unity of Babel, we need to work towards a primordial unity of Paradise—a unity that respects the diversity, a unity that exists not only among the humans, but also between the humans, the Divine and the Nature. The picture of Paradise is the picture of perfect unity and reconciliation. But this picture of unity was disfigured when the humans wanted to be like the Divine. In other words, the primordial unity was destroyed as the humans tried to

⁴³ All these modern forms of ‘global-village-syndrome’ are nothing but the faithful successors of colonialist mentality.

do away with diversity. Pluralism respects unity in diversity, and where there is unity in diversity, there will be *dialogical tension* rather than *dialectical conflict*.⁴⁴ Pluralism is kept alive neither by a mere juxtaposition of individual units of diversity nor by a dialectical conflict among them, but by a dialogical tension that keeps the individual units together and apart—unity and diversity.

After having ventured into clarifying the problem of pluralism, we find that we have not come to a conclusive clarification of the notion, which is neither possible nor was it intended to. We have, at least, started the movement of philosophical reflection, which hopefully will bring about an attitudinal change—a change that respects the otherness of the other by accepting the others to be *otherwise* rather than *likewise*.

⁴⁴ Raimon Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony*, p. 77.

TOWARDS A PHILOSOPHICAL PLURALISM

From the Plural Possibilities in Martin Heidegger

George Panthanmackel

In the last fifty years or so, particularly in the German-speaking world, no philosopher has exerted more influence and invited more notoriety, controversy and curiosity than Martin Heidegger.¹ Summaries of his thought abound in introductory textbooks and articles, and quotes of and references to him frequently appear in newspaper articles, radio, television, and internet. In the judgement of many, the originality of Heidegger's thought and the rigour of his analyses guarantee him a place among the greatest of philosophers. However, his writings tend to be excessively abstruse and technical. During his lifetime, Heidegger published a few books and also left an extraordinary number of manuscripts, lecture notes and working papers.

What was Heidegger's main contribution to the philosophy of this century? Perhaps, more than any other philosopher, he remained committed to the single question, the question of the meaning of being. He was faithful to a path of thinking that is not constrained within nor predetermined by any one actual or possible world-view. His philosophical method prepares the way for the advent of a new kind of thinking by reading the traditions anew. Heidegger's method of analysis of *Dasein*'s temporality could be of assistance to us in liberating ourselves from a 'forgetfulness' of India's future (*Zukunftsvergessenheit*²) with its plural possibilities.

1. Being as a Plural Possibility

According to Heidegger, the oldest word for being is *es*, and in Sanskrit it is *asus* which means life, the living, that from out of itself stands and which moves and rests in itself: the self-standing. To this root belong in Sanskrit the verbal formation *esmi*, *esi*, *esti*, *asmi*, to which correspond the Greek *eimi* and *einai*, the Latin *esum* and *esse*, the German *sunt*, *sind* and *sein*.³ The second Indo-European root is *bhu* and *bheu*. The Greek *phuo* is a derivative of it. *Phuo* means to emerge, to be powerful, of itself to come to stand and remain standing. The Greek *physis*⁴ and *phyein* are the developed forms of the same root. The root *phy* has been connected with *pha-phainesthai*. Thus *physis* would mean that which emerges into the light, *phyein* would mean to shine, to give light and therefore to appear. The third stem occurs only in the inflection of the Germanic verb *sein*: *wes* (Sanskrit: *vasami*). The German form resulting from this stem are *gewesen*, *was*, *wesen*. The participle *wesend* is still preserved in *an-wesend* (present) and *ab-wesend* (absent). The *sens* in the Latin reflects this root: *prae-sens* and *ab-sens*.⁵

¹ Martin Heidegger was born in Messkirch, Germany, on September 26, 1889. His dissertation, *Die Lehre vom Urteil im Psychologismus* (The theory of judgment in psychologism, 1913), was prepared under Artur Schneider (1875-1945). In 1915 he completed his *Habilitation* at Freiburg under the neo-Kantian Heinrich Rickert (1863-1936) with *Die Kategorien und Bedeutungslehre des Duns Scotus* (Duns Scotus's doctrine of categories and meanings). Heidegger was Privatdozent at Freiburg 1915-23, Professor Extraordinarius at Marburg 1923-28, and Professor Ordinarius and Chair of Philosophy at Freiburg 1928-46, also served as the First Rector of the University of Freiburg under National Socialism during 1933-34. He died in Freiburg on May 26, 1976. His best known work is *Sein und Zeit* (1927).

² The term is coined by the author.

³ Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, tr. Ralph Manheim (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1959), 71.

⁴ *Physis* means self-blossoming emergence, opening up, unfolding, growing. In short, it means the realm of things that emerge and linger on. *Physis* originally encompassed heaven as well as the earth, the stone as well as the plant, the animal as well as man. It encompassed human history as a work of men and the gods. It is the power of emerging and enduring. It is the power of being and becoming. *Physis* also included psychic in it. [Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, tr. Ralph Manheim (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1959), 14,16]

⁵ Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 71-72.

From the three stems, we have three concrete meanings: to live, to emerge, to linger, or endure. The philological investigations show that in the infinitive the definite meanings of the word are effaced. Substantivization stabilizes and objectifies this effacement, and the word becomes a name for something indeterminate, plural. Secondly, *Das-Sein* is a compromise and mixture of three different root meanings. Mixture and effacement go hand in hand. In the combination of these two processes of mixture and effacement, we find an adequate explanation of the fact from which we started, i.e., ‘the word *being* is empty and its meaning a vapor.’⁶

Thus, ‘being’ is indefinite in meaning and yet we understand it definitely. Being is totally indeterminate and at the same time highly determinate. It ultimately turns out that despite all the blur and mixture and universality of its meaning we mean something definite by it. This definiteness is unique in its kind. The being which belongs to every being is more unique than all else. Everything that is unique can be compared with other things. Hence, the determinability of being is increased by these possibilities of comparison. Being, however, cannot be compared with anything else since there is nothing above being. If being is thus the most unique and determinate, the word cannot be merely empty. Besides, there is no such thing as empty word. At most a word may be worn out, though still filled with meaning.⁷

Being also disclosed itself to the Greeks as *physis*. The roots of *physis*, *phy* and *pha*, refer to the same thing. So, *phyein*, self-sufficient emergence, is *phainesthai* which means to flare up, to show itself, to appear.⁸ In this way, being means also appearing. The appearing is not something that happens to being subsequently, but it is the very essence of being. Appearing is the power of being that emerges, that manifests. Being, appearing, causes to emerge from concealment, stands in un-concealment, *a-letheia* (truth). Truth is in the essence of being which appears, whereas non-being⁹, which hides truth, withdraws from appearing.¹⁰ Along with the way of being, the way of non-being and becoming need to be considered. Becoming is neither being nor non-being, but the appearance of being.¹¹ Becoming is coming-into-presence and going-out of it. Being is emerging, permanence¹², appearing presence, and non-being is absence. The reciprocal relation between emerging and declining is appearing, being itself.¹³ “Just as becoming is the appearing of being, so appearance as appearing is a becoming of being.”¹⁴

There is also an essential relation of thinking to being. Thinking (*noein*) is part and parcel of being. Originally *logos* did not mean speech or discourse, but gathering, collecting.¹⁵ The essence of *logos* is gathering. *Legein* as gathering is related to the original togetherness of being. Gathering has a fundamental character of opening, making manifest. *Legein* thus stands in opposition to concealing and hiding. To gather is to disclose, to manifest.¹⁶ Gathering maintains in a common bond the conflicting and that which tends apart. *Logos* does not let what holds in its power dissolve into an empty freedom from opposition, but by uniting the opposites maintains

⁶ Ibid., 72.

⁷ Ibid., 78-79.

⁸ Ibid., 101.

⁹ The Greek term for non-being is *existasthai* (usually translated as ‘existence.’ For Heidegger, it is an instance of the thoughtless habit of using the words ‘existence’ and ‘exist’ as designations for being, an indication of our estrangement from being. [Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 64.]

¹⁰ Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 101-102.

¹¹ Ibid., 114.

¹² Permanence in a twofold sense: standing-in-itself in the sense of arising (*physis*) and ‘permanent’ or enduring (*ousia*).

¹³ Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 115.

¹⁴ Ibid., 115.

¹⁵ Ibid., 137.

¹⁶ Ibid., 170.

the full sharpness of their tension. Thus, *logos* is a gathering together of the opposites. *Noein*, thinking, determines what being is. Being is the object of thinking, that which is thought. *Noein* means to apprehend. To apprehend means to accept, to let something come to one, to take a receptive attitude toward that which shows itself.¹⁷ Where being prevails, apprehension prevails and happens with it; the two belong together. Apprehension is the receptive bringing-to-stand of the intrinsically permanent that manifests itself. Apprehension occurs for the sake of being. There is being only when there is appearing, when there is disclosure.¹⁸ From this indeterminate and ‘empty’ character of being, we could legitimately infer the conclusion that the word disposes itself to plural interpretations as it contains within it plural potentialities and possibilities.

2. Dasein as a Plural Possibility

Heidegger credited Husserl with three basic discoveries. The first is *intentionality*. For Husserl, intentionality is the very structure of consciousness in all its modes. In every form of consciousness, there is a specific relatedness. For Heidegger, this structural relatedness is much more than a basic feature of consciousness. It is the fundamental character of the very life of each human being in which each human being is essentially related.¹⁹ The second discovery is the doctrine of *categorial intuition* which teaches that the human discourse depends on a complex set of structures, forms and basic concepts which are all of an ideal nature. Among the categorial intuitions mentioned by Husserl, the problem of the meaning of being stood out as having a special relevance for Heidegger. He took advantage of Husserl’s double thesis – being is not a real predicate and being is given to categorial intuition – and transformed it for his own ontological purpose. ‘Being is not a real predicate’ meant for both Kant and Husserl that it is not to be found among the predicates which define the quiddity of beings. This thesis turned out to mean for Heidegger that being is not a being. The thesis states a difference between being and beings – an onto-ontological difference. Likewise, the thesis ‘being is given to categorial intuition’ turned out to mean that in its factual life the human has an understanding of being. Factual life interprets itself in term of being. That is, the ontology of those factual beings who understand being is a hermeneutics, a theory of interpretation.²⁰ Thus, Husserl’s twofold thesis about being induced Heidegger to search in the life of the human being for the unique ground for an intelligibility of the various meanings of being. It induced him to search for the focus of intelligibility within the human *Dasein*.²¹ The third discovery is that of the *apriori*. As claimed by Husserl, time-consciousness was the most fundamental consideration of his phenomenology. The consciousness has to be temporal in order to be intentional. In order to be able to intend, consciousness has to be a ‘living present,’ a present which constantly articulates the ‘retention’ of what is just past with the anticipation [protention] of what is going to happen (future). Heidegger took advantage of this concept. He demonstrates that temporality is the only horizon within which one understands the meanings of being. This concept is evident in his masterpiece, *Being and Time*, a book in which the three Husserlian discoveries operate in a peculiar way along with an Aristotelian inspiration. What Heidegger discovered very early is that what occurs for the phenomenology of the acts of consciousness is thought more originally by Aristotle as *aletheia*. In its traditional definition, truth is an adequation between the mind and the real. This adequation occurs in a specific place: the predicative judgment. For Husserl, prior to the so-called *adequatio intellectus ad rem*, the touchstone of truth is evidence, i.e., the self-manifestation of the object as phenomenon to intentionality. Moreover, Husserl claimed that the locus of truth is not restricted to the predicative judgment, but to intentionality itself, or

¹⁷ Ibid., 137-138.

¹⁸ Ibid., 139.

¹⁹ Jacques Taminiaux, “Philosophy of Existence: Heidegger,” in *Routledge History of Philosophy*, Vol. VIII, ed. Richard Kearney (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 40.

²⁰ Ibid., 41-42.

²¹ Ibid., 42.

consciousness in all its forms. Heidegger took advantage of this breakthrough of Husserl in his phenomenological interpretation of Aristotle. As far as truth is concerned, Aristotle, Heidegger claims, is more original than Husserl on two accounts: first, because Aristotle understands truth as the unconcealment of beings for an unconcealing being (human being); second, because this unconcealing, instead of being restricted to consciousness, is attributed by Aristotle to the human comportment as such (human way of being). In other words, for Aristotle, *aletheia*, or truth, is a matter of *bios*, of life and existence. It is in the context of this phenomenological reading of Aristotle that Heidegger replaced the words ‘factual life’ by the key word *Dasein*²² in order to characterize the human way of being. In German, the word is both a verb and a noun. As a verb, it means ‘to be present,’ or ‘to exist.’ As a noun, it means ‘presence,’ or existence. Moreover, the prefix, *da*, means both *there* and *then*, pointing to a *place* and *time* for something to happen. Hence, the word characterizes the human way of being, suggesting that the concrete existence of a human being is a phenomenon which is *there*, thrown into a place and a time in which an unconcealment or disclosure happens or takes place.²³

In his search, in addition to a concept of truth in terms of existence, Heidegger discovered in Aristotle a concrete analysis of human existence as an unconcealing way of being. Similarly, Heidegger has meaningfully reappropriated the triple Husserlian discoveries: intentionality, categorial intuition and the *a priori* of time. Intentionality helped him to know that human existence as such is a *relatedness to*. Categorial intuition enabled him to understand that human existence, in its relatedness to, understands being. Likewise, the *a priori* of time taught him that time is at the core of the understanding of being. They all required an analysis of *Dasein*’s way of being, i.e., for an ontology of *Dasein* as Heidegger discovered that Aristotle’s description of human comportment (way of being) paved the way to the ontology of *Dasein*.²⁴

Dasein is the only being for whom being is a question or an issue. If an analysis of *Dasein* has to be fundamental, it must treat *Dasein* as a being for whom being itself is the question, and not ‘what is human?’, ‘what is mind?’ or ‘what is life?’ This analysis is preparatory, because it is carried out not for its own sake but in order to provide an answer to the question of the meaning of being.²⁵ *Dasein* is such that its very essence lies in its ‘to be,’ or in its existence. ‘Existence’ indicates an openness to a task, a plural possibility. In Heidegger’s understanding, the word ‘existentia,’ in its traditional use, is ‘presence-at-hand.’ The term is appropriate only to entities which are precisely not of *Dasein*’s character. *Dasein* is the only entity in which existence has a priority over essence. There is no *Dasein* in general, because individual *Dasein* is not a special instance of some genus. Hence the question ‘what is *Dasein*?’ has to be replaced by the question ‘who is *Dasein*?’ *Dasein* is an entity for which being is an issue in its very being, is ‘in each case mine.’ ‘Mineness’ grounds either authenticity or inauthenticity. The German words, *Eigentlichkeit* (authenticity) and *Uneigentlichkeit* (inauthenticity), have no moral connotation. *Eigentlichkeit* refers to a condition in which someone is one’s own being, and *Uneigentlichkeit* to a condition in which someone is not properly one’s own being.²⁶

²² According to John D. Caputo, *Dasein* is used by Heidegger as a technical term to signify that being whose very mode of being is to understand being and hence to raise the question of the meaning of being. Heidegger exploits the root meaning of the word ‘there-being’ (*da-Sein*). It is up to *Dasein* ‘to be’ (*zu-sein*) the ‘there’ (*da*) of the world, i.e., to be the place where the world is disclosed or becomes manifest. The thrust of the word ‘there’ is not to signify one place as opposed to another, but rather the essential disclosedness, or manifestness of things as a whole. *Sein* in turn has a verbal and infinitive sense. ‘to be’ the there. Hence the force of the term is to emphasize that *Dasein* must itself *be* the ‘there,’ the disclosedness of being and world. [John D. Caputo, “Dasein,” in *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology*, ed. Lester Embree et al (Dordrecht, Boston, London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997), 133].

²³ Jacques Taminiaux, “Philosophy of Existence: Heidegger,” 42-43.

²⁴ Ibid., 43.

²⁵ Ibid., 47.

Because of the priority of existence over essence, the fundamental analysis of *Dasein* has to treat it from the existentiality of its existence. The basic characters of existentiality are called *existentialia*. Mineness grounds either authenticity or inauthenticity. Because of that all *existentialia* have an authentic and inauthentic modality. All *existentialia* have a transcendental status as they are *a priori* condition of possibility for *Dasein*'s existence. They are factors of a constitutive state of *Dasein*, namely, being-in-the-world.²⁷

2.1. *Dasein* as Being-in-the-World

For Heidegger, the 'world' itself is the structure of being-in-the-world. The world as a phenomenon means to let us see what shows itself in 'entities' within the world. Phenomenon is that which shows itself as being and as a structure of being. However, merely enumerating and giving an account of things that are in the world – houses, trees, peoples, mountains, stars – is a pre-phenomenological business which cannot be phenomenologically relevant. Giving a phenomenological description of the world means to exhibit the being of those entities which are present-at-hand within the world and to fix it in categorial concepts. Now the entities within the world are things of Nature invested with value. The primary theme here is the being of things of Nature insofar as the thinghood of things 'invested with value' is based upon the thinghood of Nature. That characteristic of being which belongs to things of Nature (substance) is substantiality.²⁸

Both the ontical depiction of entities within-the-world and the ontological interpretations of their being are not such as to reach 'the phenomenon of the world.' In both of these accesses to 'Objective being,' the world has already been 'presupposed.' The world is neither the common world nor the subjective world, but the *worldhood* of the world as such. 'Worldhood' is an ontological concept which stands for the structure of one of the constitutive items of being-in-the-world. Being-in-the-world is a way in which *Dasein*'s character is defined existentially. Therefore, worldhood is an *existentialia*. Ontologically, 'world' is a characteristic of *Dasein* itself. Thus, we know that the word 'world' is used in several senses. By unraveling these various ways [senses], we can understand the different kinds of phenomena that are signified, and of their way of interconnection.²⁹ Here Heidegger enumerates four ways in which 'world' is used:³⁰ First, 'world' is an ontical concept signifying the totality of entities present-at-hand. Second, 'world' is an ontological concept signifying the being of entities. Third, 'world' is that 'wherein' a factual *Dasein* lives. It has a pre-ontological existentiell signification. It may stand for the 'public' we-world, or one's own closest environment.³¹ Fourth, 'world' is the ontologico-existential concept of *worldhood* which embraces in itself the *a priori* character of worldhood in general. Nevertheless, Heidegger reserves the expression 'world' for the third signification – that 'wherein' a factual *Dasein* lives.³² It means the context in which we encounter beings and ourselves, which determines what beings *are* for our understanding.³³ It is not something

²⁶ Ibid., 48.

²⁷ Ibid., 48.

²⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, tr. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 91.

²⁹ Ibid., 92.

³⁰ Ibid., 93.

³¹ That world of everyday *Dasein* (the horizon of average everydayness) closest to *Dasein* is the environment (*Umwelt*). *Umwelt* contains a suggestion of spatiality. From this point of view, *Dasein*'s spatiality becomes phenomenally visible. See also Johnson J. Puthenpurackal, *Heidegger: Through Authentic Totality to Total Authenticity* (Louvain: Leuven University Press, 1987), 3-24.

³² Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 93.

³³ Dorothea Frede, "The Question of Being: Heidegger's Project," in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Charles Guignon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 56.

external but is constitutive of *Dasein*. It is our context of involvements.³⁴ All human activity is worldly as it involves a background of implicit familiarity, competence, and concern or involvement. However, there is a priority of practical world (*Zuhandenheit*), guided by our practical interests and concerns, over the theoretical world of presence-at-hand (*Vorhandenheit*). The theoretical world has its own background skills and familiar ways of coping with things as it uses the general competence and familiarity of the practical world as its background. All the same, it is incomplete, deficient or derived in relation to the practical world.

According to Heidegger, the being of the entities we encounter can be exhibited phenomenologically if we take as our clue our everyday being-in-the-world. This everyday being-in-the-world is called our dealings in the world and with entities within the world. These dealings are found in our manifold concerns. The kind of dealing which is closest to us is that kind of concern which manipulates things and puts them to use. The phenomenological question applies to the being of entities encountered in such concern. In the disclosure and explication of being, our real theme is being; the entities are only preliminary and our accompanying theme. The entities are those which show themselves in our concern with the environment. Such entities are simply what gets used, what gets produced, and so forth. As entities so encountered, they become the preliminary theme for the purview of a 'knowing' which looks primarily towards being and takes the entities as its accompanying theme. This phenomenological interpretation is a determination of the structure of being which entities possess. But as an investigation of being, it brings to completion that understanding of being which belongs already to *Dasein* and which 'comes alive' in any of its dealings with beings. Those entities which serve phenomenologically as our preliminary theme become accessible when we put ourselves into the position concerning ourselves with them in some such way. The kind of being which belongs to such concerned dealings is not one into which we need to put ourselves first. This is the way in which everyday *Dasein* always is.³⁵

Being-in-the-world, the primordial phenomenon, has to be analysed to uncover the *existentialia*. Though the phenomenon is unitary, it is possible to look at it plurally, in three distinct ways:³⁶ emphasizing the world as such, or on the 'being-in' as such, or on the one who is in the world. First, *the World as such*: The world is neither the total amount of entities (universe) nor a framework for those entities. It is neither a global container nor an addition of contents nor nature. The world is presupposed for nature to appear. The world is *a priori* in terms of existentiality. In fact, only *Dasein* is in the world, and there would be no world without *Dasein* open to it. *Dasein*'s existence is its own 'can be' or possibility. Hence, 'the world' in the phrase 'being-in-the-world' must be described in terms of possibility which is already given as an *existentialia*. Moreover, if we take as clue our everyday way of being, we must admit that our comportment (way of being) is characterized by a concern with an environment of beings that are interrelated. They are all interrelated in order for them to appear as 'in-order-to.' This interrelatedness presupposes as backdrop a context of involvement which is that 'wherein' which refers to a deeper *a priori*. This deeper *a priori* is the very relatedness of *Dasein* to its own potentiality for being. This ultimate 'for the sake of which' is not a possibility within the world. It is world itself as *Dasein*'s own potentiality. World is being for the sake of which *Dasein* is transcending. Second, *being-in*: Since existence is a disclosing process, the being-in is better captured as an openness than as an insertion. Being-in is constituted of three plural *existentialia*: disposition (*Befindlichkeit*), comprehension (*Verstehen*), and discourse (*Rede*³⁷). *Disposition* is

³⁴ Robert J. Dostal, "Time and Phenomenology in Husserl and Heidegger," in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, 155.

³⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 95-96.

³⁶ Jacques Taminiaux, "Philosophy of Existence: Heidegger," 48-49.

³⁷ The German word *Rede* is Heidegger's translation of the Greek *logos*.

the state in which *Dasein* finds itself as thrown into the world. Disposition discloses *Dasein* in its thrownness. *Comprehension* implies projection. The projections pervading *Dasein*'s ordinary comportment have their ontological foundation in *Dasein*'s projection upon its 'can be' or possibilities. *Comprehension* discloses *Dasein* itself in its own potentiality-for-being. *Discourse* is equiprimordial with disposition and comprehension. It is the disclosing articulation of the intelligibility of being-in-the-world. Third, 'who' in the world: *Dasein* in its everyday mode of being is not properly a self; for most of the time self loses itself in what it is busy with. Besides, it essentially belongs to *Dasein* to be with other *Daseins*, and consequently *Dasein* is absorbed in the neutrality of the 'they' (*das Man*), instead of confronting one's own *Dasein*. In both cases the inauthentic reigns over the authentic. As a result of such a tendency of 'fallenness' (in which *Dasein* has to forget or move away from its own self), all the *existentialia* have two modes: authentic and inauthentic. For example, discourse and comprehension in their inauthentic mode are both idle talk and curiosity respectively.

Being-in-the-world is also being-with-others as *Dasein* is not a solitary ego. Others are those among whom *Dasein* finds itself already there. The real task is to find oneself in the midst of others, to be oneself in the midst of the pre-given, constant, and quietly imperious rule that others exert over us. This leads to the famous account of 'authenticity' and inauthenticity,³⁸ the main phenomenal features of which are taken from Kierkegaard but recast by Heidegger in the terms of an analytic of *Dasein*.³⁹

The basic principle of the analytic of *Dasein*, worked out in *Being and Time*, was *Dasein* existing for the sake of itself. The principle itself was restricted to the way of being of individuals. That restriction vanished in 1933 when Heidegger decided to support Hitler and became the Rector of the University of Freiburg. The focus of his Rectoral Address was no longer the individual *Dasein* but the *Dasein* of the German people. In that Address, Heidegger claims that the intention of the Greeks was to understand *theoria* in its relation to being. *Theoria*, understood as the science of the being of beings, is the very medium that determines in its ownmost being, the *Dasein* of a people and of the State. Accordingly, the very existence of a people organized in a State becomes the authentic location for the unconcealment of beings in their totality and in their being. Now the organization of a State is obviously not a matter of pure *theoria*, but a matter of *techne* (knowhow) and of *poiesis* (production). The Rectoral Address also introduces the idea that being itself, and not only *Dasein*, is intrinsically polemical and historical. *Dasein* – either as an individual or as a people – is the 'there' of being, an openness to plural possibilities.⁴⁰

3. Time as a Plural Possibility

The authenticity of *Dasein* constitutes its most extreme possibility of being. *Dasein* is primarily determined by this possibility. The perplexity and difficulty of grasping *Dasein* is grounded in this fundamental possibility of its being. Yet how is *Dasein* to be apprehended in its extreme possibility of being since I am still underway with my *Dasein*? The answer is that *Dasein* shows itself in its extreme possibility. The end of my *Dasein* is not a possibility at some distance away from me, but a possibility which *Dasein* knows of as present in this or that way. *Dasein* has in itself the possibility of meeting with its death which is its extreme possibility. This possibility stands before in certainty characterized by an utter indeterminacy. The self-

³⁸ Heidegger is often criticized by interpersonal thinkers like Gabriel Marcel and Emmanuel Levinas for regarding the other person as a threat to, rather than a condition of, authenticity.

³⁹ John D. Caputo, "Dasein," in *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology*, ed. Lester Embree et al (Dordrecht, Boston, London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997), 134-135.

⁴⁰ Jacques Taminiaux, "Philosophy of Existence: Heidegger," 58-59.

interpretation of *Dasein* is its interpretation with respect to its death⁴¹, the indeterminate certainty of its ownmost possibility of being at an end.⁴²

What has *Dasein* to do with the question of time? *Dasein* knows of its death in each case. Knowing one's own death in each case means that *Dasein* is running ahead to its past, to an extreme possibility of itself that stands before it in certainty and complete indeterminacy. The being of possibility here is the possibility that knows of death in the sense that 'I already know, but am not thinking about it.' *Dasein* knows of death in the manner of knowing that *shrinks back* to its past.⁴³ The past is that to which I run ahead. By running ahead to the past, *Dasein* runs up against its most extreme possibility, namely, death. This is also *Dasein*'s coming back to its everydayness which it still *is*. This running ahead is the authentic and singular future of one's own *Dasein*. "In running ahead *Dasein* is its future, in such a way that in this being futural it comes back to its past and present. *Dasein*, conceived in its most extreme possibility of being, is time itself, not in time."⁴⁴ Being futural, *Dasein* gives itself its time. It means "being futural gives time, cultivates the present and allows the past to be repeated in how it is lived."⁴⁵ Thus, we know that the fundamental phenomenon of time is the future. Each *Dasein* must maintain itself in its running ahead. In running ahead into authentic time, *Dasein* has all time for itself in each specific case. Running ahead seizes the past as the authentic possibility of every moment of insight. Being futural gives time, because it is time itself.⁴⁶ It is what it is concerned with. It is its present. Everything in the world is encountered by *Dasein* as residing in the present. Hence, *Dasein* is the whole of time in such a way that it does not get rid of future. The future is present to which care clings. The futurity to which care clings is by grace of the present. *Dasein* likes to encounter new things in its own present. However, *Dasein* is authentic only as possible *Dasein*. *Dasein* is in itself historical in so far as it is its possibility. In being futural, *Dasein* is its past; for in going ahead of itself, it comes back to itself, to its past and present.⁴⁷ Every moment of experience has these three dimensions. The unity of *Dasein* is founded on care and the unity of care is founded on temporality.⁴⁸

The world is a past as an already pre-given 'wherein.' It is also a future as a constantly anticipated 'for which.' A temporal dimension is also seen in the three interconnected modes of disclosure which constitutes 'being-in.' *Disposition* discloses the facticity of *Dasein*'s thrownness (past). It reveals that it belongs to existence to have already been. *Comprehension* discloses *Dasein* as a project.⁴⁹ This means that *Dasein* throws itself forward in the direction of a future. By articulating being-in-the-world, *discourse* expresses (present) both the thrownness and the self-projection of *Dasein*.⁵⁰ Consequently, we see that temporality is the ground of the

⁴¹ Since care is the basic state of *Dasein* which (care) implies one's exposure to the anxiety of death, this exposure must be as constant and all-pervasive as care itself. If we were not threatened by death, our basic state would not be care. But if our basic state were not care, our death would not be felt as threatening. Care and the sense of mortality are thus 'equiprimordial.' [Piotr Hoffman, "Death, Time, History: Division II of Being and Time," in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Charles Guignon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 201.

⁴² Martin Heidegger, *The Concept of Time*, tr. William McNeill (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 11.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴⁸ Robert J. Dostal, "Time and Phenomenology in Husserl and Heidegger," in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, 156.

⁴⁹ *Dasein* as a projection (*Entwurf* = from the German root "entwerfen" = to throw) finds itself thrown into a world, thrown into a situation with concrete possibilities. These concrete possibilities are definite possibilities different from logical possibilities. The concrete possibilities imply limitations. Heidegger speaks of these limitations as *Dasein*'s "facticity," in contradistinction to the other kind of fact that he calls "factuality." [David Couzens Hoy, "Heidegger and the Hermeneutic Turn," in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, 179].

ontological constitution of *Dasein*. For Aristotle, time is an unlimited sequence of moments that are irreversible and measurable. For Heidegger, the original concept of time has to be articulated in conformity with the ontological constitution of *Dasein* as found in the structure of *Sorge*⁵¹ (which captures *Dasein* in its entirety): being-ahead-of-itself (existentiality > future) and already-being-in-a-world (facticity > past) and being-alongside entities within-the-world (fallenness > present).⁵² This structure indicates the ‘originary’ time in which the primordial meaning of existentiality is future. Nevertheless, neither the existential future (anticipation) nor the existential past (retrieval) nor the existential present (instant of vision) has the traditional meaning of a discrete entity. Because the existential future is a coming-to-onself, it is a dimension. It is not at all a not-yet-present moment nor a sequence of not-yet-present moment. In Heidegger’s language, the existential future is an *ecstasis* – ‘standing outside’, ‘an openness to.’ Each *ecstasis* is open to specific horizon.⁵³ All the *ecstases* are interconnected under the primacy of the future. Hence, temporality is an ecstatic unity of future, past and present having a horizon of its own which is the condition of the possibility of the world as existential and of *Dasein*’s transcendence. Because of its existentiality, temporality is essentially finite. Temporality is the very process through which an intrinsically finite mode of being opens itself to its own potentiality for being and to other modes of being. Hence, it is not enough to say that *Dasein*’s existence is temporal, rather, *Dasein* temporalizes. Genuine time is self-temporalization.⁵⁴

It turns out that common time, as an infinite sequence, is derived from existential time. Time is already disclosed to us *before* we use a clock, in our daily comportment. For instance, when I say ‘now,’ in daily life, I am always expressing myself as attending to something, as *presentifying* it. Likewise, when I say ‘at that time,’ I display myself as *retaining* something bygone. Similarly, when I say ‘then,’ I show that I am *expecting* something to happen. Hence counting time leads back to presentification, retention and expectation. But this triad presupposes the existential triad. Existential (original) temporality is essentially finite, whereas counting time becomes an infinite sequence. Existential temporality is an ever-renewed encroachment of the past upon the future and vice versa, whereas counting time becomes irreversible. Existential temporality is the ownmost mobility of *Dasein*, whereas counting time gets bound to the motion of things.⁵⁵ In other words, if time is *Dasein*, then it becomes the principle of individuality, of course not in the traditional sense. For in being futural in running ahead, *Dasein* becomes itself. In running ahead it becomes visible in the possibility of its singular past. Time individuates in such a way that it makes everyone equal in death. Time brings everyone into a possibility with respect to which no one is discriminated as all are dissolved into dust.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ Jacques Taminiaux, “Philosophy of Existence: Heidegger,” 50.

⁵¹ *Sorge* (care) characterizes the ontological unity of *Dasein*’s being-in-the-world. *Sorge* is the transcendental structure at the root of all the existential features. *Sorge*, as the ontological unifying structure of *Dasein*, is revealed in the fundamental disposition of anxiety. Anxiety discloses the three interconnected dimensions of *Sorge*: facticity, possibility, and fallenness. *Dasein* is *Sorge* since *Dasein* is always concerned about its being. [Jacques Taminiaux, “Philosophy of Existence: Heidegger,” in *Routledge History of Philosophy*, Vol. VIII, ed. Richard Kearney (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 50-51] Anxiety is the disclosure of *Sorge*. It is only a manifestation of *Sorge* and the latter is more fundamental than anxiety.

⁵² Robert J. Dostal, “Time and Phenomenology in Husserl and Heidegger,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, 156.

⁵³ As Tomy S. Kalariparambil puts in the conclusion of his work, *Das befindliche Verstehens und Seinsfrage* (Berlin: Duncker und Humbolt, 1999): “The originary time extends its threefold different presences in the not-yet, no-more, and the present. This threefold extending of the threefold different ways of the presence is of the changed horizon.” (Die ursprüngliche Zeit reicht dreifach unterschiedliches Anwesen im Noch-nicht, Nicht-mehr und Gegenwärtigen. Dieses dreifache Reichen der dreifach unterschiedlichen Weisen des Anwesens...ist der verwandelte Horizont).

⁵⁴ Jacques Taminiaux, “Philosophy of Existence: Heidegger,” 52-53.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁵⁶ Martin Heidegger, *The Concept of Time*, 21.

In the words of Heidegger: “Time is *Dasein*. *Dasein* is my specificity, and this can be specificity in what is futural by running ahead to the certain yet indeterminate past. *Dasein* always is in a manner of its possible temporal being. *Dasein* is time, time is temporal. *Dasein* is not time, but temporality. The fundamental assertion that *time is temporal* is therefore the most authentic determination...because the being of temporality signifies non-identical actuality. *Dasein* is its past, it is its possibility in running ahead to this past. In this running ahead I am authentically time, I have time. In so far as time is in each case mine, there are many times [>plural]. Time itself is meaningless;⁵⁷ time is temporal.”⁵⁸ Here Heidegger distinguishes authentic or primordial temporality from inauthentic temporality (time), which is an infinite sequence of ‘now-points’ arranged in relation of before and after. *Authentic temporality* is identical with the structure of *Dasein* itself. This temporality is ‘ecstatic,’ i.e., *Dasein* in the process of temporalization, always ‘stands outside’ or transcends itself. *Dasein* is outside itself in its past as what it has been; it is outside itself in the present by making the present entities in the world; and it is outside itself in the future that ‘comes forward’ it. Past, present, and future, as ‘ecstases’ of temporality, are neither successive time-points nor temporal modes of appearance nor the intentional correlates of memory, perception, and expectation, but they are *Dasein*’s way of being-in-the-world. Among the ecstases, the future enjoys priority. The activities of *Dasein* are oriented towards what they project. *Dasein* is always ahead of itself; it is “futural.” *Dasein*’s projecting into the future grounds authentic past and present by making them the past and present of the project in which *Dasein* is engaged. The temporal ecstases, therefore, form a unity in *Dasein*, which exists as futural with plural possibilities by which *Dasein* makes things *present* in the very process of *past-ing* (having been).⁵⁹ For Heidegger, thus, temporality in general is futural with possibilities and can only be understood in terms of the situation in which *Dasein* confronts (a) the range of possibilities with choices regarding the way it wants to carry out or to be its being and (b) the fact that *Dasein* has to carry out or be its being as its being is given to it.⁶⁰

CONCLUSION

According to Heidegger, the philological investigations show that in the infinitive the definite meanings of the word are effaced and the word becomes a name for something indeterminate, plural. It is a compromise and mixture of three different root meanings. From this indeterminate and ‘empty’ character of being, a legitimate conclusion is inferred that the word disposes itself to plural interpretations as it contains within it plural potentialities and possibilities. *Dasein*’s very essence is ‘to be,’ ek-sistence, which indicates an openness to a possibility, a being-in-the-world. Being-in-the-world, the primordial phenomenon, is analysed to uncover the *existentialia* in three distinct, plural ways: the world as such, the ‘being-in’, and the one ‘who’ is in the world. Later, the focus of Heidegger’s Rectoral Address was no longer the individual *Dasein* but the *Dasein* of the German people. Accordingly, the very existence of a people organized in a State becomes the authentic location for the unconcealment of beings in their totality and plurality. *Dasein* is also the all and whole of time in such a way that the future is present to which care clings. However, *Dasein* is authentic only as possible *Dasein*, only in being futural. In being futural, it is its past; for in going ahead of itself, it comes back to itself, to its past and present. All the *ecstases* of *Dasein* are interconnected under the primacy of the future.

⁵⁷ Here I have a certain reservation about the exactness of William McNeil’s translation of this statement. A better translation could be “**The** time is meaningless,” instead of “Time **itself** is meaningless.”

⁵⁸ Martin Heidegger, *The Concept of Time*, 20-21.

⁵⁹ John B. Brough, “Time,” in *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology*, 702.

⁶⁰ Frank M. Kirkland, “Immanuel Kant,” in *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology*, 379.

Even without subscribing to Heidegger's own 'meta-narrative' of *Dasein*, it would not be hard to argue that philosophy in India today is in a state of deep crisis – a crisis caused by the scant respect shown to plural ways of the people in which often certain monolithic philosophies tend to view the whole of reality from the perspective of the so-called 'glorious' past. The other *ecstases* of temporality and historicity (future and present) are ignored, neglected, dominated and swallowed up by the overarching influence of the past under the patronage of the dominant philosophical systems and fundamentalistic interpretations of religio-cultural traditions of India. Our fellow-citizens, as a whole, do give priority or exclusive treatment to their own selective identities rooted in a 'great' past of their own claims. Such an approach, in the words of Amartya Sen, is 'a false move to assume that one's own identity is a matter of discovery [of the past] rather than choice.' The promoting of the discovery-view arises from the fact that the choices we make are constrained by our past, by our traditions and customs. Of course, choices of all kinds are always made within particular constraints. The point at issue here is not whether any possibility whatever can be chosen, but whether we have sufficient choices over alternative plural possibilities, and perhaps more importantly, whether we have some freedom in deciding what priority to give to the plural possibilities that we may simultaneously have. Possibility is thus a quintessentially plural concept, varying relevance of different possibilities in distinct contexts.⁶¹ And, most importantly, *Dasein* can choose to give due significance to that possibility among a cluster of plural possibilities. An authentic choice over possibilities is a certainty if we can give priority to future over our past and present. Our fellow-citizens will do well in committing themselves to a future *heteropia* rather than to a monolithic *utopia* rooted in the past. The past conditions my freedom, the present constrains my choices, but the future with its plural possibilities opens up the horizons of my freedom and choice by which I can overcome the past and embrace the present. The future of India is the future of plural possibilities with a freedom to make the most appropriate choices as 'authentic' and responsible '*Da-sein-zeits*' who '*ek-sist*' (stand out) into the future out of the past and the present.

⁶¹ Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian History, Culture and Identity* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 350-352.

Gadamer's "Fusion of Horizon" and the Challenges to Indian Pluralism

John F. Sequeira

Introduction

The problem of the *one and many* has baffled the human mind from the very inception of human history. In solving this problem the philosophers of different times have offered varied solutions. Ever since the Greek philosophy began playing its active role in the development of human thought, human understanding was generally considered as *adequatio* and thus the possibility of the attainment of the objectivity of knowledge and understanding. However, the change of shift from this earlier thinking began with the publication of Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*. Martin Heidegger, grounding himself on the historicity of man championed his proclamation, saying, that all understanding is founded on one's fore-understanding. Through his ontological analysis of man and consequently of the human thought, Heidegger dethroned the very foundation of objectivity of knowledge, proposing on the other hand a moderate historically conditioned understanding. All our understanding is founded on our pre-understanding, and all that we understand we understand "as" because of our thrown facticity.

If all our knowing is conditioned by history and if all our understanding is the outcome of our involvement in the tradition and culture, then epistemological pluralism is an unavoidable resultant of this conditioning. Epistemological pluralism, maintains that there is no possibility of arriving at one single meaning or truth, rather, meaning depends on the variables and their cultural conditioning. However, there requires a way out to build this gap between the epistemological 'one' and 'many'. Hans George Gadamer proposes a *via media*, between total objectivity and total relativity, through his dialogical nature of hermeneutic understanding and the principle of the "Fusion of Horizon."

The concept of fusion of horizons has far reaching consequences not only to epistemological pluralism but also in facing the challenges of pluralism in India. Today as India faces the new challenges emerging from religious, cultural and linguistic fundamentalism on one side and socio-economic globalization on the other, the insights arising from the concept of "fusion of horizon" may pose itself as new trendsetter in confronting these challenges, paving a healthier way to understand and respecting the otherness of the other.

Prejudice (*Vorurteil*)¹ as a Condition for Understanding

1 Gadamer defines prejudice as a "judgment that is rendered before all the elements that determine a situation have been finally examined." "In German legal terminology *Vorurteil* is a provisional legal verdict before the final verdict is reached." To the one who is involved in the legal dispute this kind of judgment may have adverse impact. Accordingly, the French *Préjudice* and the Latin *Prejudicium* have a negative meaning, giving the sense of an adverse effect, disadvantage, or harm. However, for Gadamer this negative sense is only derivative. The negative consequences depend precisely on the positive validity, the value of the provisional decision as a pre-judgment like that of any precedent. Therefore, prejudice does not necessarily mean a false judgment, but part of the idea is that it can have a positive or a negative value.

Gadamer builds his whole theory of hermeneutical understanding on the principle of “prejudice” (*Vorurteil*). Prejudice was discredited by the Enlightenment philosophers as obstacle to the objectivity of knowledge. According to the enlightenment doctrine of prejudice, the prejudices arise out of two sources: prejudice due to human authority and prejudice due to over hastiness. For the enlightenment it is the reason that gives authority. With the help of reason we can know all things better. As against this Enlightenment doctrine, Gadamer sets himself to rehabilitate prejudices in hermeneutic understanding and all that makes up for the prejudices i.e., tradition and authority. To this effect he has recourse to Heidegger's notion of the ontological structure of hermeneutic circle, and more specifically the insight that issues from it, namely, that all understanding involves a prior-understanding. This prior- understanding is that which gives the real thrust to the hermeneutical problem. He writes:

Anyone who wants to understand a text always performs an act of projection. He projects in advance a sense of the whole as soon as an initial sense appears. Likewise the initial sense appears only because one is already reading with some expectations of a definite meaning. In working out such a fore projection, which is of course continually revised consists the understanding of what is there.²

Understanding is basically projection, and what it projects are the expectations that precede the text, anticipating for the whole before arriving at it. What the interpreter projects in advance is what he understands already. He tries out a meaning already familiar to him and proposes it as a possibility. There is no zero-point from which meaning is first encountered. These initial anticipations that direct the reader into the text give meaning for the text as a whole. The projected meaning is his own possibility in that he has projected it; it is part of the world in which he already knows his way around, and it is something that he can and does understand.³ Thus, even before one begins consciously to interpret a text he has already placed it within a certain context (*Vorhabe*), approached it from a certain perspective (*Vorsicht*), and conceived of it in a certain way (*Vorgriff*).⁴ This anticipatory meaning is to be constantly revised in terms of what emerges as one reads the book. The meaning of any object, therefore, is co-determined by one's own circumstances or life relations (Dilthey) and expectations. There is no understanding that is objective in the Cartesian sense; rather all understanding involves projections of meaning that arise out of one's own situation and go beyond the observable facts.

Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshal, 2d ed. (London: Sheed and Ward, 1993), 270, Hans-Georg Gadamer *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer Philosophischen Hermeneutik, Gesammelte Werke* Vol. I (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), (1986), 275.

2 (Gadamer 1993, 276), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 281)

3 See Joel C. Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics: A Reading of Truth and Method* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 166.

4 Georgia Warnke, *Gadamer Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason* (California: Stanford University Press, 1987), 77

The hermeneutically trained conscience, says Gadamer, should be therefore from the beginning be sensitive to this interplay of one's own prejudices on the one hand and the alterity of the text on the other. This sensitivity involves neither neutrality with regards to the content, nor the extinction of one's self, rather foregrounds and appropriates one's own fore-meanings and prejudices with openness, because it concerns him too.⁵ This means that we are willing to integrate the meaning of a text with our precious preconceptions by making them conscious, bringing them into view and assimilating them to what the text reveals. In any case if we are to understand, says Gadamer, we understand only in and through the appropriation of prejudices. Without prejudice no understanding is possible. This recognition that all understanding inevitably involves some prejudice gives the hermeneutical problem its real thrust.⁶

This constant process of projections and revision of them is what constitute for Gadamer the movement of understanding and interpretation. However, Gadamer always insists that what guides one within this circular movement of understanding is attentiveness to what is there (the subject matter or the content). Following Heidegger, Gadamer confirms that the reading of what is there, simply means making the anticipations conscious "so as to check them and thus acquire the right understanding from "the things themselves" (*die Sache*).⁷ Gadamer asserts: "The hermeneutical task becomes of itself a questioning of things" and not just what the other says.⁸ Objectivity in interpretation consists, therefore, not in the avoidance of fore-meanings but its confirmation and through this confirmation realizing the process of understanding, by understanding the content or subject matter of the text.

Thus, for Gadamer the absolute reason is not a possibility for historical humanity and reason exists for us only in concrete historical terms. It follows from it that our study of historical understanding should begin, not as in Dilthey, from mere awareness of experience but from prejudices, which constitute the initial directness of our whole ability to experience. Prejudices are the conditions whereby we experience something—whereby what we encounter says something to us.⁹ Self-reflection or autobiography is not primary and, therefore, not the foundation to the hermeneutical problem, because through them history is made private. This is inadmissible because, "history does not belong to us, we belong to it."¹⁰ The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life. That is why "the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being."¹¹ It is paramount to accept them as they are, as the initial directives in our quest for hermeneutical experience.

If prejudice is the condition for every understanding, what is the legitimacy of this prejudice? Gadamer is quick enough to tell us that the legitimacy of prejudice is to be

5 (Gadamer 1993, 269), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 273)

6 (Gadamer 1993, 270), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 274)

7 (Gadamer 1993, 269), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 274)

8 (Gadamer 1993, 269), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 274)

9 (Gadamer 1980, 133)

10 (Gadamer 1993, 276), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 281)

11 (Gadamer 1993, 277), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 281)

found in the very tradition and culture in which we are situated together with their authority.

Tradition and Its Authority: Legitimize Prejudices

According to Gadamer, human understanding, therefore our prejudiced understanding, is essentially bound with the prior authority of tradition. Only by accepting tradition in its proper perspective that one can open the way "to appropriate understanding which is dominated by...our historical consciousness."¹² In fact, historical consciousness is inseparably situated within traditions. Influenced by Heidegger, Gadamer observes that our self-understanding, our self-identity as moral beings—literally our very being itself—is conditioned by traditions which precede and condition it absolutely. Gadamer writes:

Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society and the state in which we live.... That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments constitute the historical reality of his being.¹³

That the *de facto* authority of tradition mentioned above exercises its authority on our finite being independently of its being recognized proves in a sense the priority of tradition over reason. Gadamer even argues that tradition has a prior authority, which is confirmed by rational recognition. When one comes of age we acknowledge that tradition offers us a superior and broader perspective of human life, what we call "cumulative wisdom of ages" that can be neither had by finite individual intellect, relying upon its own experiential resources, nor demonstratively justified by it.¹⁴ Gadamer writes:

That which has been sanctioned by tradition and custom has an authority that is nameless, and our finite historical being is marked by the fact that the authority of what has been handed down to us and not just what is clearly grounded has a power over our attitude and behavior. All education depends upon this, even though, in the case of education... becoming mature does not mean that a person becomes his own master in the sense that he becomes free from all tradition. The real force of morals ...is based upon tradition. They are freely taken over but by no means created by a free insight or grounded on reasons. This is precisely what we call tradition: the ground of their validity.¹⁵

Thus, for Gadamer the validity of our finite understanding cannot be asserted *apriori*, because it is based upon tradition.¹⁶ Gadamer does not intend to be prescriptive (as the categorical imperative of Kant). He simply suggests a deeper, philosophical explanation of the reasons why tradition is to be recognized as a superior perspective, which surpasses our finite understanding. This tradition, which is the basis of our

¹² (Gadamer 1993, 276), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 281)

¹³ (Gadamer 1993, 276), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 281)

¹⁴ David Bruce Ingram, *Truth, Method, and Understanding in the Human Sciences: The Gadamer Habermas Controversy* (Phd. Diss., University of California, 1980), 80.

¹⁵ (Gadamer 1993, 280), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 285)

¹⁶ (Ingram 1980, 80)

understanding, as the ontological circle of Heidegger indicates, conditions our understanding and at the same time extends in and through this understanding to cover new contexts. Gadamer writes: "Tradition is not simply a precondition; rather we produce it ourselves in as much as we understand, participate in the evolution of tradition and hence further determine it ourselves."¹⁷

Thus, for Gadamer, in any following of tradition, there is an element of freedom and history. "Even the most genuine and pure tradition does not persist because of the inertia of what once existed."¹⁸ Tradition does not mean prolongation, but preservation. Preservation, however, is an act of the reason. "It needs to be affirmed, embraced, and cultivated and appropriated." In our day-to-day experience, only innovation and planning may appear to be the result of reason. However, for Gadamer this is a naive notion. "Even where life changes violently, as in the ages of revolution, far more of the old is preserved in the supposed transformation of everything than anyone knows and it combines with the new to create a new value."¹⁹ Preservation of tradition is as much a freely chosen action as are revolution and renewal.

Hence, for Gadamer, in the understanding of human sciences the element of tradition should be given its full value. There is no question of freeing oneself from the prejudices of tradition. Rather understanding in the human sciences can understand itself correctly only with its historicity, i.e., situating itself within tradition. He asserts: "Understanding in human sciences should allow itself to be addressed by tradition.... At the beginning of all historical hermeneutics, then, the abstract antithesis between tradition and historical research, between history and knowledge of it must be discarded."²⁰ There must be a constitutive unity of effect between the effect (*Wirkung*) of a living tradition and the effect of historical study. The task before us is to "recognize the element of tradition in historical research and inquire into hermeneutic productivity."²¹

If all our understanding is prejudiced understanding because of our involvement in tradition, then the objectivity of knowledge and understanding becomes problematic. Following Heidegger, Gadamer maintains that understanding of a text is determined by the anticipatory movements of pre-understanding. It is our prejudices, and not our judgments of *adequatio* that determine our being, because we find ourselves always in a tradition. Understanding on the other hand is not an act of subjectivity either, but an entering into "participation,"²² or an event of transmission of tradition. This is the decisive turning point of Gadamer's hermeneutic understanding from that of others,

Participation as Fore-Conception of Completeness (*Vorgriff der Vollkommenheit*)

17 (Gadamer 1993, 293), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 298)

18 (Gadamer 1993, 281), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 286)

19 (Gadamer 1993, 281), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 286)

20 (Gadamer 1993, 282), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 287)

21 (Gadamer 1993, 283), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 287)

22 Gianni Vattimo, "In senso delle parole: Ermanitica come koiné," *aut aut*, 217-218 (1987): 6

Gadamer explains this “participation” in tradition, whereby understanding is arrived with his famous expression of “fore-conception of completeness (*Vorgriff der Vollkommenheit*).” In the process of understanding a text, initially the interpreter will assume the completeness of the text or behaviour and he does so in a double sense. The content of the text is regarded initially as having within itself “immanent unity of meaning,” on one side, and at the same time transcending the “expectations of meaning that proceed from the relation to the truth of what is being said.”²³ The meaning of the text could be otherwise, but if one does not regard the text as having a completed unity of meaning, there is nothing that can call into question the prejudices guiding the interpretation.²⁴ It is only through this completed unity of meaning that the text can present itself as a self-authoritative whole.²⁵ When the reader fails to fulfill this fore-conception of completeness in a text because of the negative experiences, “be that the reader finds it boring, empty or ridiculous, sentimental, imitative or simply not working”²⁶ understanding fails because the text would not speak any longer. Then there is no participation in it. Rather we take it either psychologically or historically as another’s opinion. The fore-conception of completeness is regulative in this context rather than constitutive for understanding. Nevertheless it appears here that the movement of understanding is fundamentally still in the line of whole-part relation.

Understanding as “Belonging” (*Zugehörigkeit*)

There is another way in which Gadamer confronts this problem. In every understanding says Gadamer there is interplay of movements between the text in question and the interpreter. This interplay of relationship is what he calls “belonging” (*Zugehörigkeit*) to tradition.²⁷ The hermeneutic understanding is constituted as a relation of belonging in the same way as Heidegger speaks of the belonging together of Being and Dasein. In other words, Gadamer accepts a kind of interplay of the movement of text and the movement of the interpreter in understanding. So too, Gadamer insists that there is a state of affairs that follow from the fact that there is a dialogue between text and its interpreter. The state of affairs is that “something happens” (*etwas geschieht*), and this happening is made possible “only because the word that has come down to us as tradition and to which we are to listen (*hören*) really encounters us, so as if it addressed us and is

²³ (Gadamer 1993, 294), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 299)

²⁴ (Risser 1997, 75)

²⁵ Rock Marchildon gives us two different viewpoints of understanding the truth content in philosophical understanding. The two views considered are those of L. K. Schmidt who sees the thing in itself as the criterion of truth and Jean Grondin, for whom there is no truth criterion at all. Marchildon on the other hand opines that the truth depends on the legitimacy of the prejudices at work in understanding. He poses, the complete unity of meaning, that we have before we read the text (anticipation of completeness), as the condition of the possibility of an awareness of prejudices. However, we surpass this unity and through the fusion of horizon and through the process of dialogue, which is affected by historical consciousness, we attain the understanding of the thing in itself as the truth criterion. For a detailed study see Rock Marchildon, “À Propos de la Conception Herméneutique de la Vérité,” *Laval: Théologique et Philosophique* 53, 1 (1997):141-150

²⁶ Hans-Georg Gadamer “Philosophy and Literature” trans. Antony J. Steinbock, *Man and World* 18 (1985): 253.

²⁷ (Gadamer 1993, 295), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 300). For a detailed discussion on the issue see, Jerald Wallulis, “Philosophical Hermeneutics and the Conflict of Ontologies,” *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 24 (1984): 283-302

concerned with us."²⁸ In this hearing the interpreter comes to "belong" to the tradition in question.

In this "belonging" to tradition, insists Gadamer, there is an element of continuity between "familiarity (*Vertrautheit*) and strangeness (*Fremdheit*)"²⁹ In this continuity lies the commonality that binds us to the tradition and the strangeness of the text that we want to understand. This commonality, says Gadamer, is constantly being formed. This formation, which takes place by virtue of belongingness is not the reconstruction or reproduction of what the author meant but a new production of meaning. This continuity does not mean "the unbroken stream of tradition" in which the past alone dominates. Rather hermeneutic understanding happens as a mediation between past and present, between a dialectic of strangeness and familiar, "between a historically intended, distanciate object, and "belonging" to a tradition." Gadamer asserts: "the true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between."³⁰

Because of our "belongingness" to tradition, says Gadamer, in the process of understanding, "one cannot separate in advance the productive prejudices that enable understanding from those prejudices that hinder it and lead to misunderstandings."³¹ This separation rather takes place within the event of understanding itself. That is, since the prejudices cannot be separated they should be worked out interpretively. This issue of separation is the issue that Gadamer treats under the concept of temporal distance.

Understanding and Temporal Distance

Another problem that confronts us at this juncture is that how the interpreter can "belong" to the tradition of text of the historical past? For Romantic hermeneutics understanding was the reproduction of an original production. This means the historian could overcome the temporal distance in the historical understanding by placing oneself within the spirit of the age that was to be understood, so as to be able to think within its thought as a means of gaining historical objectivity. As against this Gadamer opines that in understanding a historical text, time is not primarily a gulf to be bridged. It is a supportive ground of events on which the present is rooted.³² It is an illusion even to think that the interpreter can transpose himself into the spirit of the age, think with its ideas and its thoughts, and not with his own, in order to attain historical objectivity. Rather the truth lies in "accepting temporal distance as a positive and productive condition that enable understanding."³³ Temporal distance enables understanding because

28 (Gadamer 1993, 461), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 466)

29 (Gadamer 1993, 295), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 300)

30 (Gadamer 1993, 295), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 300)

31 (Gadamer 1993, 295), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 301)

32 (Gadamer 1993, 297), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 302). Paul Ricoeur agrees with Gadamer on this issue. Ricoeur asks: "How is it possible to introduce a critical instance into a consciousness of belonging which is expressly defined by the rejection of distanciation? It is possible, in my view, only in so far as historical consciousness seeks not only to repudiate distanciation but to assume it. Gadamer's hermeneutics contains, in this respect a series of decisive suggestions...." Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. and trans. John B. Thomson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 61. See also Jerald Wallulis, "Philosophical Hermeneutics and the Conflict of Ontologies," in *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 24 (1984): 283-302

it is filled with customs and tradition "in which everything handed down presents itself to us."³⁴

Understanding and Historically Affected Consciousness (*Wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*)

Another reason why temporal distance is a supportive ground of all our understanding is because of our historically affected consciousness. History affects in its working out, or better, the realization of history takes place in the working of history. Gadamer comments that one should "learn to understand...and recognize that in all understanding whether we are expressly aware of it or not the efficacy of history is at work."³⁵ To deny this efficacy is to deny the actual formation of knowledge itself. History is a pure and unbroken continuity of events in which the effect of every past prejudices our every present.³⁶ Any time of history can understand any other, merely by utilizing the prejudices already transmitted to it by the past time. Since human being is finite, that human consciousness itself is affected by *Wirkungsgeschichte* and thus human understanding is always prejudiced by some history, the historical tradition to which we belong.³⁷

It is not only that consciousness is affected by history, but also it is aware that it has been affected. This is what Gadamer calls *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*.³⁸ This consciousness helps one to understand the traditions in which the historian does not already participate. Yet Gadamer reminds us "being historical does not mean dissolving in self knowledge." Historically affected consciousness is something more than mere self-knowledge. It gives us a possibility of better awareness of our own historic situation, the situation in which real understanding takes place.

Drawing on Buber's distinction between "I-Thou" relationships without explicitly identifying it as such, Gadamer emphasizes that our involvement in tradition is a dialogical participatory relation where history is constantly at work. Just as for Buber, I-Thou relationship is a relationship characterized by directness, involvement, openness, mutuality, and presentness so too for Gadamer tradition is a genuine partner in dialogue, we belong to it, as does the "I" with a "Thou."³⁹

33 (Gadamer 1993, 297), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 302)

34 (Risser 1997, 77)

35 (Gadamer 1993, 301), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 306)

36 (Weinsheimer 1985, 182)

37 (Weinsheimer 1985, 182)

38 For different translations of this word see Jerald Bruns, *Inventions: Writing, Textuality and Understanding in Literature and History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 181; David C. Hoy, *The Critical Circle: Literature, History and Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 63; Richard E. Palmer *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory* in Scheiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger and Gadamer (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), 191; Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 359. However, in our discussion following Joel Weinsheimer we will use it as "Historically affected Consciousness."

39 (Gadamer 1993, 258), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 364)

It is this belonging to the tradition in a genuine relationship which is at the root of every hermeneutical understanding of tradition. The openness to tradition, he says, is the highest form of hermeneutical experience, which has the real character of *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*. It does not project meaning from the "I" but as an authentic openness it lets something be said. This is the true replica of any genuine relationship. It involves not only openness on the part of the speaker. Rather anyone who listens is also fundamentally open. Without this openness there is no genuine bond. "Openness therefore involves recognizing that I myself must accept some things that are against me, even though no one forces me to do so."⁴⁰

In the hermeneutic experience, therefore, the interpreter must allow tradition to claim its own validity, not simply accepting the past in its otherness but in the way that it has something to tell me. When an historical text is read as merely historical, what it presents has been already dogmatized and placed outside of question. "Authentic historical consciousness does not see present as the apex of truth; it holds itself open for the claim which the truth in the work can address to it."⁴¹ "The hermeneutical consciousness," writes Gadamer, "culminates not in the methodological sureness of itself, but in the same readiness for experience that distinguishes the experienced man from the man captivated by dogma.... This readiness is what characterizes historically operative consciousness."⁴² The experienced person is not possessed of objectified knowledge rather through his openness he is matured with non-objectifiable experience which helps him to have an authentic non-dogmatic dialogue. This experience is a core reality for understanding the dialogical nature of Gadamer's hermeneutics.

Gadamer says that the historically affected consciousness is primarily consciousness of the hermeneutic situation.⁴³ In ordinary parlance the very idea of situation connotes that we are not outside it. Rather we find ourselves within it, thus being excluded from any possibility of objective knowledge. At the same time as every finite present, our human finitude can never give us a full vision of the reality. It can give us only a partial contingent or limited knowledge. Because of this, Gadamer tries to explain situatedness simply as a standpoint, a perspectival vision. To place oneself in the hermeneutical situation means to place oneself with the tradition that one tries to understand. However, the illumination of this situation - reflection on effective history - can never be achieved perfectly because of our human finitude. Gadamer writes: "To be historically means that knowledge of oneself can never be complete."⁴⁴ Gadamer through the concept of "fusion of horizon" (*Horizontverschmelzung*) tries to answer the possibility of coming to understand this situatedness, which is affected by history.

Understanding as "Fusion of Horizon" (*Horizontverschmelzung*)

40 (Gadamer 1993, 361), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 367)

41 Richard E. Palmer *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger and Gadamer* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), 193

42 (Gadamer 1993, 361), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 367)

43 (Gadamer 1993, 301), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 307)

44 (Gadamer 1993, 302), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 307)

For Gadamer, essential to the concept of situation is the concept of "horizon." Horizon is the range of vision that includes every thing that can be seen from a particular vantage point.⁴⁵ To have a horizon means not only having a limited knowledge of what is nearby but be able to see beyond it. Thus, "a person who has an horizon knows the relative significance of every thing within this horizon whether it is near or far, great or small."⁴⁶ Thus for Gadamer, "working out the hermeneutical situation means acquiring the right horizon of inquiry for the questions evoked by the encounter with tradition."⁴⁷

Historical understanding must acquire an appropriate historical horizon so that what we are trying to understand can be seen in its appropriate dimensions. For romantic hermeneutics it simply meant to transpose oneself into the historical horizon from which a traditionary text speaks in order to understand what that text wants to tell us. If the interpreter fails to transpose himself into the historical horizon in this way, he would misunderstand the very meaning of the text and its significance. On the contrary, Gadamer asks whether to place ourselves into the historical horizon of the text is adequate or whether such a venture is even ever possible.⁴⁸ Using the dialogical event of understanding Gadamer tries to compare historical understanding as transposition into the horizon of the other to a certain kind of conversation between two people. In any conversation by entering into the standpoint of the other, into what he is claiming to say, we are making our own standpoint safely unattainable. Applying this to historical consciousness, the person who thinks historically "comes to know the meaning of what has been handed down, without necessarily agreeing with it, or seeing himself in it."⁴⁹ Gadamer is of the opinion that in such a venture one has given up the claim to find in the past any truth that is valid and intelligible for himself. "Acknowledging the otherness of the other in this way making him the object of objective knowledge, involves the fundamental suspension of his claim to truth."⁵⁰

Again, however, the fundamental question before us is whether this kind of process in understanding really fits the hermeneutic phenomenon, or as Gadamer asks, are there in reality two different horizons—one that of the person seeking to understand and the other the horizon in which one wants to place himself? In other words, are there such kinds of closed horizons as Nietzsche thought?⁵¹ Is the horizon of one's own present time ever closed in this way? And can an historical situation be imagined that has this kind of closed horizon?

Gadamer says that the historical movement of human life consists in the fact that, it is never bound to any one standpoint and hence can never have a truly closed horizon.⁵²

45 (Gadamer 1993, 302), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 308)

46 (Gadamer 1993, 302), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 308)

47 (Gadamer 1993, 302), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 308)

48 (Gadamer 1993, 304), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 309)

49 (Gadamer 1993, 303), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 308)

50 (Gadamer 1993, 304), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 309)

51 Nietzsche complained against historicism saying that historicism has destroyed the horizon bounded by myth in which alone the culture is able to live. See his *Untimely Meditations* II, at the beginning. See also (Gadamer 1993, 304), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 309)

52 (Gadamer 1993, 304), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 309)

The past does not stand behind us as something isolated from the horizon out of which we speak. The horizon of the past existing in the form of tradition is always in motion. "This horizon changes for a person who is moving."⁵³ The surrounding horizon is not set in motion by the historical consciousness either, but in it this motion becomes aware of itself. Therefore it should be seen not as two horizons closed in themselves - as the past and the present. Rather the process of movement from one single horizon, which moves from within, comprises the whole of our self-consciousness. Gadamer writes: "When our historical consciousness transposes itself into the historical horizons, this does not entail passing into alien worlds unconnected in any way with our own; instead, that they together constitute the one great horizon that moves from within and that beyond the frontiers of the present, embraces the historical depths of our self-consciousness."⁵⁴ This is what Gadamer calls "fusion of horizons."⁵⁵ Fusion of horizons is, therefore, not that there are two horizons that should meet but accepting the fact that whatever is contained in the historical consciousness is in fact embraced by a single historical horizon. The horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past as is evident in the way we test our prejudices. Gadamer affirms again: "There is no more an isolated horizon of the present in itself, than there are historical horizons which have to be acquired. Understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing for themselves."⁵⁶

Again the question before us is if there are no two horizons why speak of the fusion of horizons and not simply the formation of one single horizon? The answer to this question as Gadamer himself poses it is found in the historical consciousness itself, in what Gadamer calls the process of foregrounding. The process of foregrounding is always reciprocal "Whatever is being fore-grounded must be fore-grounded from something else which in turn must be fore-grounded from it."⁵⁷ We have seen how the prejudices are brought into play. Now seen from the point of view of horizon the present horizon has to be fore-grounded in the past, at the same time as the present is derived from the past and built on it. Hence "the horizon of the present can not be formed without the past."⁵⁸ In the hermeneutical circle it is seen that hermeneutical consciousness does not find itself in an unbroken stream of tradition but stands intermediate between an "historically intended separate objectivity" and belongingness to tradition. The encounter with tradition involves the experience of the tension between the historical text and the present. This tension is not to be assimilated, i.e., the continuity of the tradition is not simply the unity of discourse. Thus, there is a need to project a historical horizon that is different from the horizon of the present.

Although it is true that in historical understanding a new unity is formed in acquiring the historical horizon, historical consciousness is aware of its own otherness and hence foregrounds the horizon of the past from its own. Gadamer says, therefore, that

53 (Gadamer 1993, 304), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 309)

54 (Gadamer 1993, 304), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 309)

55 (Gadamer 1993, 306), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 311)

56 (Gadamer 1993, 306), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 311)

57 (Gadamer 1993, 305), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 310)

58 (Gadamer 1993, 306), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 311)

the historical horizon is not a "solidified into the self-alienation of a past consciousness, but is overtaken by our own present horizon of understanding."⁵⁹ In an apparent Hegelian tune⁶⁰ Gadamer concludes by saying that in the taking over of the historical horizon there is indeed "a fusing of horizons," the past is appropriated in the present and the present comes to the flour in and through the past through a constant dialogue between the present and the past.

Understanding as Dialogue

In any ordinary dialogue the primacy of the question and answer has to be accepted. So too is the case with the hermeneutic dialogue. It is a dialogue between the interpreter and the text. The interpreter and the historical text are the partners in conversation. The interpreter is drawn into conversation with the historical text when the text speaks something interesting, something that concerns the interpreter. The interpreter who is drawn into conversation with the text does not make assertions rather engages in dialogue. To draw the text into dialogue means to let it put the question to the interpreter.⁶¹ The task of hermeneutics is to transform fixed assertions into conversation and bring the static and bygone past back into the process of history.

In dialogue questioning is reciprocal, and same holds true of the dialogue with historical text. In this dialogue the text puts the question to the interpreter. "That a text handed down from tradition becomes the object of interpretation means that already it puts a question to the interpreter."⁶² The initial question would be to what question is this text an answer? The meaning of every sentence is determined by the question to which it replies. To reply means to understand the question. Thus to open a dialogue with tradition is to understand the question to which the text is an answer as an open question. In other words, to open a text for discussion is to open its subject matter to the interpreter's contribution. It is only through his contributions that the dialogue is furthered. This does not mean that the interpreter supplies the definitive answer that the text itself cannot provide. Quite the contrary, for the interpreter to enter into dialogue with the text simply means that he does not have any ready-made answers but is willing to find an answer together with the text. This obliges the interpreter to put the question to the text in turn. There is a realization of reciprocity of the questioning when the interpreter puts the question to the text by which he in turn is put in question.⁶³

It is in this dialogical play of putting the question and in turn of being put in question the "fusion of horizon" takes place. This means that in the interpretive dialogue both the intention of the original author and the personal insight, desire, and intention of

⁵⁹ (Gadamer 1993, 307), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 312)

⁶⁰ Unequivocally the mediation of understanding cannot be confused with with the Hegelian mediation of Geist. Although Hegel is a decisive figure for Gadamer there is no mediation in hermeneutic experience as Hegel understood by this term. There is rather a possibility of finding a Kierkegaardian element in Gadamer's thought when one encounters a comparison between Gadamer and Hegel. For further reference See (Risser 1997, 119-138)

⁶¹ (Weinsheimer 1985, 367), (Warnke 1987, 99-100)

⁶² (Gadamer 1993, 369), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 375)

⁶³ (Weinsheimer 1985, 210)

the interpreter are in play. What actually happens in dialogue is something like what Joel Weinsheimer calls "between cup and lip." History is the gap between will and consequence, the non-identity of intention and meaning.⁶⁴ In understanding the meaning is in the process of realization. Both the text and the interpreter know well of their own finitude, and are aware that they do not have the last word. The interpreter understands himself only as participant in a continuing conversation. However, he places his own prejudices at risk and places in the open what he himself takes for granted, thus posing new possibilities for questioning and extending his own horizon by fusing it with that of the text.⁶⁵ This spirit of holding oneself open to history is what Gadamer calls "the continuing event of truth."

This "fusion of horizon" that takes place in understanding is actually the achievement of language.⁶⁶ In understanding the subject-matter between two persons who engage in dialogue, the subject-matter must take the form of a language. This does not mean that what we have understood is subsequently put in words, rather the way understanding occurs—whether in the case of a text or a dialogue with another person—in the coming into language of the thing itself. This very conversation must presuppose or create a better language. Hence, reaching an understanding on the subject matter of a conversation necessarily means that a common language must first be worked out in the conversation. Thus, concludes Gadamer: "To reach an understanding in dialogue is not merely a matter putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were."⁶⁷

“Fusion of Horizon” and Its Consequences to Indian Pluralism

“Reality is pluriform in nature.” A complete comprehension of the whole of the reality is beyond human intellectual capacity. The pluriform reality manifests itself through diversity of religion, culture, knowledge, ethnicity and other transcendental phenomena. This is true in every culture and social strata. The variations found in the social compositions in different world societies have been always the object of social research down the centuries. It was the common knowledge among the anthropologists and social scientists that, with the exception of some isolated preliterate societies, different social groups coexisted in all societies. These social groups could never remain as watertight compartments, one unknown and uninfluenced by other. On the contrary intermingling and mutual fecundation of cultures took place down the centuries resulting in the contamination of each culture and racial purity. Even groups that are most exclusive and with absolutist claims could not resist what Peter Berger calls “cognitive contamination.”⁶⁸

⁶⁴ (Weinsheimer 1985, 210-211)

⁶⁵ (Weinsheimer 1985, 211)

⁶⁶ See (Gadamer 1993, 378.)

⁶⁷ (Gadamer 1993, 379)

⁶⁸ Peter Berger, *A Far Glory: The Quest for Faith in an age of Credulity*. (New York: Anchor Books, 1993), 38-39.

Refer also Mathew Jayanath, *From Plurality to Pluralism: Constructing a Sociological Theory of Religious Pluralism Vidhya.Jyothi* 64 (2000), 807-824

The Indian scenario was never a different story, even facing the same diversities based on culture, religion, language, region and ethnicity. These diversities and their resulting cognitive contamination existed from antiquity. Even before the arrival of Indo-Aryan groups with their cultural and religious uniqueness, many indigenous cultures and religions abounded in India. It is a land of the birth of new religions like Buddhism and Jainism, Sikhism and Sufism. It was a land that welcomed many monotheistic religions like Christianity, Islam and Judaism. Even lately India is confronting so many new sects like Hare Krishna, New age religions etc. In other words, India like any other country, is a perfect example of Plurality and multifacetedness.

However, what is more challenging in India today, unlike the past, is the speed in which this “pluralizing” process takes place and the adverse effects that originate from therein. Traditional societies in India by and large were relatively self-enclosed entities with limited exposure to other cultures, traditions, and styles of life. Today because of the development of cities, mass literacy, travel and mass communication, immigration and emigration of people, trade, commerce and globalization, India has become a melting pot of diverse cultures and religions on one hand, and at the same time, the hub of fundamentalism and communalism on the other. It is the ‘fear psychoses’ of the annihilation of their unique identity created in the mind of the people is basically the cause of fundamentalism and communalism. Just as it was the struggle for political and economic independence that created a change of consciousness among the Indian people during the colonial powers, so too today, the frenzy of “pluralizing process” that creates a consciousness of disintegration and gradual annihilation of the cultural and religious identity which calls for socio-cultural and religious independence. It is this unrest found in Indian society that is the real challenge of Pluralism in India. Gadamer’s philosophy may shed some light in helping to calm this unrest a little.

For Gadamer, the locus of hermeneutic understanding is the culture and tradition in which we are born. “Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society and the state in which we live.”⁶⁹ Human consciousness is basically historical consciousness, a consciousness, so dynamic and progressive as history itself. Human person is called upon to understand the dynamism of this socio-cultural history with the consequent dynamism of his very historical consciousness if he/she wants to cope with the frenzy of “pluralizing process.”

It is not just that human consciousness is basically historical, but our belonging to a tradition, culture, religion, and ethnicity is itself conditioned by our historical consciousness. In every belonging to a tradition or culture, because of this historical consciousness, there is always a steady flow of familiarity (*Vertrautheit*) and strangeness (*Fremdheit*). We not only constantly belong to this familiarity and strangeness but it is in this interplay of familiarity and strangeness resides what makes us understand our culture and tradition, if we understand it at all. The ideology of Puritanism and protectivism that fundamentalism claims to achieve was never a historical reality and can never become in the future because it goes against the very historical consciousness of human person.

69 (Gadamer 1993, 276), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 281)

Understanding of our own tradition, culture, religion or ethnicity happens only in the mediation between past and present, between the dialectic of strangeness and familiar, "between a historically intended, distanced object, and "belonging" to a tradition." Gadamer asserts: "the true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between."⁷⁰

If the true locus of our understanding of our tradition is this in-between, then understanding, appreciating and appropriating our tradition, culture or ethnicity goes much deeper than our dissolving in self-knowledge or objectifying ourselves in an isolated culture or tradition. It calls for a genuine dialogical openness of relationship, which is characterized by directness, involvement, mutuality and presentness, between that which is familiar and that which is strange. It is in this I–Thou relationship that one is able to understand and respect the otherness of the other, the culture, religion, tradition and ethnicity of the other and understand and absorb that which is beneficial and healthy.

Thus, the problem of pluralism in India calls for building a right attitude of historical consciousness with an appropriate historical horizon, so that whatever we want to understand might be understood in its appropriate dimensions. This appropriate historical horizon helps us to understand not only the otherness of the other, but also the meaning of what has been handed down in our own particular culture, religion or ethnicity. Such a venture may help one to give up the claim to find in the past any truth that is valid and intelligible for himself. "Acknowledging the otherness of the other in this way making him the object of objective knowledge, involves the fundamental suspension of his claim to truth."⁷¹ Fundamentalism and communalism which is the result of absolutization of one's own religion and culture with a closed horizon needs to be liberated, if India has to maintain its rich heritage of pluralism and to maintain not only its socio-political integrity but also its religious pluriformity. If one requires to discard the fear of annihilation and death of culture in which one is immersed, one requires to build a consciousness that accepts change and transformation by constant influence and contamination. Even mere tolerance of the otherness of the other may be a narrow way of living out the pluralistic hegemony of India. It is by fusing our horizons with different cultures, religions, traditions, and ethnicity which is the result of our historical consciousness that finally will not only help us to overcome the frenzies of our pluralizing process but also help us build a richer and stronger cultural, political and multi-religious India.

70 (Gadamer 1993, 295), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 300)

71 (Gadamer 1993, 304), (Gadamer 1886, 1: 309)

Anekantavāda of Jainism

A Philosophical Orientation for Pluralism

Vallabadass John Peter

Introduction

The problem of pluralism arises ultimately from the perennial philosophical issue of ‘One and Many.’ The problem ‘One and Many,’ in Indian tradition is as acute as in the other traditions. The classical systems of Indian philosophical traditions vie with one another on their vision of reality. That Reality is one or two or many is the contention of different philosophical schools, like Advaita, Samkhya, Dvaita, Siddhānta, Jaina etc. Each has leveled vehement criticism on others’ views and tried to establish one’s own position with various arguments. Elaboration, defense or rejection of different conceptions of the reality, is unwarranted in our present task of philosophizing. We could take our position for or against one or none of these philosophical systems. Yet, we are confronted with our contemporary problems in a multiplicity and diversity of religious, cultural and philosophical traditions. Our contemporary world faces a new phenomenon of interaction of different religions, cultures, philosophies, and worldviews. No conceptual framework or worldview on anything is said to be privileged and allowed to monopolize the human society. The Problematic is the way of understanding and philosophizing for better living situations of the human beings.

The contemporary situation witnesses globalization on the one hand and the growing awareness of diversity of religions, cultures, peoples, and philosophies on the other hand. Both are observed cautiously, for their tendency of homogenization and fragmentation. Economic, political or cultural homogenization, dreams for a single uniform universal human culture or worldview, under the pretense of Globalization. Undue focus and emphasis on the differences, diversities and individual identities too have the danger of being isolated and fragmented, giving rise to various problems of fanaticism, fundamentalism, terrorism and destructive ideologies. In particular, Indian scenario draws our attention too. The emerging cultural nationalism tries for a monoculture, single language, and single religion in the name of unity. Indianness is narrowed down to single worldview, absolutizing it to be Indian. That there are typically different ways of philosophizing is consciously forgotten. Of course the reality pictures the situation vividly. One single form or method of philosophizing, or way of living is never a possibility in human history. No single system of philosophy is privileged to

assume an absolute position. The challenge of our times is an endeavour to give expression to the manifold voices of philosophy in their respective cultural contexts.¹ Against this background of multiplicity, we place the philosophical problem of ‘One and Many’ as addressed by Indian philosophical traditions. In Classical Indian tradition, Jains have rightly inquired into this field and propounded the famous theory of *Anekantavāda*, non-one-sidedness or manifoldness of reality. In this paper we try to explore *Anekantavāda* to uphold the principles laid down in it that we might orient ourselves for promoting Pluralism.

A. Jaina Vision of Pluralism

As a Pluralistic realism, *Anekantavāda* of Jainism staunchly supports the conception of pluralism.² *Anekantavāda*, according to B.K. Matilal has two versions. First of all, it denotes Jaina metaphysical doctrine that reality is manifold and each entity has a manifold nature, consists of diverse forms and modes of innumerable aspects. Secondly, *Anekantavāda* is considered as a Jaina philosophical method that allows for reconciliation, integration and synthesis of conflicting philosophical views.³ Traditional views of *Anekantavāda* assert the principle of understanding reality in a pluralistic way. In *Aptamimamsa*, No.104, Samantabhadra defines *Anekantavāda* as a position that gives up, by all means, any categorically asserted view – *sarvathaikantatyagat* and it depends on the method of sevenfold prediction. Mallisena describes it as a doctrine that recognizes that each element of reality is characterized by many (mutually opposite) predicates like being and non-being. It is called *Vastu-sabala* theory, that underlines the manifold nature of reality. Manifoldness includes mutually contradictory properties. Jaina philosophy attempted to make this position rationally acceptable, both metaphysically and logically.

B. Jaina Vision of Reality

All six fundamental categories of Jainism too speak of *Anekanta*. The first category, *Jīva* – life, is multiple. *Ajīva* or *pudgala* consists of *aṇus*, *skandhas*, atomic & molecular entities that constitute the physical reality. The space and time too are of multiple compositions.⁴ The metaphysical theory of reality as many-faced is a consequent of logical doctrine – *Syadvāda*, affirming that every judgment is subjected to some condition and

¹ Anthony Savari Raj, *A New Hermeneutic of Reality: Raimon Panikkar's Cosmotheandric Vision* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1998), p.35.

² N. Muthu Mohan, *Postmodernism and Indian Philosophy* (Madurai: Bhavani Publications, 2002), p.34.

³ B.K. Matilal, *The Central Philosophy of Jainism (Anekanta-vada)* (Ahmedabad: L.D. Institute of Indology, 1981), p.25.

⁴ N. Muthu Mohan, *Postmodernism*, p.34.

limitation. Various judgments about the same reality may, therefore be true each in its own sense, subjected to its own condition. Basic of Jaina metaphysics is that every object has innumerable characters (*ananta-dharmakam vastu*). Implications of this view are as follows: every object is what it is because of its positive and negative characters. “If we consider, then, an object in the light of its own positive characters and also in the light of the characters of all other objects which are absent in it, the object would no longer appear to be a simple thing having only a limited number of qualities, as we ordinarily take it to be. The object on the contrary, turns out to be one possessed of unlimited characters.”⁵ Jaina writers remark that one, who knows an object fully, knows everything. Only omniscient person –*kevali*– has complete knowledge of an object. For practical purpose-*vyavahara*, partial knowledge is quite sufficient. This does not mean that finite object is really possessed of limited characters. Nor should we think that our ordinary knowledge about it is complete and perfect.

C. *Nayavāda* and *Anekantavāda*

Nayavāda of Jainism shows the truth value of the unqualified or unmodified statement, i.e., *Naya* is an ordinary or common sense statement possessing a neutral truth-value which may be called the indeterminate truth-value. Indeterminate truth-value is “less true than the true and more true than the false.”⁶ The false statement is called *Ekantavāda* – statement of exclusive predication, while the true statement is called *Syadvāda* or the statement of relative predicate, i.e. a statement under the perspective of its truth-conditions. Statements can be shown to be true even on the basis of two-valued logic. It is perfectly all right according to Aristotelean logic and the modern two-valued logic of propositional calculus involving quantifiers. *Syadvāda* refers to many-valued logic, as S.L. Pandey asserts, “*Syadvāda* in fact, is an instance of *nayavāda* which has all the basic characteristics of many valued logic.”⁷

Nayavāda as a doctrine of standpoints is one of the components of *Anekantavāda*.. The four *nayas* may be summarized as: 1. when we take a coordinate view of things, we are said to be resorting to *naigama naya*. 2. When we are inclined towards generalization, it is

⁵ S. C. Chatterjee & D.M. Datta, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1968), p.87.

⁶ S.L. Pandey, “*Nayavada* and Many Valued Logic,” in *Studies in Jainism*, ed. M.P.Marathe (Poona: IPQ Publications, 1984), p.157.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.162.

sañgraha naya; 3. When we are inclined towards particularization, it is *vyavahara naya*. 4. When a specific point or period of time is of the essence, it is *justra naya*. The Nyaya-Vaisesika, the Vedanta, the Samkhya and the Buddhist systems have each tried to interpret and systematize experience from one of the above four points of view. “Each regards the interpretation from his point of view absolutely true to the exclusion of other points of view.”⁸ Thus it becomes one-sided in its approach to reality. They mistake them for the whole truth.

Philosophical motivation of Jains is not just to emphasize the different facets of reality, but also the contradictory and opposite sides of the same reality, the dual (contradictory) evaluation of the same proposition.⁹ Bivalence theory has two possible values of a given proposition, true and false. *Anekanta* requires the mixing of opposite values. *Saptabhanginaya* – seven-fold prediction, helps epistemologically to uphold *Anekantavāda*. *Saptabhanginaya* not only upholds the affirmation or denial, but also the affirmation and denial jointly for the same proposition. It is a direct challenge to Bivalence theory, that something is either true or false. Jaina argues for the possibility of joint application of two predicates, true and false, either True or False or both True and False, under given certain conditions. So sameness of proposition or propositional identity is open. This does not mean rejection of law of contradiction. Law of contradiction requires that a proposition and its contrary cannot be true together, yet keeping the possibility of them being false open. The law of excluded middle is that between the values true and false, there is no third alternative. It eliminates the possibility. In non-bi-valence logic, a multiple-valued logic, law of contradiction is not flouted.¹⁰ Jains disregard the mutual exclusion of yes and no, but argue in favour of this combinability in answer to a given question.

In affirming contradictions, usually, we are constrained to say both ‘True and False’ simultaneously. “True-False’ ‘Yes-No’ could be artificially constructed as no natural language words convey the concept that directly and unambiguously flouts non-contradiction. So Jains devise new term ‘Inexpressible’ *syad* as a new evaluation or predicate. It is non-composite in character like ‘true’ and ‘false.’ Discussion in modern times on logical and semantical paradoxes, try to apply the third value, alternatively called paradoxical or

⁸ S. Dasgupta, *History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol.I. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975), p.178.

⁹ B.K. Matilal, “*Anekanta*: Both Yes and No?” *JICPR*, Vol.VII. No.2 (Jan-Apr, 1991), p.9.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p.10.

indeterminate, which is distinguished from neither True nor False. Yet like modern logic, non-bi-valence logic or para-consistent logic, Jaina did not construct the Truth matrices of negation, conjunction, and alteration. We can emphasize using the reference to modern logic, that Jaina notion of inexpressible or notion of *anekanta* is not unintelligible or irrational concept.¹¹

D. Reconciliation of Opposites

While commenting on Haribhadra's *Sarva-darśana-samgraha*, Gundaratna Suri says that the Jain doctrine is to show that the mutually opposite characterization of reality by the rival philosophies should be reconciled; for depending upon different view points, reality can be discovered to have both natures, being and nonbeing, general and particulars. Advaita position of Brahma as the ultimate reality, non-dual, permanent, substantial, all-inclusive being is at one end of spectrum where the doctrine of being culminates. On the other end of spectrum is Madhyamika Buddhist doctrine of 'non-being' or 'becoming' doctrine.

Jaina reconciles by concepts of *dravya* and *paryāya*. *Paryāya* is what is called a process of ever changing phases of the reality. *Dravya* is the thing or being, the reality, which is in the process. Both, Being and Becoming are inextricably mixed together. "Being and Becoming mutually imply each other and to exclude one or the other from the domain of reality is to take a partial (*ekānta*) view. The idea is not to identify some element of reality as 'substance' and other as 'process,' but to see same element having both characteristics alternatively and even simultaneously. This simultaneousness is the focus in seven fold prediction...."¹²

E. Anekantavāda Vs Ekāntavāda

Anekantavāda is to be understood against *Ekantavāda* in the philosophy of Upanishads and Vedānta that ultimate reality (Brahman) is One. *Anekānta* is a thesis opposing *Ekantavāda*. *Ekantavāda* argues for ontologically only one of the possible modes of existence. It is undemocratic and totalitarian. Hemachandra, a Jaina philosopher, says, "*Ekantavāda* is a philosophy of *Himsa*."¹³ He states radically that *Manu Smṛiti* and other Brahminical texts are *Himsa Jastras*. "However, the fact remains that *Ekantavāda* by its non-

¹¹ *Ibid.* p.12.

¹² *Ibid.* p.4.

¹³ *Yoga shastra* 2.35

recognition of anything other than Brahman and by declaring it as *Māya* opens up a page in the history of Indian Philosophy that represents and justifies Despotism.”¹⁴ We face an octopus tentacle of Vedānta swallowing up all these rich understanding of reality. Vedāntic vision of reality dominated the Indian scenario all through. One could boldly assert that the projection of Vedāntic, especially Advaitic vision of reality is due to the problem of one and many. Even within the Vedāntic tradition, one witnesses the monistic and dualistic schools fighting for centuries in projecting their view of reality.

F. *Anekantav#da*: Its Implications for Pluralism

1. Metaphysical puzzle, in Indian thought started with the dichotomy of basic concepts such as being and nonbeing, permanence and change, substance and modes, identity and difference. Early Buddhist canons call them, through rough generalization, first pair of opposites as Eternalism (*s#^vatav#da*), and the second pair as annihilationism, nihilism (*ucchedav#da*). Avoidance of the two extremes: *anta*, one-sided view, was the hallmark of Early Buddhism. Buddhism as middle way succeeded in this way rejecting both the extreme views. Jaina *anekanta* is not clinging to either of them exclusively. Difference between Early Buddhism and Jainism is that the former avoids the extremes by rejecting them altogether while the latter proceeds by accepting both with qualifications and also by reconciling them. “Hallmark of Jainism is... the attempted reconciliation between the opposites.”¹⁵ Jains attempted to understand the points of view of the fighting parties (in a philosophical dispute) so that their dispute could be resolved and reconciled. Thus, the essence of the *Anekantav#da* lies in exposing and making explicit the standpoint or presuppositions of different philosophical schools.¹⁶ *Anekantav#da* of Jainism should have emerged from the context of multiple philosophical, religious and ethical theories and practices. The spirit of *Anekanta*, as a synthetic and a comprehensive approach pervades Jainas’ entire field of investigations, be it metaphysical, epistemological or ethical.

2. Buddhism and Jainism both have the metaphysical thesis by answering, “is A B?” either in assertion or in negation. Those that can be answered straightaway with yes or no, as the Buddhist describes, are called *eka8sa–vyakaran3ya*. Yet Buddhism and Jainism followed different method or style of answering. Both are *Vibhajya-v#din*, analyzing the significance

¹⁴ N. Muthu Mohan, *Postmodernism*, p.34.

¹⁵ B.K. Matilal, “*Anekanta*: Both Yes and No?,” p.3.

¹⁶ B.K. Matilal, *The Central Philosophy of Jainism*, p.23

and implications of the questions to reach a satisfactory answer. From the clue of *Vibhajya-v#da*, which is meant to imbibe a sort of openness, dogmatic adherence exclusively to any view point is unwelcome. Jainas developed their doctrine of *Anekantav#da*, which would be called as ‘non-dogmatism,’ ‘non-absolutism’. B.K.Matilal prefers ‘Non-one-sidedness’ – as literal rendering for *Anekantav#da* that retaining the freedom of interpreter as well as its open-endedness.¹⁷

3. Spirit of accommodation is Indic in nature. Jainas developed a philosophy of synthesis and toleration. In Jaina philosophy this catholicity is grounded in its very philosophical doctrine of *Anekantav#da*. Jaina’s contribution is “in the direction of providing an epistemological framework for reconciling the conflicting truth claims of Religions.”¹⁸ In *Syadv#da* and *Nayav#da*, *Anekantav#da* has its corroborating principles. In epistemological principle of *Syadv#da*, certain ontological meaning is impeded in it. *Syadv#da* is not just a principle of indeterminacy, as it is complimented by *nayav#da*, stands for validation and rationalization of particular stand point. *Syadv#da* stands to speak a democratic principle in philosophical perceptions. The doctrines of *Anekantav#da*, *Syadv#da* and *Nayav#da* should be understood as inalienable components of a systematically worked out realistic and pluralistic philosophy.¹⁹

4. Sometimes *Anekantav#da* is called as ‘relative pluralism’ or ‘metaphysical relativism.’ The *Nayav#da* is criticized that it leads to a view, which announces that all predicates are relative to a point of view. No predicate can be absolutely true of a thing or an object in the sense that it can be applied unconditionally at all times under any circumstance. Jainism in this way becomes identified with a sort of facile relativism. Change is that it can be shown to be self inconsistent, for in trying to argue that all truths are relative to some point of view or other, it makes use of an absolute notion of truth. Jainism openly admits an absolute notion of truth, which lies in the total integration of all partial or conditionally arrived at truths. “The emphasis here is on the conditionality and limitedness of the human power and human vision and therefore it applies to all humanly constructible positions. The concern is somewhat ethical.”²⁰ Jainism discourages rejection of seriously held view, in fear of failing to comprehend its significance and underlying presuppositions and assumptions.

¹⁷ B.K. Matilal, “*Anekanta: both Yes and No?*,” p.2.

¹⁸ Arvind Sharma, *A Jaina Perspective on the Philosophy of Religion* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2001), p.117.

¹⁹ N. Muthu Mohan, *Postmodernism* p.35.

²⁰ B.K. Matilal, “*Anekanta: Both Yes and No?*,” p.7.

Thus openness is encouraged at all times. *Anekantav#da* attempts to transcend both relativism and absolutism, without rejecting them.

5. Jainas argued for a non-dogmatic position, although they were termed as ‘dogmatic about non-dogmatism.’ Their main argument was intended to show the multi-faceted nature of reality as well as its ever elusive character such that whatever revealed to any observer at any given point of time and at any given place would be only partially and conditionally right, ready to be falsified by a different revelation to a different observer at a different place and time.²¹ Jainas think that in our theoretical search for understanding reality this point can hardly be overstated. The doctrine of *Anekantav#da* as a non-absolutist vision claims for a thesis that things have infinite aspects that no determination can really exhaust its full comprehension. In the doctrine of *Nayav#da*, there are many partial perspectives from which reality can be determined. None of which is taken by itself, wholly true, but each of which is partially so.

7. Jainas set a limit to our usual understanding of law of non-contradictions. There are many determinants and indexicals of successful application of any predications. The notion of human rationality is not fully exhausted by our comprehensions of and the insistence upon, the law of non-contradictions. Rational understanding of Jaina position is possible in metaphysics as we discussed earlier. So Jaina *Anekantav#da* is a “meta-metaphysical”²² position since it considers all metaphysical positions to be spoiled by the inherent paradoxicality of our intellect.

8. Jaina doctrine was characterized by toleration, understanding and respect for the views of others. This is the unique character of Jaina philosophy and religion. For, very seldom such a sincere attempt have been made to understand the position of the adversary whether the fundamental assumption of ontology (i.e. the thesis that reality is many-sided or things are basically of infinite fold nature) is correct or not, is another matter. But it is certainly the professed catholicity of the Jaina outlook.²³ Jainism, not only as philosophy but also as practical religion emphasized *ahimsa* – non-violence, as a consequence of *anekanta*. *Ahimsa* is tolerance and recognition of various points of views. *Ahimsa* is an attitude of the

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.12.

²² S.Gopalan, *Jainism as Metaphilosophy* (Delhi: Satguru Publications, 1991), p.23.

²³ B.K. Matilal, *The Central Philosophy of Jainism*, p.6

individual towards the other. The doctrine of *Anekantav#da* finds its support and practical ramification in the concept of *ahimsa*.

Conclusion

The world of multiplicity, diversity of cultures, religious and philosophical traditions call for a right understanding and comprehension of the reality. The problem of affirming reality as one or two or many draws our attention in upholding pluralism. In Indian philosophical traditions we find pluralistic understanding in very many systems of Indian Thinking, like Siddh#nta, Dvaita, S#mkhya, etc., the solutions offered for accommodating the variety of worldviews, often culminates in conflicts of views rather than reconciliation. Neither inclusivist nor exclusivist position is adequate in our enterprise. We need to orient ourselves for an approach, as Raimon Panikkar observes, “towards a healthy pluralism which would allow the conviviality and coexistence of cultures and civilizations that no single culture, religion or tradition has the right to claim to represent the universal range of human experience...”²⁴

Jainism with *Anekantav#da* could be the one in our search for such healthy pluralism. Pluralistic realism of Jains asserts the theory of manifoldness of reality and knowledge. “Reality... is a complex not merely in the sense of constituting many-ness (*aneka*) but also because of its manifoldness (*anekanta*).”²⁵ Reality is not only manifold. It can be comprehended from an infinite number of standpoints. Theory of non-one-sided view of reality, *Anekantav#da* of Jainism shows us how one could be tolerant and practically welcoming the other views. Metaphysical absolutism never served the purpose of co-existence of worldviews, cultures, religions, and philosophies. It only led to oppression and suppression of various world cultures and traditions. *Anekantav#da* reconciles the opposites without rejecting them. Every viewpoint is complementary for a holistic vision of reality. Therefore Jaina theory of *Anekanta* is an orientation for affirming, upholding and promoting pluralism.

Finally, ‘Tirthankara’ translated as “Bridge builders,”²⁶ convey a hint of role of Jainism to play in the context of conflicting truth-claims. The Tirthankara – as Noble soul,

²⁴ Anthony Savari Raj, *A New Hermeneutic of Reality*, p.38

²⁵ S. Gopalan, *Outlines of Jainism* (New Delhi: Niley Eastern Ltd, 1975), p.145.

liberated one, knowledgeable person is rightly called so, as knowledge liberates a person coming out from monistic, absolutistic tendencies. As philosophers serious in our endeavor to promote pluralistic views, we are called to be the ‘bridge builders’: *Tirthankaras*.

²⁶ Vasudha Narayanan, “The Jain Tradition,” in, *World Religions: Eastern Traditions*, ed., Willard G. Oxtobey (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.136.

PLURALISM AND RELATIVISM

Joseph Venattumattam

There exists no authoritative formulation of pluralism, although philosophers like Isaiah Berlin took up the task in the 1940s and 1950s. By now pluralism has become a recognizable label. However, it is doubtful whether at this early stage of development a solid formulation of pluralism is either possible or desirable. There are, in fact, many versions of pluralism.

Pluralism is the view that the world contains many kinds of existent which, in their uniqueness, cannot be reduced to just one, nor can it be said to be as many as human minds perceive. Let me illustrate pluralism with the example of values. According to pluralism there are many incommensurable values whose realization is required for living a good life. These values often conflict with each other so that the realization of one excludes the realization of others. There is no authoritative standard to resolve such conflicts because there is also a plurality of standards. There are, nevertheless, reasonable ways of resolving conflicts among incommensurable values.

For me, pluralism is a middle way between realism and relativism. Realism is the philosophical doctrine that a real world exists and that it is not simply the constructs of the human mind. Relativism is the view that every belief is as good as any other. ‘True’ is an equivocal term having as many meanings as there are procedures of justification which a given society uses in one or another area of inquiry.¹ My attempt is to defend pluralism by contrasting it with realism and relativism. In doing it I have chosen the concepts of “truth” and “values” as illustrations.

1. Extremes: Realism and Relativism

1.1 Realism

Realism² in general is an attitude or an assumption that things can be known as they really are. The concept “realism” is fluid and it varies from philosopher to philosopher or from position to position. All realists agree that mind is distinct from the objects of knowledge. The object of knowledge must be ontologically independent of mind, though it might be epistemologically mind-dependent. Realists distinguish between the “act” of experiencing and “what” is experienced.

¹ R. RORTY, *Objectivism, Relativism and Truth*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, 23.

² By Realism I mean Metaphysical Realism which is a kind of Absolutism or Objectivism or Monism. A pluralist can be a realist but not a metaphysical realist. The position I defend can be termed “Pluralistic Realism”.

What is experienced is expressed in propositions. Propositions are meaningful statements describing states of affairs, and they must be either true or false. A state of affairs is an occurrence, an event, or a happening; it is neither true nor false. A true proposition describes a state of affairs that did occur, is occurring or will occur. A proposition is false if it describes a state of affairs that did not occur, is not occurring or will not occur.

Realists hold that “true or false” and “right or wrong” do not vary from culture to culture. What cultures believe has no necessary connection with what is true. The realist maintains that a man’s objective duty is sometimes independent of what either the man or his society believes or feels it is. If we accept certain beliefs as absolutes, then there can be the problem of conflicting absolutes. There is no way to solve it without declaring one of the absolutes as the true or real absolute.

1.2 Relativism

Relativism does not lack adherents today. Many anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, political scientists, historians and legal thinkers find it attractive. Many people accept relativism owing to despair arising from an encounter with some form of scepticism. What they look for are substitute certainties. Relativists hold that “a man has a duty to do or to refrain from doing something if and only if the society of which he is a member believes or feels that he does.”³

According to relativism the idea of absolute or universal truth is a myth. The customs of different societies are all that exist. These customs cannot be said to be right or wrong because there is no independent standard to judge them. Every standard is culture-bound. For example, there are no universal truths that hold for all people at all times; there are only the various cultural codes. Moreover, one’s own code has no special status; it is merely one among many.⁴

According to relativism the moral code of a society determines what is right within that society. If it says that a certain action is right, then that action is right, at least within that society. Different cultures have different moral codes. Hence there is no objective truth in morality. True or false and Right or wrong are only matters of opinion; and opinions vary from culture to culture. According to relativists it is mere arrogance to try to judge the conduct of other peoples. We should adopt an attitude of tolerance toward the practices of other cultures.

³ R. M. LEMOS, “Objectivism, Relativism and Subjectivism in Ethics”, *International Philosophical Quarterly* 5 (1965), 56.

⁴ J. RACHELS, *Elements of Moral Philosophy*, New York: University of Alabama, 1998, 17.

1.2.1 Demerits of Relativism

If we rationally analyse relativism we find that its argument is wrong. Its conclusion does not follow from the premise. The premise concerns what people believe; the conclusion, however, concerns what really is the case.⁵ Some communities believe the earth is flat. Some other communities believe that the earth is spherical. Does it follow from their disagreement that there is no objective truth in geography? Such a conclusion is unwarranted because we realize that, in their beliefs about the world, the members of some societies might be wrong. There is no reason to think that if the world is spherical everyone must know it.

A realist is branded as a dogmatic. But a relativist can well be a member of a dogmatic, intolerant, ethnocentric society, which teaches its members that its own conception of what is right or wrong is binding upon all men everywhere.⁶ People of different cultures tend to believe not only that there is but *one true* morality but also that the one true morality is their own.

Relativism has many defects. First, it obliges slavish conformity to the beliefs and practices of one's own society. Most of us think that our society's code is imperfect and needs revision. But relativism would stop us from criticizing our own. This can lead to conservatism and stifling of progress. We believe that at least some changes in our society have been for the better (e.g. uplift of women). Progress means replacing a way of doing things with a better way. But how can we judge the new way as better? Relativism would say that it is wrong to judge some practice by the standards of a different time. To say that we have made progress implies a judgement that present-day society is better, and that is just the sort of transcultural judgement that is impermissible. Hence no social reform is possible.⁷

Secondly, relativism leads to heteronomy. The relativist says that a man's duty is what his society believes it is. But a society cannot believe anything apart from what the various individual human beings do. Hence a man's duty is what the other members of his society (some designated group) believe it is. It means others determine my duty; an elite group arbitrarily determines the duty of other members.⁸

Thirdly, relativism is guilty of over-simplification. Society is not so simple; a person may be a member of a number of societies or sub-societies. And he may encounter conflicting duties. He cannot fulfil all of them, and relativist thesis that a man's duty is what his society determines, affords no resolution of the conflict. It ends in self-contradiction.⁹

⁵ J. RACHELS, *Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 19.

⁶ R. M. LEMOS, "Objectivism, Relativism and Subjectivism in Ethics", 60.

⁷ J. RACHELS, *Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 22.

⁸ R. M. LEMOS, "Objectivism, Relativism and Subjectivism in Ethics", 61.

Fourthly, relativism would abolish all absolutes. As a result we are forced to accept that Hitler's value system is as good as Mahatma Gandhi's, for how can we condemn any human being or culture for doing something if there are no absolutes by which we can measure their morality? We could no longer say that the customs of other societies are morally inferior to our own. Of course, we should not condemn others. But should we also not criticize others? If we accept relativism we would have to admit that social practices like slavery or anti-Semitism are immune from criticism.

1.2.2 Merits of Relativism

Relativism has some sound insights. First, it shows that different societies at different places and times have different moral beliefs, practices and laws, and that most people accept uncritically the beliefs, customs and laws of their own society. It also tells us that we have the duty to observe the customs of our society and to obey the laws of the state in which we live. It rightly insists that a member of some primitive society cannot be held morally responsible for failing to observe some moral principle recognized by advanced societies.¹⁰

Secondly, relativism shows that one's duty is relative to his position in society and his own abilities. The duties of a soldier differ from that of a farmer. A man who can swim has the duty to save a drowning man; but a man who does not know swimming has the duty to call for help.

Thirdly, relativism reminds us that the applicability of an abstract duty such as truthfulness is relative to the nature of the situation and to the purpose of acting. Means and ends are relative to one another. To understand the objective duty, careful and patient inquiry and some degree of practical wisdom are necessary.

Fourthly, relativism warns us about the danger of assuming that all our preferences are based on some absolute standard. There are many things which are mere social conventions. Should women cover their breasts or not? Objectively speaking, it is neither right nor wrong – there is no objective reason why either custom is better. Many of our practices are only cultural products. However, it goes wrong by concluding that, because some practices are relative, all must be so.

Fifthly, relativism helps us to have an open mind. In the course of growing up we have acquired some strong dogmatic feelings. These feelings are occasionally challenged. Relativism, by stressing that our views can reflect the prejudices of our society, provides an antidote for such dogmatism. Herodotus writes:

⁹ R. M. LEMOS, "Objectivism, Relativism and Subjectivism in Ethics", 62.

¹⁰ R. M. LEMOS, "Objectivism, Relativism and Subjectivism in Ethics", 64.

For if anyone, no matter who, were given the opportunity of choosing from amongst all the nations of the world the set of beliefs which he thought best, he would inevitably, after careful consideration of their relative merits, choose that of his own country. Everyone without exception believes his own native customs and the religion he was brought up in, to be the best.”¹¹

We should be more open to discovering the truth. We can realize that our feelings are not necessarily perceptions of the truth – they may be the result of cultural conditioning.¹²

2. Pluralism: A Middle-Way

For the metaphysical realists, truth must be *one* because it is an ontological concept. The relativists maintain that truth is an epistemological concept and hence must be *many*. Hilary Putnam claims that the “epistemological” and the “ontological” are intimately related. Over and against the existing positions that judgments are either “objective” or “subjective,” Putnam proposes that they can be “objective-subjective” or relatively objective.

2.1 Truth

Putnam is an advocate of pluralistic realism¹³ which is a middle way between metaphysical realism and relativism. He upholds a plurality of ontologically distinct and irreducible right descriptions of the same facts. He makes use of two terms – interpenetration and interdependence – in his characterizations of pluralistic realism. His doctrine of conceptual relativity affirms the interpenetration of fact and convention. Putnam attacks the dichotomy of subject and object by defending their interdependence.

By “conceptual relativity” Putnam means that “while there is an aspect of conventionality and an aspect of fact in everything we say that it is true, we fall into hopeless philosophical error if we commit a ‘fallacy of division’ and conclude that there must be a part of the truth that is the ‘conventional’ and a part that is the ‘factual’.”¹⁴ He adds to this idea a corollary “that two statements which are incompatible at face value can sometimes both be true.”¹⁵

Let us examine Putnam’s idea of the interpenetration of fact and convention. Against Hans Reichenbach’s call to distinguish fact from convention in theorizing about the world, Quine insists that the very distinction between fact and convention collapses when construed as a sharp dichotomy. He writes in “Carnap and Logical Truth”¹⁶ quite skillfully:

¹¹ J. RACHELS, *Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 28. Here Rachels quotes Herodotus who tells the story of the Greeks and Callatians.

¹² J. RACHELS, *Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 26-29.

¹³ J. CASE, “The Heart of Putnam’s Pluralistic Realism”, *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 55 (2001), 417-429.

¹⁴ H. PUTNAM, *Realism with a Human Face*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990, x.

¹⁵ H. PUTNAM, *Realism with a Human Face*, x.

¹⁶ W.V.O. QUINE, “Carnap and Logical Truth” in H. Putnam, *Philosophy of Mathematics: Selected Readings*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964.

The lore of our fathers is a fabric of sentences. In our hands it develops and changes, through more or less arbitrary and deliberate revisions and additions of our own, more or less directly occasioned by the continuing stimulation of our sense organs. It is a pale gray lore, black with fact and white with convention. But I have found no substantial reasons to conclude that there are any quite black threads in it, or any white ones.¹⁷

Putnam agrees with Quine that there is a degree of factuality and conventionality in what we say. Nevertheless, it is wrong to say, “These and these elements of the world are the raw facts, the rest is the result of convention.”¹⁸ Though our concepts are culturally relative, it is wrong to claim that the truth or falsity of what we say using those concepts is culturally relative.

It is a fact that the train I am traveling in is running at 150 kilometers an hour. The speed of the train is measured in relation to the ground. When we do this we are following a convention. We could choose another convention and measure the speed of a train relative to a moving airplane. As Putnam says, “*Everything* we say is conventional in the sense that we might have said something else, perhaps something verbally incompatible; and *everything* we say is factual in the sense that we could not have said just anything else.”¹⁹ Putnam claims that there can be conventionality and factuality without distinct conventional and factual components. It means one can be a realist and a conceptual relativist at the same time. Conceptual relativity rejects absoluteness and not objectivity. Something can be relatively objective and be true.

Putnam claims that two incompatible statements can both be true. For him, talk of truth within the different schemes is perfectly intelligible since the standards are “*appropriate to the scheme itself*.”²⁰ Hence it is possible that two statements, which are incompatible at face value, can both be true. Let us see how a certain fact is described as chair in the commonsense version and as a collection of atoms in the scientific version. We can choose either of these versions in its proper context. Nonetheless, these accounts are incompatible because we cannot make both conceptual choices at the same time.²¹

2.2 Values

Putnam believes in a plurality of moral images;²² we need a number of complementary moral images of the world. But he disagrees that these moral images are merely conventional.

¹⁷ W.V.O. QUINE, “Carnap and Logical Truth”, 376.

¹⁸ H. PUTNAM, *Representation and Reality*, Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1988, 113.

¹⁹ H. PUTNAM, “Convention: A Theme in Philosophy”, in *Realism and Reason: Philosophical Papers* vol. 3, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, 179. The argument shows that man is not merely a spectator but a creator. He uses his imagination and opts for a discourse. The same situation could be described in different ways by the same speaker or by different speakers.

²⁰ H. PUTNAM, “Truth and Convention” in *Realism with a Human Face*, 96.

²¹ H. PUTNAM, “Truth and Convention” in *Realism with a Human Face*, 102-103.

²² H. PUTNAM, *Many Faces of Realism*, La Salle: Open Court, 1987, 61-62. The following are some of the moral images. Jerusalem-based image based on fraternity which becomes secularised as liberty, equality and fraternity of French revolution, the moral image of Roman ‘civic republicanism’ which bases human dignity and identity

The central thesis of pluralism is that there are many reasonable conceptions of a good life and many reasonable values upon whose realization good lives depend.²³ There is context relativity in ethics. Nevertheless, belief in pluralism does not mean that all ideals of human flourishing are equally good. Putnam rejects both “ethical realism”²⁴ and “ethical relativism.”²⁵

Realists believe that some values are overriding, and not merely conditional. They insist that other values can be compared and contrasted with them. For example, if life were an overriding value, then in conflicts with freedom or justice, life would always take precedence. They believe that there exists a highest value such as happiness to which all other values are subordinated and with reference to which all other values could be authoritatively ranked.

Relativists hold that there are only conditional values and not overriding values. These conditional values are conventional in character. They are the products of the customs, practices, and beliefs of a particular tradition. Relativists may concede that reason has a role to play in settling conflicts among values, but according to them, reason is confined to play that role within particular traditions. There is no reasonable way of settling conflicts between values belonging to different traditions, because what counts as reasonable is itself a product of particular traditions.

There is, in fact, a plurality of values which are in many cases conflicting. Often the realization of one excludes the realization of another. Pluralists believe that living a good life must be essentially concerned with coping with these conflicts. However, doing so is formidably difficult because the conflicts are often caused by the incompatibility and incommensurability of the values whose realization is regarded as essential.

Pluralists disagree with realists that there are overriding values and agree with the relativists that the values are conditional. Pluralists disagree with relativists that values are conventional and agree with the realists that there is a context-independent ground to which

as a member of a *polis*, the moral image of human beings as created in God’s likeness, and the Kantian moral image of self-legislating agents.

²³ H. PUTNAM, *Reason, Truth and History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, 148.

²⁴ R.C. COBURN, “Morality, Truth and Relativism”, *Ethics* 92 (1982), 664-666. According to ethical realism (also known as ethical objectivism or ethical absolutism), just as we judge that there is a chair in front of us and feel certain about such judgment and agree on them because objects exist independently of us, so there is an independent realm of moral facts. These facts somehow affect us in such a way as to generate the moral judgments we make and the certainty we feel in connection with them; and our agreement on moral matters reflects essentially our similarity as regards this capacity to be affected by the objective, mind-independent phenomena in question.

²⁵ R.C. COBURN, “Morality, Truth and Relativism”, 667-668. Ethical relativism (or ethical subjectivism) denies that moral truths have the properties of objectivity and universality claimed by both rationalists and realists. They deny that moral judgments must be true for all persons and that they reflect moral facts independent of the practices and states of mind of human beings. Relativists consider the truth of a moral judgment as relative to the beliefs, customs, or rules of a social group or individual.

we can reasonably appeal in settling conflicts between incompatible and incommensurable values. Pluralists have always to argue on two fronts: against relativists, to whom they must show the existence of a context-independent ground for resolving conflicts among conditional values, and against realists, to whom they must show that only conditional and not overriding values can be based on this ground.²⁶

I want to show how both realist and relativist arguments fail and pluralist arguments succeed about the value of life. You may all agree that life is a primary value. Albert Schweitzer tells that reverence for life contains within itself the commandment to love, and the call to compassion for all life.²⁷ Does this mean that without reverence, love and compassion for viruses and cockroaches we cannot be ethical? Schweitzer might restrict his claim to human lives. Then the question is, should we oppose just wars and motorcycle racing?

There are strong reasons for regarding life as a primary value. But these reasons do not commit us to accepting the claim that life is an overriding value. In some circumstances it is reasonable to give or to take life. The problem is to specify the circumstances; we should know when its violation might be reasonable. We know that many lives would be saved if we lowered the speed limit, prohibited mining, outlawed Himalayan expeditions, and forced people to lose weight. If these were done people would object because although they value life, they also value other things. Freedom, justice, prosperity, adventure, privacy etc. come into conflict with the value of life. Any primary value may conflict with some other primary value, and it is not possible to decide *a priori* how such conflicts are to be resolved. Sometimes the claims of life reasonably override the claims of freedom or justice. Since pluralists recognize this possibility while realists cannot do so, we have reason to prefer pluralism to realism.

The claims of conflicting values must be balanced against each other. Pluralism allows that in some contexts life may be reasonably taken or given up. And this seems suspiciously close to relativism. Different traditions have different conventions about the appropriate ways of treating the old, infants, criminals, enemies, traitors, and so on. Each tradition may recognize life as a primary value, and yet legitimise widely different reasons for taking it. In the context of a tradition infanticide, capital punishment, torture or mutilation may be regarded as reasonable. To move away from realist insistence on the overriding value of life

²⁶ J. KEKES, "Pluralism and the Value of Life", *Social Philosophy and Policy* 11 (1994), 49.

²⁷ A. SCHWEITZER, *The Teaching of Reverence for Life* (translated by C. Winston), New York: Holt, Rineheart, and Winston, 1965, 26.

may seem moving toward the relativistic view that any attitude toward life is reasonable in a given context, provided that it is sanctioned by the prevailing tradition.

The problem for pluralists is to arrest the movement that begins with the rejection of realism and ends with the acceptance of relativism. The problem for pluralists is to show that if we give up the view that life is an overriding value, we still need not embrace the view that there is no reasonable prohibition against taking life that all traditions should recognize. Let us consider a concrete case.

The Dinka tribe in Sudan has had a tradition of burying alive their most important and respected religious and political leaders. While performing religious rites Dinka people make a deep pit in the ground and place the dying spear-master in it. Then the community, in great joy, throw cattle dung on the spear-master until the pit is covered except for a narrow opening. The spear-master slowly suffocates and dies. The Dinka believed that during the ceremony the vitality of the spear-master is transferred to the people. Through the narrow opening the life or breath of the spear-master passes on to his people so that they can continue with their lives.²⁸

It is precisely because they value life as highly as we do that they celebrate the spear-masters' self sacrifice. They and we agree about life being a primary value. What we disagree about is whether what they regard as a reasonable case for taking the lives of the spear-masters is indeed reasonable. If the Dinka were right in believing that the killing of the spear-master is the best way to sustain the life of the tribe, then we would have to agree with them about live burial being reasonable.

Dinka agree with us about the value of life. If they did not they would not kill the spear-masters; it is by killing them that they aim to protect life. Disagreement presupposes agreement. We should note that such plausibility as relativism has derived from its concentration on the more superficial disagreement, while ignoring the deeper agreement between us about the value of life.

We disagree with the Dinka because their belief is simply false. They believed they had good reasons for acting as they did, but were mistaken. Life does not pass from the mouth of a dying person to members of his tribe. Of course, the belief has had a symbolic meaning and the tribe derived psychological sustenance from their tradition. But there were other means of getting this. We know this because the Dinka tradition has remained strong even after Sudanese authorities outlawed the live burial. Hence the killing of the spear-master couldn't be justified. According to Putnam, individuals engage in rational criticism, not in solitude but

²⁸ J. KEKES, "Pluralism and the Value of Life", 53-54.

in cooperation with other rational critics. Referring to Habermas and Apel, Putnam says that a warranted or justified statement should withstand tests and criticism of the community. Hence private knowledge and incorrigible knowledge do not exist. A true statement presupposes a community of critics.²⁹ We must conclude that the Sudanese authorities acted reasonably in outlawing the live burial.

Reflection on the custom of live burial helps us to conclude that relativism is weak. The strength of relativism is in its insistence on the richness and variety of human possibilities and its reluctance to condemn moral possibilities which are alien. These are useful correctives of moral dogmatism. But relativists go too far. There are human differences, but they are *human* differences. Traditions allow different possibilities, but there is a limit to these differences because human beings are united at a deep level of their being. On a less deep level significant differences emerge about how different traditions interpret their beliefs and activities.

What relativists miss is that moral disagreements are possible only if there are moral agreements in the background. It is this layer of agreement derived from our common humanity that transcends particular traditions and constitutes the context-independent ground. Pluralism allows it, relativism does not, indeed it cannot and that is a reason for preferring pluralism to relativism.³⁰

Reason shows that there are other values which are more or less universal. The prohibition of murder and truth telling are necessary features of all societies. There may, of course, be exceptions to the rule. Such rules are common to all societies because they are necessary for any society to exist. Cultures may differ in what they regard as legitimate exceptions to the rules, but this disagreement exists against a background of agreement on the larger issues. Therefore it is a mistake to overestimate the amount of difference between cultures. Not every moral rule can vary from society to society.

3. Conclusion

Human beings can have a plurality of true versions of reality. Our insistence on agent point of view signifies neither the denial of realism nor the acceptance of relativism. The denial of the monistic position enables us to accept a plurality of true or right versions of reality. But we should not go to the other extreme and claim that all versions are true or right, or equally good. There exist right and wrong, true and false, and better and worse versions. The inability to realize a science of metaphysics or epistemology does not mean anything goes. The truth or falsity, rightness or wrongness of our versions depends on the reality,

²⁹ H. PUTNAM, *Many Faces of Realism*, 53-54.

³⁰ J. KEKES, "Pluralism and the Value of Life", 59-60.

though always within some conceptual scheme. In short, there is one world, and a plurality of perspectives; a perspective is true not absolutely but relative to a conceptual scheme.

On the level of ideas there is always a tendency to polarize. This is especially evident in the moral, religious and political realms. The growing threat of fundamentalism, fanaticism and terrorism is a symptom of such a polarization. The assumption that truth is monolithic obliges us to accept just one position as true and reject all others as false. The conviction about the possession of truth fills us with a feeling of superiority and an urge to eliminate falsity. The relativist view that truth is relative to cultures is equally extremist. The slogan “man is the measure” leads to individualism or cultural imperialism. The individualist determines truth by her/his own personal norms. For a cultural imperialist, the only understandable notion of truth is defined by the norms of one’s culture.³¹

What we need is neither uniformity nor multiplicity, but a unity that expresses itself in diversity. By a deep reflection on the life-world, we become aware of the underlying but hidden unity of the world, despite its evident and real diversity. Our world is a gigantic and complex repertoire of diversities. These natural diversities lead to diversities in understanding and describing the world as reflected in customs, history, politics, language, morality, religion etc. What we need is an empathetic understanding of the underlying unity in human forms of life and the reasonable diversity in their expression in particular contexts.³² Philosophers like Putnam and Kekes invite us to accept pluralism and reject monism. It is an invitation to accept the fact that truth can be divergent. The acceptance of the ideal of “unity in diversity” would cure the growing menace of fundamentalism, fanaticism and terrorism.

³¹ J. VENATTUMATTAM, *Rationality and Life*, Ujjain: Ruhalya Publications, 2003, 136.

³² Pluralism has great significance for evoking mutual understanding of differences of cultures, religions and cults. In this connection, let me mention the issues of ecumenism which is concerned with greater understanding among different denominations in Christian religion, and interreligious dialogue which is concerned with greater understanding among different religions in the world.

CULTURAL PLURALISM

A Celebration of Difference

Shailendra

Introduction

Man is in constant journey. Immigration, exile, diasporas,¹ political refugees, rapid population growth, uneven economic growth, brain-drain, improved means of transportation, globalisation, political upheaval and natural disasters have given birth to a different culture called Multiculture² or what American philosopher Horace Kallen called Cultural Pluralism³. Now the situation is such that rather than holding on to Motherland one is forced to look for the land of opportunities for survival. While leaving Motherland he has to give up Mother tongue in favour of language of the Queen Mother [English] or any other. One has to perform a symbiotic-cut for the survival. We find ourselves in the world of religious, cultural, political pluralism.⁴ Pluralism encompasses our lives. Pluralism also gives birth to difference. People try to be different from the other group. Identity becomes a matter of pride and conflict too. Hence, such a transformation of the society demands that the cultural differences are not only tolerated but also celebrated for the harmony and peace of the community. Before we go into details let us examine the conceptual change of the word culture.

1. Understanding Culture

¹ Etymologically the word derives from the Greek *dia*—through and *speirein* — to scatter. The term ‘diasporas’ has long been associated by historians and social scientists with the dispersal of the Jews from Palestine, their homeland, following their defeat by the Romans in A.D. 70. cf. J. Hutchinson & A. Smith ed., *Ethnicity* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996]: 316.

² The two terms ‘multiculture’ and ‘multiculturalism’ though similar in appearance carry very different associations. ‘Multicultural’ points to the visible and universally accessible products of cultural diversity—food, clothes, music, theatre and sometimes specialist occupations—and on the whole it has very positive resonance: we are all happy to live in multicultural societies which add to the very variety and colour of lifestyle available to us, increasing the breadth of our choices as consumers. ‘Multiculturalism’, on the other hand, when it is not simply the noun form ‘multicultural’ directs our attention away from these purely visible aspects of the diversity, to the deeper philosophical and political implications of the coexistence of different orientations to engagement with the world, and the way in which those differences jostle for recognition with national and global boundaries, sometimes in relative harmony with each other, sometimes in real conflict. C. W. Watson, *Multiculturalism*, [New Delhi: Viva Books, 2002]: 107. The word is used first time from 1965 onwards. Comes from multi-cultural. Often used in Canadian context.

³ Jean Hampton, *Political Philosophy: An Introduction* [Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1978]: 217.

⁴ In 1818, as a term in church administration, from plural+ -ism. Attested from 1882 as a term in philosophy for a theory which recognises more than one ultimate principle. In political science attested from 1919 [in Harold J. Laski] in sense “theory which opposes monolithic state power.” General sense of ‘toleration of diversity with a society or state’ is from 1933. Cf. [www. Etymonline.com](http://www.etymonline.com)

The term ‘culture’⁵ has undergone a change in its general understanding that anthropology had for centuries. It has a long intricate history and now it is used with diverse and sometimes confusing meanings. In the beginning it was used in the sense of cultivation of crop and breeding of animals. This idea was metaphorically extended to the cultivation of human mind. “Culture has its roots in the practice of careful attention to the gods who were cultivated...to ward off their anger and invite their blessings. The cult of the gods of growth and fecundity, Persephone, Demeter, and the rest, involved invocatons and cermonies connected with the land; singing and sacrificing—but also ploughing and planting: whence agriculture, literally ‘the culture of fields.’ The transition from cultivation in this sense...to metaphorical cultivation of fields of idea, of the arts, of power, etc., is enough to understand.”⁶ In anthropological sense culture is a body of beliefs, habits or behaviours, encountered in the daily life of a localised group. And these beliefs and behaviours bring the members of the same community together and give community its unique identity which distinguishes it from the other communities.

However, this use of ‘culture’ as the active cultivation of the mind continued. Culture is often associated with the past glory of the community. Its beliefs, traditions, literature, myths, and symbols are considered as a treasure-trove for the future of the community. It is community’s reservoir from which one can draw the inspiration for better life. As Said writes:

You read Dante or Shakespeare in order to keep up with the best that was thought and known, and also to see yourself, your people, society, and tradition in their best lights. In time, culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation or the state⁷; this differentiates ‘us’ from ‘them’, almost always with some degree of xenophobia. Culture in this sense is a source of identity...⁸

It is through culture that one community is differentiated from the other and even personality of the individual is determined by it. One is socially known through one’s culture. Culture becomes an identification badge. However, “this identity is subject to change, for a culture is a living organism. Through their interactions and their reactions to external influences, the members of a community transform their behaviours and ultimately also the underlying beliefs and preferences.”⁹ Life, which is a network of relationships is influenced by the network of information and boundaries transcending telecommunications. Hence, we find that cultural identity is in a constant

⁵ In 1440 it was used for “tilling of land” from Latin *cutura*, stem of *colere* “tend, guard, cultivate, till”. The figurative sense of “cultivation through education” first attested in 1510. Meaning “the intellectual side of civilization” is from 1805; that of “collective customs and achievements of a people” is from 1867. Cf. www.etymonline.com

⁶ D. T. Goldberg, *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader*: 372.

⁷ The State is a legal concept which describes a social group within a defined territory with political institutions and an effective government. It also exercises sovereign power within its borders and is recognised as sovereign by other states in the international system. Ethnic group can transform itself into a *nation* when political and statist ideas develop within it. Cf. Urmila Phadnis & Rajat Ganguly, *Ethnicity and Nation-building in South Asia* [New Delhi: Sage Pub., 2001]:20.

⁸ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, [London: Vintage, 1994]: xiii.

flux and is shaped by social and economic interactions. Culture is a process of adaptation according to the changing circumstances of time. It has been plastic natured to be able to bend and mould according to the needs of the community. It is a way of “understanding the world and responding to it.”¹⁰ In such circumstances preservation of culture became a matter of pride and prestige. One’s status in the society was judged according to one’s cultural past and height maintained in the present. Amartya Sen explains this point by saying that it is not mere economic development that matters but culture. He says, “To have a high GNP per head but little music, arts, literature, etc., would not amount to a major developmental success. In one form or another, culture engulfs our lives, our desires, our frustrations, our ambitions, and the freedoms that we seek.”¹¹ We see a gradual change in the concept of culture. It is not mere past traditions and beliefs of the community but an identifying and distinguishing mark of the community.

a. From Culture to Multiculture

As we have said above that certain factors have given birth to a different type of culture called multiculture. Here the word ‘culture’ is used in a totally dissimilar sense. The word ‘multiculture’ “is to create not just a sense of differences but also to recognize those differences as springing from a universally shared attachment of importance to culture and to an implicit acknowledgement of the equality of all cultures.”¹² Here the word culture is not used in the anthropological sense. It is a term which “has a generous feel to it, it is welcoming, inclusive, embracing; like ‘international’ or ‘pluralist’ or ‘ecumenical’ it suggests a largeness of conception, a transcendence of sectional interest, an openness to the variety of human pursuits and achievements.”¹³ The best definition probably comes from Bhabha and Parekh. They define it like this:

Multiculturalism doesn’t simply mean numerical plurality of different cultures, but rather a community which is creating, guaranteeing, encouraging spaces within which different communities are able to grow at their own pace. At the same time it means creating a public space in which these communities are able to interact, enrich the existing culture and create a new consensual culture in which they recognize reflections of their own identity.¹⁵

The difference between anthropological use of the term ‘culture’ and multicultural use of the term is well shown by Terence Turner. According to him, anthropological concepts of culture are not oriented towards programs of socio-political change and cultural transformation. He writes:

⁹Timur Kurian, “Cultural Obstacles to Economic Development Often Overstated Usually Transitory,” in V. Rao and M. Walton ed., *Culture and Public Action* [New Delhi: Paul’s Press, 2004]: 117.

¹⁰ Watson: 109.

¹¹ Amartya Sen, “How Does Culture Matter,” in *Culture and Public Action*: 39.

¹² Watson: 2.

¹³ Caws: 381.

Any useful intervention by anthropologists in multiculturalist discourse, however, must begin with the realisation that multiculturalist use the term culture in different ways and for different purposes than anthropologists. Multiculturalism, unlike anthropology, is primarily a movement for change. To the extent that it has developed a theoretical analysis, it is primarily a conceptual framework for challenging the cultural hegemony of the dominant ethnic group...by calling for equal recognition of the cultural expressions of nonhegemonic groups with the educational system. Culture for multiculturalists, then, refers primarily to collective social identities engaged in struggle for social equality. For multiculturalism, culture is thus not an end in itself...but a means to an end and not all aspects of culture as conceived by anthropologists are relevant to the achievement of that end.¹⁴

This new element of social and political transformation that is found in cultural pluralism enriches those who embrace it. The concept of cultural pluralism is inclusive and “To confine the development of one’s identity within the variables of any single culture seems...to be a wanton neglect of the vast riches that are available in the world...”¹⁵ One should approach every new culture with an open mind. Every culture has something significant and self-transformative to say to one who listens to it. This is well echoed by Charles Taylor:

Cultures that have provided the horizon of meaning for large numbers of human beings, of diverse characters and temperaments, over a long period of time—that have, in other words, articulated their sense of the good, the holy, the admirable—are almost certain to have something that deserves our admiration and respect, even if it is accompanied by much that we have to abhor and reject. Perhaps one could put it another way: it would take a supreme arrogance to discount this possibility *a priori*.¹⁶

There is something novel, mysterious, fascinating and even something irrational and irritating in every culture, but that does not mean that one should denounce the particular culture carelessly. We have many examples of men/women dedicating their lives for preserving certain riches or cultural heritage of dying culture. Preservation of such alien culture has become sole aim of their life. This goes to show that one needs to work to remove strangeness between oneself and the alien culture by ‘dwelling in¹⁷’ in Heideggerian sense. One should speak of any culture rather *a posteriori*. This is what Caws says, “No form of cultural novelty can be ruled out *a priori*; if I remain open to experience I shall certainly continue to be surprised by what I encounter and find I can appreciate. And because such new experiences, if I enter into them, mediate my relations to myself. They can add new facets to my identity.”¹⁸

¹⁴Terence Turner, “Anthropology and Multiculturalism: What is Anthropology that Multiculturalist should be Mindful of it?,” in *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader*: 408.

¹⁵ Caws: 381.

¹⁶ Charles Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” in *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader*: 101.

¹⁷ Cf. Martin Heidegger, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” in *Basic Writings*, trans. David F. Krell, [New York: Harper & Row, 1977].

¹⁸ Caws: 382.

From the political and economic perspectives too the meaning of the term 'culture' has undergone a change due to the globalisation, consumerism and information revolution. Many countries of the world are like department-stores, where every culture is available. Now the culture is made use of for political gains and even cultural products are sold as consumer goods at a larger level in the world market. A sense of belonging to the same culture is made use of for winning elections and manipulating certain matters of international concern.

In the process the term 'culture' gathers new meanings. "Among the most significant of these is the idea that culture, as distinct from nationality, is a source or locus of collective rights to self-determination. Culture, as such, becomes a source of values that can be converted into political assets, internally as bases of group solidarity and mobilization and externally as claims on the support of other social groups, governments, and public opinion all over the globe."¹⁹ In the name of unity and security of the country demands are made for hegemonic national culture. Culture has become a tool to secure political rights and socio-economic interests for the group. Politically culture is becoming an important aspect of community. This is what we would call a politics of culture. "Culture in this sense is a source of identity, and a rather combative one at that, as we see in recent 'returns' to culture and tradition."²⁰ Politics of these 'returns' is very clearly seen in our country. Our country's Hindutva forces are making hue and cry about returning to our ancient culture. Culture has become battleground to fight political issues. To protect certain cultural values and traditional moral norms which are in danger of being influenced by globalisation, governments are taking recourse to religion and appeals to masses that globalisation is against religion and one's culture. It is clearly seen in Islamic world and in our own country. We have RSS and Shiv Sena acting as cultural cops trying to form a cultural policy. This leads to our discussion on the role of globalisation in multiculturalism.

2. Globalisation and Multiculturalism

In many countries of the world there is a political mobilization against globalisation. It is perceived as culture-devouring Western monster. It brings about changes in one's life style like dressing, food habits, art and music, and moral outlook. It is fast food and fast life that dominates the life the youth. People in many countries are up in arms against this phenomenon and preservation of local culture has become a prime concern. There are certain features of globalisation like revolution in communications, and transportations, market oriented economy, homogenisation of consumer products. These factors lead to homogenisation of culture, or to the so-called melting pot which creates the crisis of identity. Here one feels insecure and seeks for cultural identity and distinctiveness. Rather than contributing to cultural integration, conflicts and contradictions are sharpened due to the exposure to alien culture.²¹ In such a situation cultural identity becomes significant because in the

¹⁹ Turner: 420.

²⁰ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*: xiii-xiv.

²¹ Cf. Yogendra Singh, "Is Globalisation a threat to Regional and Local Identities?," in I. Ahamd, P. Ghosh & H. Reifeld ed., *Pluralism & Equality: Values in Indian Society and Politics* [New Delhi: Sage Pub. 2000]: 242-3.

pursuit of global village, the village is forgotten. The agriculture is ruined by the food products of Western culture. Here not the needs of the village that are taken care of, but of town and cities where the affluent live. Vandana Shiva points out seven superstitions of globalisation. One of them is:

Globalisation leads to peace because borders are removed and everyone becomes a member of the global village. [Then she retorts]: Globalisation is increasing violence and disintegration in society by increasing economic insecurity and by ethnicising and ghettoising all forms of dissent, protest, and articulation of alternatives. First globalisation empties cultures of their economic and material base by transferring control over production and markets to transnational corporations. Materially emptied cultures are then pitted against one another, because their common economic base has disappeared. Cultural diversity is then pushed into conflict and ethnocide as in the case of Rwanda, Somalia, Sri Lanka, ex-Yugoslavia.²²

However, this phenomenon should not be looked at with contempt. It has its own benefits for the culture. Preservation of culture is duty of every individual but “‘preserving culture’ cannot mean keeping it the same; the introduction of technology, for example, can bring about huge transformations in a culture...yet we do not normally think that its introduction has been antithetical to preservation of most cultures...”²³

Though globalization is considered to threaten cultural integrity, meaning and significance of the certain cultural artefacts yet it helps spread of the culture and commercialisation of culture. The pieces of arts, paintings, ethnic dress materials are sold in the international markets and folk dances are performed on the world stage, and feasts and festivals are celebrated cross-culturally. This positive aspect of globalisation in identity formation is well brought out by Yogendra Singh. He articulates:

The processes of globalisation which involve tremendous exposure of local, sub-regional and regional social entities to the forces of market and finance on the one hand, and on the other, access to revolutionary means of communication and media, not only influence but also energise the latent aspirations of these groups to reinvigorate and re-fashion their cultural identities. In this sense, the globalisation process instead of being a threat to such identities becomes a means for their construction.²⁴

²² Vandana Shiva, “Globalisation, Gandhi and *Swadeshi*: What is Economic Freedom? Whose Economic Freedom?,” in *Mainstream*, May, 1998: 14. Following are the other six superstitions about globalisation: 1. Globalisation is a natural phenomena not an ideology. 2. There is no alternative to globalisation. 3. Globalisation is a totally new stage of human evolution. 4. Globalisation will increase citizen freedom and democracy by reducing the power of the state. 5. Globalisation will increase prosperity for all by leading to limitless growth. 6. Globalisation will protect the environment by leading to economic growth and hence creating a greater appreciation of environmental values. Cf.: 13-4.

²³ Hampton: 242.

²⁴ Yogendra Singh: 264.

Through the means of communications and transportations the boundaries are shifted and the very concept of time and space has undergone a change. “Time-space compression...has confused the distinctions between places and times. What was distant now appears close; the frontiers separating one place for another appear to be porous; the globe has become compressed into a flat and undifferentiated space.”²⁵ With such changes a culture has to change. It is not a piece of antique that can be kept in a shelf but the life style of people. “A culture that does not react and change with time is as good as a dead one or it is dying, or at best maintains a fossilized form of existence, fit to be turned into a museum piece.”²⁶ I would like to conclude this section in the words of Jagdish Bhagwati, an advisor to UN on globalisation. He affirms:

Indeed, human beings have a complex self-identity whose mosaic draws on ‘horizontal’ colours that come from living with others within a community and ‘vertical’ colours that come from ethnic and historical roots and memories, often reconstructed and imagined. Nearly all societies will therefore treasure the past, seeking to freeze and recall in museums the cultural heritage they decide to hold precious. As cultures evolve and elements of them vanish, we must decide what we need to remember and retain in our midst. All of past cannot be frozen endlessly in time. This conscious choice of the elements of one’s heritage that must be preserved is precisely what happens as the old gives way to the new...Nostalgia, then is used not to bottle up change, which in any case is inevitable, but to decide what a society really wants to remember in the context of change and then to find ways to do so.²⁷

What society needs to remember is identities are not fixed badges. Identities undergo change in globalisation. Cultural, national and ethnic identities will always be influenced by each other and from influencing and conflicting of these identities individual identity will be formed.

3. Identity Wars

In the present world your identity²⁸ matters. Who you are and where you come from matter a lot. Your social acceptance, social standing, and esteem depend on your

²⁵ Max Silverman, *Facing Postmodernity Contemporary French Thought on Culture and Society* [London: Routledge, 1999]: 50.

²⁶ B. K. Matilal, “Pluralism, Relativism and Interaction Between Cultures,” in Eliot Deutsch ed., *Culture and Modernity: East-West Philosophic Perspective* [Delhi: Motilal Banarasadass, 1994]: 152.

²⁷ Jagdish Bhagwati, *In Defese of Globalisation* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004]: 112-13.

²⁸ Huntington gives following six sources of identity: *Ascriptive*, such as age, ancestry, gender, kin [blood relatives], ethnicity [defined as extended kin], and race; *Cultural*, such as clan, tribe, ethnicity [defined as a way of life], language, nationality, religion, civilization; *Territorial*, such as neighbourhood, village, town, city, province, state, section, county, geographical area, continent, hemisphere; *Political*, such as faction, clique, leader, interest group, movement, cause, party, ideology, state; *Economic*, such as job, occupation, profession, work group, employer, industry, economic sector, labour union, class;

identity. Your culture, place of birth, religion and gender give you an identity. According to Chakrabarty “Identity is not something that ‘we have’; rather, it is ‘what we are’; It is not a ‘property’ but ‘a mode of being.’ therefore, to talk of preserving, maintaining, safeguarding, or losing one’s identity is to use misleading metaphors.”²⁹ Our identity formation depends on the external circumstances to a great extent. It depends on the way we experience the world and understand it. Our parents, relations, friends, cast, religious community and the ‘significant others’ with whom we interact. “We define our identity always in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the things our significant others want to see in us. Even after we outgrow some of these others—our parents, for instance—and they disappear from our lives, the conversation with them continues with us as long as we live.”³⁰ This idea is echoed by Kushal Deb too. “We use ‘others’ as a looking glass, recognition or non-recognition by others becomes crucial for one’s own self-definition....Interestingly, even for the dominant community there seems a need for a stereo-typed conception of the ‘other’ in order to define its own identity positively.”³¹ Here one can hear echo of Hegel’s Master-Slave morality in *Phenomenology of Spirit*.³² Identity is a differentiating mark that I/we carry on my/our forehead/s. The harm misrecognition can do to one’s identity formation is well illustrated by Taylor:

The thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by *misrecognition* of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in false, distorted, and reduced mode of being.³³

He further adds that, “misrecognition shows not just a lack of due respect. It can inflict a grievous wound, saddling its victims with a crippling self-hatred. Due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need.”³⁴ Taylor considers recognition as a basic human right and “the withholding of recognition can be a form of oppression.”³⁵ Identity is a differentiating that makes me what ‘I am’ and gives me my distinctiveness from ‘you’ ‘we’ from ‘they’.

a. Cultural Identity

Social, such as friends, club, team, colleagues, leisure group, status. Samuel Huntington, *Who We Are?: America’s Great Debate* [New Delhi: Penguin Book, 2004]: 27.

²⁹ Biduyt Chakrabarty, *Community Identity in India: Its Construction and Articulation in Twentieth Century* [New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003]: 3.

³⁰ Taylor: 79.

³¹ Kushal Deb, “Multiculturalism and Self: Issues of Comparison Between Canada and India,” in Jasbir Jain ed., *Dislocations and Multiculturalisms* [Jaipur: Rawat Pub. 2004]: 12.

³² G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, A. V. Miller trans. [New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998].

³³ Taylor: 75.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 76.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 81.

Culture plays an important role in the identity formation of the person. One is born into a culture. Belonging to it is not a voluntary choice that one makes as in case of associations. Here one finds oneself in it. The beliefs, practices, literature, language, traditions etc. are a kind of raw material out of which one is to carve out cultural identity. Rajeev Bhargava holds that Culture matters in the formation of the identities. He says, “that a culture-related self-esteem matters to the people as much as the fulfilment of material needs. Equally significant was the recognition that the sense of identity and self-worth of persons derives from cultures that they not only know well, but can and may call their own. Therefore, not culture in general, rather a *particular* culture matters to people.”³⁶ Hence, we know for sure that the identity of the individual person is rooted in something bigger than the individual that is culture. Culture is not something that one chooses freely. Renouncing one’s culture and assimilating to another culture in a short period of time is not possible. It is something that cannot be voluntarily acquired. It is necessary condition for every individual to preserve a sense of identity and belonging.³⁷ Cultural identities can be “enabling, enlightening, and enriching structures of attachment and feeling...Who we are—that is, who we perceive ourselves or are perceived by others—will significantly affect our life chances: where we can live, whom we will marry... and what kinds of educational and employment opportunities will be available to us.”³⁸

One of the important elements in identity formation of the individual is language. Rajeev Bhargava throws light on this identity formation dimension of language:

The identity of persons, one can legitimately say, is defined by the language they happen to use. Identification with beliefs and desires is impossible without language because a person would not know what these beliefs and desires mean and therefore what they are, unless he/she possesses one. Since entry into a world of meanings is crucial for the formation of beliefs and desires, personal identity is related to a world of meanings. To put it briefly, persons identify with their particular language and with members of their linguistic community. That is why, one identifies oneself, as one is identified by others, by being located in a common world of meanings—a culture.³⁹

Salil Misra too emphasises the importance of language in the identity formation and says, “Language emerges as a powerful vehicle of identity formation, promoting group-solidarity. Language, under modern conditions...acquires a power that it did not possess before. Along with culture and religion it emerges as a serious candidate for being a motivator of group formation and solidarity.”⁴⁰

³⁶Rajeev Bhargava, “The Multicultural Framework,” in *Mapping Multiculturalism*: 78.

³⁷ J.Malik & H. Reifeld, *Religious Pluralism in South Asia and Europe* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005]: 121-137.

³⁸ P. Moya & M. H. Gracia ed., *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and Predicament of Postmodernism* [Hydrabad: Orient Longman, 2005]: 8.

³⁹ Bhargava: 81.

⁴⁰ Salil Misra as quoted in J. Malik & H. Reifeld ed., *Religious Pluralism in South Asia and Europe* [New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005]: 17.

Besides language geographical territory too plays a great role in formation of cultural identity. How place has impact on the cultural identity is well spoken in these lines by Smith:

Cultural geography considers the formation of identities in relation to space and place. The way we see ourselves in relation to the place where we live, work and play is itself a complex product of the boundaries we construct between ourselves and others. The kinds of boundaries we draw have had an impact through the inclusion and exclusion of others....To give a 'place' meaning, we also draw upon the kinds of oppositions...such as same/other, friend/stranger, security/danger...so on. In this way, we produce the meaning of places and the boundaries between them in our everyday lives. Cultural geography also assumes that 'culture' involves constant struggle for dominance and the generation of resistance through which identities are accomplished.⁴¹

b. Ethnic Identity

We are talking about whole world becoming a global village and people identifying themselves as global citizens due to the technological revolutions in the field of movements and communication. But we also see the sealing of the boundaries and the narrowing down in the identity formation. One such tendency is to identify oneself with ethnic group. One proudly depicts such identity through ethnic dress, food, music, names etc.

The term ethnicity comes from Greek term *ethnos*. In Homer, it was not used for familiar groups of people sharing a culture, an origin, or a language. It was used, rather, to describe large, undifferentiated groups of either animals or warriors. It was also used for animal multitude. Sophocles used it for wild animals. Aristotle used it for foreign or barbarous nations, as opposed to 'Helenes'. In New Testament it came to be used for the non-Christian [pagan] and non-Jewish. From Nineteenth century onwards it came to be used for group of people of shared characteristics.⁴² According to Nash there are certain core elements of ethnicity. They are *kinship* that is biological descent, the second one is *commensality*, that is the propriety of eating together indicating peership, and the final element is *common cult*. On the surface level there are other pointers like dress, language, and physical features, house architecture etc.⁴³ Ethnic identity is belonging to a 'culturally defined collectivity.'

Ethnic identity safeguards declining traditions and helps gain civil right and political gains and also gives strength to fight against exploitation in the society. Ethnic groups make a claim to a certain alteration in their status, economic well-being, educational opportunities. They demand the right to be different, and even demand for geographical region is made. Ethnic identity is also used as "a weapon of

⁴¹ Mark Smith, *Culture: Reinventing the Social Sciences* [New Delhi: Viva Books, 2002]: 116.

⁴² E. Tonkin & others, "History and Ethnicity," in *Ethnicity*: 19-21

⁴³ Manning Nash, "The Core Elements of Ethnicity," in *Ethnicity*: 25

revenge against centuries of discrimination and new forms of exploitation; it serves as an instrument for applying pressure in the political market; and it is a response to needs for personal and collective identity in highly complex societies.”⁴⁴

Well, ethnicity often becomes matter of conflict. The nations based on the ethnicity often have conflicts. This narrow form of identity needs to be overcome. One needs to transcend ethnic identity in favour of broader national identity. For poly-ethnic and immigrant societies, state should try to forge purely civil identities. This takes to the topic of national identity.

c. National Identity

First of all let us define the term ‘nation’. What does the term ‘nation’ mean? It is a historical community within a given geographical space, called homeland with its distinct language and culture. In short we can describe this as a community with separate territory, language, traditions, customs etc. Habermas describes as people “who see themselves as ethnically and linguistically homogeneous groups against the background of common historical fate and who want to protect their identity not only as an ethnic community but as a people forming a nation with the capacity for political action.”⁴⁵ Phadnis quotes Ernest Barker’s definition in the following words:

A nation is a body of men, inhabiting a definite territory, who normally are drawn from different races, but possess a common stock of thoughts and feelings acquired and transmitted during the course of common history; who on the whole and in the main, though more in the past than in the present, include in that common stock a common religious belief; who generally and as a rule use a common language as the vehicle of their thoughts and feelings; and who besides common thoughts and feelings, also cherish a common will, and accordingly form, or tend to form, a separate state for the expression and realization of that will.⁴⁶

David Miller tells us what nations are not. In his word, “Nations are not aggregates of people distinguished by their physical or cultural traits, but communities whose very existence depends upon mutual recognition.”⁴⁷ The existence of nation depends on a shared belief that its members belong together, and share a wish to continue their life in common. Further he describes what keeps a national community together. According to him, people are held together by a dense web of customs, practices, and implicit understandings, in short, by a shared way of life. It is language, customs, celebrations of feasts and festivals that go make a national character.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Alberto Melucci, “The Post-Modern Revival of Ethnicity,” in *Ethnicity*: 368.

⁴⁵ Jurgen Habermas, “Struggle for Recognition in the Democratic Constitutional State,” in Amy Gutmann ed., *Multiculturalism* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994]: 118.

⁴⁶ Phadnis & Rajat: 20-1.

⁴⁷ David Miller, *On Nationality* [Oxford: Calrendon Press, 1997]: 23. For this sub-section I heavily depend on Miller.

⁴⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 41-2.

It is on the basis of these distinguishing features that national identity is formed. According to Miller, national identity is constituted of five characteristics: first one is belief. That is when they believe that they belong together. The second feature is that it embodies historical continuity. Here one becomes aware of ones obligations towards nation, which was built by ancestors who toiled and spilt their blood to build and to defend and also towards those who are to inherit. The third feature of national identity is that it is an active identity. Here decisions are taken together to achieve results. One is involved in the decision making process of the nation. The fourth aspect is that it connects a group of people to a particular geographical place. Homeland is a requirement. Finally, national identity requires a common public culture.⁴⁹

Crisis of national identity has become a global problem. People all over the world want to be differentiated from other people on the basis of different beliefs, language, religion and physical features etc. Recognition of difference becomes an important element in the lives of people. They compare and contrast themselves with other groups. “Almost everywhere people have questioned, reconsidered, and redefined what they have in common and what distinguishes them from other people: Who are we? Where do we belong? The Japanese agonize over whether their location, history, and culture make them Asian or whether their wealth, democracy, and modernity make them Western. Iran has been described as ‘a nation in search of an identity,’...Syria and Brazil each said to face an ‘identity crisis,’ Canada ‘a continuing identity crisis,’...”⁵⁰

National identity demands seeing oneself as part of a historic community, however, that does not mean holding similar political views but it is a willingness to live together with fellow nationals. Though it is capable of invoking supreme loyalty and supreme sacrifice yet, it is not necessary that nationality should take precedence over other sources of identities. Sartre’s famous example—in *Existentialism and Humanism*—of the young man’s dilemma whether to fight for his country or to stay behind to look after his sick mother would make no sense if national identity necessarily trumped all others.⁵¹ “The fact that the dilemma appears to us a real one shows that we typically regard our nationality as a constituent of our identity on a par with other constituents, and the obligations that flow from it as competing with obligations arising from other sources.”⁵²

Miller also tells us that nationality is the *only* legitimate source of collective identity which acknowledges other identities too. But it should not include elements like religion, that are incompatible with other allegiances. Inclusion of religious component can give rise to conflict between national identity and religious identity. Again one should be careful not to demand a common national identity as essential to political stability and security; then there will be a conflict as people who do not have suitable reverence towards certain practices of the state will be considered as

⁴⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 23-5.

⁵⁰ Huntington: 13.

⁵¹ Miller: 46.

⁵² *Ibid.*

anti-national elements. Hence, what is required is that the national identities should be made hospitable to the minorities.⁵³

Hence, human approach is required towards the other. While holding to one's identity in a great esteem, one should respect the other's identity too. "Nationality should be looked upon as a *sentiment* that may have certain uses in the short term...but which, in the long term should be transcended in the name of humanity."⁵⁴ This leads us to respect the differences that exist between different cultures.

4. Celebration of Difference

Differences are often known for causing tensions. The differences between political parties, religious ideologies, cultural ideologies have taken many lives in the past. Due to the differences people compare and contrast themselves and the idea of 'us' versus 'they', 'Westerner' versus 'Orientals' becomes strong. This aspect is well brought out by Edward Said in his book *Orientalism*.⁵⁵ Many dominant cultures have tried to assimilate peripheral cultures into them and wipe away any sort of distinction. However, Charles Taylor rightly points out that we need to acknowledge the differences and not assimilate:

The development of the modern notion of identity, has given rise to a politics of difference...with the politics of difference, what we are asked to recognize is the unique identity of this individual or group, their distinctness from everyone else. The idea is that it is precisely this distinctness that has been ignored, glossed over, assimilated to a dominant or majority identity. And this assimilation is the cardinal sin against the new ideal of authenticity.⁵⁶

In fact when the majority culture tries to assimilate then minority cultural groups feel threatened. The very distinguishing mark of minority communities is 'difference' from the other and they hold this 'difference' dearly. They project this 'difference' proudly and celebrate it and even sacrifice their lives for the preservation of this difference. The fact well pointed out by Valerian Rodrigues in the following words:

They are cherished differences. There are, of course, social and economic differences engendered by disadvantage. But unlike such differences which people wish to renounce or overcome, differences expressed in distinct values and ways of life are fondly treasured and people are prepared to suffer even disadvantages for the sake of preserving them...Differences are closely bound up with our identity... what we are and what we wish to be.⁵⁷

⁵³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 121-146.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁵⁵ Edward Said, *Orientalism* [London: Penguin Book, 1995].

⁵⁶ Taylor: 82.

⁵⁷ Valerian Rodrigues, "Is there a Case for Multiculturalism,?" in *Mapping Multiculturalism*: 106.

The politics of difference exhort us to “cherish differences”. However, not all sorts of differences are to be cherished but only “such that their suppression would lead to the endangering of culture or other rights.”⁵⁸ We must learn to appreciate the diversity and see things from the others’ perspective. It is through this attitude of appreciation that the virtue of tolerance is born. Carrithers elucidates this. “Diversity shows that other forms of life are possible, that we are not bound solely by our own tradition or our own unreflecting view of human nature, and that we can and must learn to appreciate the validity of others’ ways. Only then can a tolerant, pluralistic civilization emerge.”⁵⁹ The tolerant pluralistic civilization to be born requires basic attitudinal change. Besides tolerance, deep understanding and familiarity is required. These will show us the hidden seeds of wisdom in them. Tolerance is not to be understood “neutral indifference but as the appreciation of otherness from the vantage of one’s own life world...”⁶⁰ or we can put it in Heideggerian sense “a policy of ‘letting be,’ ‘letting’ that allows the other to gain freedom and identity while making room for cultural difference and diversity.”⁶¹

Taylor suggests the other attitude that one should develop towards the culture is ‘presuming’ that culture has “something important to say to all human beings.”⁶² It is with such a ‘presumption’ that one should approach a different culture because we are likely to have only the foggiest idea of its valuable contribution. Hence, “What has to happen is what Gadamer has called a ‘fusion of horizons.’ We learn to move in a broader horizon, within which what we have formerly taken for granted as the background to valuation can be situated as one possibility alongside the different background of the formerly unfamiliar culture.”⁶³ And this presumption that their traditional culture has value, we owe to all cultures. In such an attitude cultures will survive and flourish. One would be able to enrich oneself with enriching, motivating, and transforming elements of other cultures. As Geogia Warnke says:

That the survival and flourishing of one’s own culture depends upon the survival and flourishing of others against which I can test my own, in terms of which I can see its value, and from which I can even borrow. Hence, I must maintain a principle of tolerance toward other cultural values as a condition of the health of my own...If cultures are to be living cultures, they must live with others, for a serious effort to understand the values and cultures of others is our only option for the reflecting upon our own.⁶⁴

In this way we can use the difference in cultures for enriching and transforming ourselves. “Another way of using difference in culture is to welcome the ‘other’ as

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁵⁹ Michael Carrithers, *Why Humans Have Cultures: Explaining Anthropology and Social Diversity* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992]: 19-20.

⁶⁰ Fred Dallmayr *Beyond Orientalism: Essays on Cross-Cultural Encounter* [Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2001: 55-6.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶² Taylor: 98.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Geogia Warnke, “Communicative Rationality and Cultural Values,” in Stephen K. White ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Habermas* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995]: 140.

equal but not precisely the same. Most of the great humanistic scholars of our time...saw in the past and in different cultures an opportunity to overcome the alienation of time and distance...The idea therefore is to study culture not nationalistically, but in order to understand how it is made, and how it can be remade for others.”⁶⁵

If a culture has to grow then it needs openness to borrow selectively and give that can help preservation of the other culture. It must receive enriching values, elevating traditions, inspiring beliefs, and other such worthy elements of the other culture. And eye-opening insights from other cultures can lead to self-examination and authentic self-transformation.

We have seen above that globalization lays emphasis on sameness; it tries to remove differences of culture but ‘difference’ demands recognition from governments. Silverman says, “In this context, difference is no longer a stain which states are required to remove, a stigma in the blinding light of rational thought, emancipation and progress, what we must lose in order to achieve equal status with fellow citizens; the state no longer indulges in that form of cultural crusade. On the contrary, difference is today what we must achieve as a demonstration of identity. We are all required to proclaim our own difference.” Further he adds, “...in a world where difference is the badge of identity... nobody can afford to be without their difference and their own specific history. Consequently, difference needs to be imagined and reimagined, invented and reinvented, constantly in search of itself.”⁶⁶ As difference demands recognition from the governments similarly it demands its celebration from its adherents.

5. Relevance of Cultural Pluralism for India

One must look at the application and practicality of philosophy of Cultural Pluralism for India. India is a land of religio-cultural pluralism and even of political pluralism. From the linguistic perspective too it is a land of many tongues. Hence, the doctrine of pluralism is not something new to India. Vincent Smith, a British historian, described Indian society as ‘unity in diversity’ much before Indian politicians made it election-slogan after independence. In India cultural pluralism is engraved not merely in Indian Constitution but in its ancient scriptures and writings. It is from India that we have the *mantra* for cultural pluralism, that is, *Vasudeva Kutumbakam*.⁶⁷ In its Vedas we have prayers like “*Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah, sarve santu niramyha; sarve bhdrani pashntu, makshidhdukhahabhakabhavet*”. [May all beings be happy; May all be healthy; May people have well-being of all in mind; May nobody suffer in anyway].

⁶⁵Edward Said, *The End of Peace Process: Also and After* [New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2003]: 142-3.

⁶⁶ Silverman: 53-4.

⁶⁷ Sudhir Chandra, “Self and Multiculturalism: Towards Self-Reflection,” in *Dislocation and Multiculturalism*: 7.

However, the spirit of cultural pluralism of the forefathers is currently on a decline. The majority Hindu culture wants periphery cultures to join the mainstream Indian culture that is Brahminic version of indigenous culture. When this is resisted by minority groups like Muslims and Christians, they are termed as ‘outsiders’ and passions are aroused by such slogan as ‘insiders’ Vs ‘outsiders’. These ‘outsiders’ then are made to appear a threat to country’s internal and external security. The Hindu nationalists’ demand to join cultural mainstream is like demanding that rivers Brahmaputra, Godavari and Karveri flow towards Ganga and merge with it. It is a Gangaization of cultures. As Oommen says, “The very notion of the cultural mainstream implies both the process of expansionism and exclusivism...”⁶⁸ Dominate and devour policy of the majority Hindu culture cannot help building an authentic nation. The threat of assimilation creates a pressure cooker type situation within the country. Hence, cultural pluralism “can be used as a diffusing agent, as a tool used by the state for internal *diversity management*.”⁶⁹ The basic principle in cultural pluralism is to respect the difference and not maintain neutral indifference. In cultural pluralism “society does not eliminate or transcend group difference. Rather, there is equality among socially and culturally differentiated groups, who mutually respect one another and affirm one another in their differences.”⁷⁰

It is through the policy of cultural pluralism that all can be treated as ‘insiders’. The vision of Indian State should be what Gadamer envisaged about human solidarity:

The human solidarity that I envisage is not a global uniformity but unity in diversity. We must learn to appreciate and tolerate pluralities, multiplicities, cultural differences... Such unity-in-diversity, has to be extended to the whole world... Every culture, every people has something distinctive to offer for the solidarity and welfare of humanity.⁷¹

Conclusion

Our society is pluralistic society and the beauty of such society lies in the belief that no single group possesses the fullness of truth. This leads to the realization that seeds of truth are to be found in every religion and culture. The attitude of tolerance can be developed in pluralism. However, this attitude should come not from the feelings of superiority of one’s culture because such an attitude can block the openness and progress of one’s culture.

⁶⁸T. K. Oommen, “Insiders and Outsider in India: Primordial Collectivism and Cultural Pluralism in Nation Building,” in Bidyut Chakrabarty ed., *Communal Identity in India: Its Construction and Articulation in the Twentieth Century* [New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003]: 252.

⁶⁹ Kushal Deb, “Multiculturalism and Self: Issues of Comparison Between Canada and India,” in *Dislocation and Multiculturalism*: 11.

⁷⁰ I. M. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990]: 163.

⁷¹Hans-George-Gadamer in interview to Thomas Pantham, “Some Dimensions of the Universality of the Philosophical Hermeneutics: A Conversation with Hans-George-Gadamer” *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research*, Vol. ix, [1992]: 132.

We need progress. Globalisation claims that it brings progress. But it also becomes erasure of identities. A particular identity with progress should be maintained. No culture should become hindrance in the progress of the individual. Cultural bond should not become a bondage. Some deadwood from culture like obsolete beliefs, practices, traditions may have to be abandoned and some new beliefs, practices and traditions may have to be adopted into one's culture.

Science and technology have changed our world so much that speed and space matter. People are moving from one destination to the other. Business and jobs demand that one move out of one's territory, be uprooted and planted in a strange territory and those who remain in their birth place find 'outsiders' inside their living space. This in turn demands adaptation, tolerance, respect, love for the place, language, culture, religion, traditions etc. of the other. Transportation system and telecommunication network have created a new global business culture. The life styles of people have changed. Food, dress, jewellery, feasts are commercialised. This has given new avenues of business for some but with it insecurity too. One feels that one is losing his/her particular identity. What was once mine now I cannot claim to be mine; it belongs to everyone. Cultural, ethnic and national identities come in conflict. People want to preserve their identity while keeping the difference. Difference becomes a precious commodity. It gives individuality, beauty and meaning. Difference endows uniqueness on them. Every cultural group wants that their difference not merely be tolerated, but respected and celebrated.

However, there are some dangers in practice of cultural pluralism. Bhiku Parekh feels that the preoccupation with maintaining differences can be self-defeating too. The difference which constitutes community's identity can also become a constant frame of reference, hence, it becomes the other oriented. In the process one pays attention to how much one differs from the others and fails to enrich by borrowing certain enriching elements from the other.⁷² How maintaining of difference can certain times be deadly is well explained by Goldberg:

Difference can be straightforwardly exclusionary, indeed ...it can be deathly dangerous... This [self] imposed distinction may be cast as a mark of elevation or moral superiority, as being necessary to group survival or self-determination, or as a burden worth bearing, no matter one's desire or effort. Identity can sustain fascist social movements as readily as emancipatory ones, and difference may license genocide almost as easily as it does celebration.⁷³

Nevertheless, that should not discourage states from maintaining cultural difference. Practice of cultural pluralism should become a state policy. It is in cultural pluralism that each culture could get equal recognition. How one should respond to cultural pluralism is brilliantly described by Miller:

⁷²Cf. Parekh: 123.

⁷³ Goldberg: *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader*: 12-3.

The progressive response is to celebrate diversity, bolster ethnic pride, and encourage people to pick and choose among the array of cultural identities that a global culture makes accessible. Just as Marx looked forward to a future in which we would hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, and criticize after dinner, ...[similarly cultural pluralism] holds up before us an image in which we might explore our Celtic roots on Monday, spend Tuesday celebrating the Buddha's birthday in our neighbourhood temple, on Wednesday join in a Greenpeace demonstration against international whaling and take part on Thursday in a critical discussion of British Imperialism.⁷⁴

Cultural pluralism broadens our vision. In it stones are not stones, they become mystery-filled objects of worship. Traditional songs and dances express the music and rhythm of the universe. Fairy tales become books of wisdom. Traditions become experiences of the ancestors and artworks become inspiring imaginations of the people. What is needed is not standing apart from cultures but becoming part of them and understanding them. The understanding which would lead to self-understanding and self-understanding would lead to rejoicing in cultural difference. In such circumstances *Ganeshutsav* would not be only a Maharashtrian feast and Christmas a Christian Feast. The Tandoori would not be a Muslim food and Idalies would not be a Tamilian food. Rajasthani ethnic dress would not look out of place in West-Bangal. Cultural difference not only differentiates but also unites when celebrated.

⁷⁴ Miller: 186.

ECOLOGICAL PLURALISM

EMERGING TRENDS

Henry Jose Kodikuthiyil

1. Introduction

*One impulse from the vernal wood
May teach you more of man
Of moral evil and of good
Than all the sages can*

(William Wordsworth)

Ecology is in vogue nowadays. It is an emerging area of study, research and discussion for people irrespective of their religion, culture and language. The focus of this paper will be on ecological pluralism or on ecology from a pluralistic perspective. First, we shall consider the meaning of ecology. Secondly, we take a look at the scope and nature of ecology, and finally, we make a survey of the emerging trends in ecology.

1. What Is Ecology?

Ecology had no firm beginnings. “It is evolved from the natural history of the Greeks, particularly Theophrastus, a friend and associate of Aristotle. He first described the interrelationships between organisms and between organisms and their non-living environment.”¹ The word ‘ecology’ was coined by a German Zoologist Ernst Haeckel in 1866, who applied the term *Ökologie* to the relation of the animal both to its organic as well as its inorganic environment. The word ecology comes from the Greek *Oikos*, meaning household, home or place to live.² Ecology has been defined variously as the study of the interrelationships of organisms with their environment and each other. It investigates causes and effects of all ecological problems. It proposes ways in which we can read nature’s secrets more intelligently and apply our knowledge to make forces of nature serve us more effectively. Ecology, thus, can be defined as the study of relationships among organisms and between them and their environment.

¹ *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol.6, London: William Benton Publisher, 1974, p.197.

² *Compton’s Pictured Encyclopedia*, Vol. 4, Chicago: Compton and Company, 1959, p.258.

2. The Scope and Nature of Ecology

The modern ecological movement burst forth on the scene after World War II. Ecology emerged in the 1960s as one of the most popular and most important aspects of Biology.³ Today ecology has become a multidisciplinary science. It involves plant and animal biology, taxonomy, physiology, genetics, behaviour, meteorology, pedology,⁴ geology, sociology, anthropology etc.⁵ It is difficult to separate ecology from any of the above disciplines.

The term ecology can sometimes be treated as synonymous or coextensive with three different concepts or sets of concepts: (1) *The science of ecology*: the study of organisms and groups of them and their relation to their environment. (2) *Environmentalism*: a set of socio-political views about the right relationship between humans and nature. (3) *The ecology of an organism, population, or community*: in the case of organisms, roughly the life-history of that organism. In the words of Rose Mary Ruether, "Ecology emerged as a combined socio-economic and biological study in the late sixties to examine how human use of nature is causing pollution of soil, air and water, and destruction of the natural systems of plants and animals, threatening the base of life on which the human community itself depends."⁶ Now let us analyse some of the numerous dimensions of ecology.

2.1 Plant and Animal Ecology

Plant Ecology is the study of ecological patterns and processes in plant populations and communities. It includes studies of individual plant performance, population dynamics, structure and dynamics of plant communities, and how plants contribute to the function of ecosystems. Plant ecology also includes studies of evolution, how different plant life histories evolve, and how plants interact with animals. Due to the profound importance of plants in natural and artificial ecosystems, a significant part of plant ecology deals with applied research, for example landscape planning and conservation biology.⁷ Thus plant ecology focuses on the relationship of plants to other plants and their environment.

³ *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol.6, 1974, p.197.

⁴ the scientific study of the physical and mental development of children. See pedology

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.198

⁶ <http://www.spunk.org/library/pubs/openeye/sp000943.txt>

⁷ <http://www.botan.su.se/Ecology/INDEX.HTM>

Animal Ecology, on the other hand, deals with the relations of animals to their environment. It concerns itself with the study of population dynamics, distribution, behaviour, and the interrelationships of animals and their environment. This plant ecology and animal ecology are interconnected, as animals depend on plants for food and shelter. Again autecology, which is a study of the interrelation of an individual organism with its environment, population ecology, behavioural ecology etc. come under the purview of ecology.⁸

2. 2 Human Ecology

Human Ecology is the study of how human social systems relate to and interact with the ecological systems on which they depend. It seeks to describe some of the characteristics of a humane and sustainable modern complex society, what its social and institutional arrangements might be and how it might regulate the material and energy transformations through which it relates to its supporting ecosystems. Human ecology explores not only the influence of humans on their environment but also the influence of the environment on human behaviour, and their adaptive strategies as they come to understand those influences better. It is a way of thinking about the world, and a context in which we define our questions and ways to answer those questions.⁹

Human Ecology is also regarded as an interdisciplinary applied field that uses a holistic approach to help people solve problems and enhance human potential within their near environments—their clothing, family, home, and community. Human ecologists promote the well-being of individuals, families, and communities through education, prevention, and empowerment.¹⁰ According to Barry Commoner there are four laws of ecology: 1. Everything is connected to everything else. 2. Everything must go somewhere. 3. Nature knows best. 4. There is no such thing as a free lunch.¹¹ These laws are a clear indication that human beings are not free from creation. The result of a good relationship between human beings and all other beings, animate or inanimate objects, would lead to a good environment. As a result there will be more relationship as well as involvement and responsibility.¹² In the words of Lynn White, "What people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in

⁸ *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol.6, London: William Benton Publisher, 1974, p.198.

⁹http://www.eci.ox.ac.uk/humaneco/he_whatish.html

¹⁰<http://www.hecol.ualberta.ca/>

¹¹ See Barry Commoner, *The Closing Circle: Nature, Man and Technology* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971.

relation to things around them. Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny—that is, by religion."

3. Ecological Consciousness and Indian Religions

Every religion exalts the significance of nature. Religions help to shape our attitudes toward nature in both conscious and unconscious ways. Religions do provide basic interpretive stories of who we are, what nature is, where we have come from, and where we are going. Religions also suggest how we should treat other humans and how we should be related to nature.¹³ Now let us examine the ecological sensitivity in some of the most ancient Indian religious traditions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism.

3.1 Hinduism

The Hindu scriptures especially the Vedas, the Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita state that no activity whether biological, natural, human or metaphysical can exist outside the sphere of the Earth. In the words of Dr. Karan Singh, "In the ancient spiritual traditions, man was looked upon as part of nature, linked by indissoluble spiritual and psychological bonds with elements around him. This is very much marked in the Hindu tradition, probably the oldest living religious traditions in the world. The Vedas, those collections of hymns composed by the great spiritual seers and thinkers which are the repository of Hindu wisdom, reflect the vibrancy of an encompassing world-view which looks upon all objects in the universe, living or non-living, as being pervaded by the same spiritual power."¹⁴

In the Atharva Veda (12, 1.1-63), we read about the Vedic attitude towards the Earth. The whole of the Rgveda reflects a religion of nature, where man is conceived as a part and parcel of its natural dynamics. Vedic man was nature centred; for him, all natural phenomena arose from a divine source. Behind the wide spectrum of gods and an immensely intricate ritual technology of the fire-sacrifice, there was an insight into the natural laws of nature. The Rgveda resonates with hymns of praise to the deities of the sky, Earth and atmosphere, thunder, rain, sun and wind. In contrast, the

¹² See Stanislaus, "Ecology: An Awareness for Mission," (9 December 1999) *Vidyajyoti*, Vol. 63, n. 8, August 1999.

¹³ Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155 (March 1967), p. 1204.

¹⁴ O.P. Dwivedi (ed), *World Religions and the Environment*, New Delhi: Gitanjali Publishing House, 1989, p. 327.

Atharva Veda rings a new note. It affirms the life of man-in-the-world. The text contains incantations, magic spells, and formulas either to bless or appease, or to curse, or often to safeguard the general well-being of the community.

The Atharva hymns, named after the fire-churning priest or *atharvan*, were devised to establish harmony in family and village life. Here the attention of the forest-dwelling seers has shifted, as it were, from the sky pervading nature gods to the life sustaining Earth. Vedic culture, as we know, was rooted in a very high degree of material comfort. Man's life was conceived as a harmonious unit. There was neither any pessimism nor any conflict between the pursuit of dharma, artha, kama and mokṣa. Life on Earth was considered a short sojourn or a stepping-stone to higher life in other regions. From the fertile soil of this life affirming milieu sprang the most exalted vision of the real visible Earth, conceived as a nurturing mother of humankind.

The Earth on whom waters flow day and night, never ceasing motion — the Earth that is brown black and red in colour, a vast abode. (Atharva Veda, 12.1.9a-11b) The Vedic hymns to the *Prthivi* (Earth Mother) cover a wide range of aspects: physical, organic, metaphysical, ethical and cosmic. Her (Earth's) body laced by rivers and rimmed by the Ocean, is adorned with "gentle slopes and plains" (AV. 12.1.2). The Earth is composed of hills, "rock, stone and dust," and is compactly held. An essential feature of the Earth is her fragrance which pervades all the products of the Earth. The herbs, water, nymphs and celestial creatures bear it. Her fragrance enters the lotus and the flowers everywhere. The seer prays that this fragrance may enter him:

*Instil in me abundantly that fragrance,
O Mother Earth, which emanates from you
Your fragrance which has entered the lotus
Where with the immortal Gods at the Sun-daughters wedding
Were redolent, O Earth, in times primaeval —
Instil in me that fragrance.
Your fragrance that adheres to human beings
O Earth, steep us, too deeply in that fragrance*
(Atharva Veda, 12.1.23-26)

The entire universe is the body of the supreme Atman:

*Fire is his head, his eyes are the sun and the moon,
 The regions of space are his ears, his speech the revealed Vedas,
 Air is his life and his heart the world.
 Out of his feet the Earth is born
 Indeed he is the Self of all beings (Sarva-bhutantaratma)*
 (Mundaka Upanishad 2,1,4).

As a tree is born of the Earth, lives through the Earth and finally returns to the Earth the entire realm of beings has the *Atman* as their Ground of being:

*That from which beings are born,
 That by which, when born, they live,
 That into which, when dying, they enter,
 That you should desire to know:
 That is Brahman.*
 (Taittiriya Upanishad 3,1)

The one who sees all beings in the *Atman*
 And the *Atman* in all beings is free from fear.
 (Isa Upanishad, 6).

Further, in the Brhadaranyaka Upanisad we see that Brahman is the inner Controller of all and that all things form the body of Brahman. “He who dwells in the Earth and is within it, but whom the Earth does not know, whose body is the Earth and who controls the Earth within, He is the inner Controller: He is your Self, the Immortal.”¹⁵

According to the Bhagavad Gita, the entire universe is seen as the ‘body of the Lord’ (13,14; 11,10-11); the Lord permeates all beings (9,4; 11,38): He is their life-giving source (15,4; 10,8), the imperishable seed (7,10; 9,18), the ground and abode (9,4; 8,9; 11,18), the Light within (10,11; 13,18), the ultimate goal of all (9,10; 8,21; 10,20). In nature the Lord is the fertility power in the Earth (15,13), flavour in water (7,8), glance in fire (7,9), source of all life (7,7) and the divine vibration in space (8,13; 10,25). The Lord warms the Earth with the sun (15,12), fertilizes the Earth through rain (9,19; 15,13) and enlivens everything as the root keeps the tree alive

¹⁵Brhadaranyaka Upanisad, 3. 73. Ramanuja developed his concept of God in similar vein. His concept of God as the Self of all entities and all entities as the attributive body of God. See Augustine Thottakara, “Eco-Dynamics of Religion: A Vedantic Perspective” in Augustine Thottakara (ed), *Eco-dynamics of Religion: Thoughts for the third Millennium*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2000, p. 87.

(15,1). The lord is at work in the universe bringing about harmony (7,7) and integration (4, 8).

Human beings are therefore called upon to participate in this divine work of keeping all beings in life and harmony. The motivation for *karma yoga* is the ‘integration of world’ (*lokasamgraha*, 3, 25) and even more, ‘a passionate concern for the well-being of all things in nature’ (*sarvabhutahiteratah*, 12,4; 5,25). Thus Gita speaks of the responsibility towards the protection of the natural environment.

3.2 Buddhism

Buddhism emphasized the equal sanctity of all beings. Buddha preached an ethic of universal harmony (*dhamma*) which embraces not only the human world but the entire realm of beings. He stressed the need for universal love and advocated abstinence from actions that harmed fellow beings. Giving the example of a mother, Buddha said: “As she would be very good towards her only child, her well-beloved son, so too ye should be very good towards all creatures everywhere and everyone.”¹⁶

Throughout the history of Buddhism, concern for the welfare of the natural world has been an important element. Recognition that human beings are essentially dependent upon and inter connected with their environments has given rise to an instinctive respect for nature.¹⁷ For the Buddhists, taking care of the planet is nothing special, nothing sacred or holy. It’s just like taking care of our own house. A person endowed with compassion (*Karuṇā*) does not look at other beings as separate entities or selves but as parts of his own being which is in constant becoming. According to Buddhist doctrine everything in the universe is literally dependent upon everything else. Nothing stands alone; everything is linked together through time and space.

Trees and plants have a very important place in the social life of India as well as in the other countries where Buddhism is practised. Buddha was born under the blossomy grove of Asoka and Sala trees, obtained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, and preached his first sermon under the tree. Thus, trees and groves are the most pious and inspiring objects for the Bhikkhus in order to contemplate the problems

¹⁶ S.S. Tripathi and Acharya Bhante, “Buddhism and Ecological Crisis,” in O.P. Dwivedi (ed), *World Religions and the Environment*, New Delhi: Gitanjali Publishing House, 1989, p. 192.

¹⁷ Martine Batchelor and Kerry Brown, eds., *Buddhism and Ecology*, London: Cassell, 1992, 12.

related to the goodness of humanity.¹⁸ The rivers, forests, grass, creepers, herbs, mountains, and night are highly respected and regarded as bliss bestowers. The Sun, Moon, Fire and the Planets were given great respect by the Buddhist thinkers.

*Like the lotus-flower, wearing garlands of asterion,
O Night!
I pay my respect to you
And in the absence of Rajaputra seek shelter of yours.*

*May Soma, Varma, Prajapati;
May the Moon and Sun bestow bliss on you.
Thus under their blissful protection
You will go and return with safety.*

*O Grasses, Creepers, Herbs, Mountains and Woods!
I seek shelter of you in the absence of Rajaputra.*

*O Bhagirathi Ganga the Acceptor of all the Rivers!
I pay my respect
And in the absence of Rajaputra
Seek shelter of yours.*

*O Himalaya, the King of Mountains,
Bearing high-summits!
I pay my respect to you,
And in the absence of Rajaputra seek shelter of yours.¹⁹*

The natural environment, uninhabited by humanity, was also respected as the ideal place for cultivating spiritual insights. Dwelling in nature was clearly preferable for Shantideva to life in a monastery or town.

*When shall I come to dwell in forests
Amongst the deer, the birds and the trees,
That say nothing unpleasant
And are delightful to associate with?²⁰*

¹⁸ S.S. Tripathi and Acharya Bhante, "Buddhism and Ecological Crisis," pp. 201-202.

¹⁹ As quoted in S.S. Tripathi and Acharya Bhante, "Buddhism and Ecological Crisis," p. 203.

²⁰ Martine Batchelor and Kerry Brown, eds., *Buddhism and Ecology*, 13.

Thus Buddhism, in its very essence, can be described as an ecological religion or a religious ecology.²¹

3.3 Jainism

Environmentalists often suggest that Jainism epitomizes ecological religion, since Jains embrace vegetarianism, and practice *ahimsa* (nonviolence) towards all beings, including plants, microbes, and even earth, air, and water. Jaina religion is called the Religion of *ahimsa* par excellence. Its scriptures and traditions subscribe to the doctrine of *ahimsa*.²² *Ahimsa* means non-killing, non-violence, harmlessness. This doctrine of *ahimsa* is based on the belief of the unity of all life, human, animal, plant and even atoms of matter. Liberation or salvation, according to Jainism, belongs to the whole universe, the animal, vegetative and the human kingdom. Jaina understanding of Life Force (*Jiva*) suggests that all living beings have the inherent spiritual capacity to Transcendence. Jainism aims at the integral salvation of the whole universe including the animal kingdom and vegetative life. Hence it advocates the avoidance of any injury to living beings, because an injury done to any living creature hampers one's own progress towards the ultimate goal of life.²³

From the earliest extant text of the tradition, one learns that Jaina monks and nuns were keen observers of the elements and the living beings of the natural world. The *Ācarāṅga Sūtra*, which dates from the fourth or fifth century before the Common Era, indicates that Mahāvīra (c. 500 BCE), who established Jainism in its current institutional form, was a keen observer of nature. The text states that "thoroughly knowing the earth-bodies and water-bodies and fire-bodies and wind-bodies, the lichens, seeds, and sprouts, he comprehended that they are, if narrowly inspected, imbued with life."²⁴ The life force exists in the four elements of earth, water, fire, and air as well as in microorganisms, plants, and animals. At the point of death, this life-force moves from one body to the next, depending on its karmic constitution. The life force attached to an earth-body moves very slowly, whereas the life force found in an insect or microorganism might move on very quickly.

²¹ Ibid., p. viii.

²² Vincent Sekhar, "Implications of Ahimsa on Ecology: A Jaina Perspective," *Jain Journal* 28 (1993) 02, p. 94.

²³ Vincent Sekhar, "Implications of Ahimsa on Ecology: A Jaina Perspective," *Jain Journal* 28 (1993) 02, p. 93.

²⁴ A.S. 1.8.1.11–12; in Jacobi, 1884.

Jainism widens the moral circle to include all living beings including plants, contending that all living beings have souls and are of infinite value. For the Jains, this earth, with its multitude of life-forms and atoms, is the only true sphere of meaning, the place of dreams, of actions, of moral and aesthetic culmination. They call it *Jivanmukta*, the divine on earth. To this end, with rigorous ascetic practices, the Jains pursue the path of ahimsa, or non-injury, in their relations to each and every living being.

Mahāvīra had stated, “All breathing, existing, living, sentient creatures should not be slain, nor treated with violence, nor abused, nor tormented, nor away. This is the pure unchangeable external law.” Whereby Jains forbade occupations to their followers that would involve taking life, not only hunting and butchery, but also agriculture, lest in digging the ground some animal or insect life be taken. Jain ecology is thus a process of focussing on nature through the practices of restraint, meditation, and action. This inner attentiveness then blossoms into an embrace of the life-principle which is the Earth and all of its inter-related beings. The heart of Jainism is thus about stewardship, requiring human diligence, human conscience, and human love.²⁵

4. Environmental Ethics²⁶

Environmental ethics is the discipline that studies the moral relationship of human beings to, and also the value and moral status of, the environment and its nonhuman contents. It emerged as a new sub-discipline of philosophy in the early 1970s.²⁷ It can be considered as a challenge to traditional anthropocentrism. In the first place, it questioned the assumed moral superiority of human beings to members of other species on earth. In the second place, it investigated the possibility of rational arguments for assigning intrinsic value to the natural environment and its nonhuman contents.²⁸

²⁵ I. Samuel Longkumer, “Ecological Sensitivity in Indian Religions,” *Theology for our Times* 6 (1999), pp. 90-91.

²⁶ I choose the term environmental ethics because it covers all kinds of moral debate concerning human attitudes toward, and treatment of the nonhuman world. If we choose the term ecological ethics, it is referred to ecological relationships within ecosystem.

²⁷ For a brief historical sketch of Environmental Ethics see Clare Palmer, “An Overview of Environmental Ethics,” in Andrew Light and Holmes Rolston III (eds.), *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2003, pp. 15-16.

²⁸ <http://www2.hmc.edu/~tbeckman/personal/Heidart.html>

It should be noted that a wide spectrum of ethical positions is covered by the term “environmental ethics.” These positions draw on a variety of ethical traditions, from Plato and Aristotle to Mill and Moore. There are a number of differing issues and concerns raised in environmental ethics, One of the issues is the question of distinction in environmental ethics between instrumental and non-instrumental value. Instrumental value is value assigned to something because of its usefulness, as a means to an end. On the other hand non-instrumental value or intrinsic value is an expression which can be used in a variety of ways in environmental ethics. According to some ethicists, intrinsic value is something which humans create and attach to their own lives, the lives of other people, and/or to particular states of affairs or perhaps to qualities such as harmony.²⁹ It is beyond the scope of this paper to go into detail about the debate that is going on in this field of study.

Aldo Leopold’s *A Sand County Almanac* is often cited as the foundational work in holistic environmental ethics. This book espouses a land ethic, which “enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively, the land.”³⁰ According to Leopold, “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”³¹ The land ethic sketched by Leopold, attempting to extend our moral concern to cover the natural environment and its nonhuman contents, was drawn on explicitly by the Australian philosopher Richard Routley (later Sylvan). According to Routley (1973 (cf. Routley and Routley 1980)), the anthropocentrism embedded in what he called the ‘dominant western view’, or ‘the western superethic’, is in effect ‘human chauvinism’. This view, he argued, is just another form of class chauvinism, which is simply based on blind class ‘loyalty’ or prejudice, and unjustifiably discriminates against those outside the privileged class.

Furthermore there are a host of metaphysical and ethical questions that concern the entire earth. The “Gaia hypothesis” of scientist James Lovelock is one such attempt. Lovelock argues that the Earth behaves like a single living organism, in that the flora and fauna on Earth act together to regulate the climate and temperature of Earth in order to produce the best conditions of life.³² In spite of the existence of

²⁹ Clare Palmer, “An Overview of Environmental Ethics,” p. 16.

³⁰ Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, p. 204.

³¹ *Ibid.* p. 224. As quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 24.

³² See James Lovelock, *Gaia*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979; *The Ages of Gaia*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982.

different environmental ethics today, it should be noted that a number of environmental ethicists have attempted to construct approaches to environmental ethics which take into account elements of both individualist and holistic concerns.³³

5. Ecofeminism

Another emerging trend in ecology is ecofeminism. Ecofeminism is an international movement which is in search of a solution for the resistance of the exploitation and subjugation of women and earth. It includes study, research, analysis, critique, vision etc.³⁴ The term 'Ecofeminism', was first coined by the French feminist Francoise d'Eaubonne in 1974. She introduced this term in a very specific sense which predominantly reconceived feminist principles and tried to construct an environmental ethic by taking into account possible connections between the domination of women and the domination of nature.³⁵ However during the 1970s there was no coherent body of Ecofeminist theory as yet. Instead, there were differing accounts that wove together a perceived interconnection between the domination of women and nature.³⁶

Today, ecofeminist ideologies can be grouped into two streams: The first is Social Ecofeminism which endeavours to restructure gender relationships in order to achieve an egalitarian society. Social Ecofeminism calls for a revolutionary social change in which systems that feed on human oppression, most notably capitalist

³³ see Clare Palmer, "An Overview of Environmental Ethics," p. 25.

³⁴ Heather Eaton, "Ecological-Feminist Theology", in T. Hessel (ed.), *Theology for Earth Community – A Field Guide*, New York, Orbis Books, 1996, p. 77.

³⁵ Arpana Dhar Das, "Ecofeminism," *Indian Philosophical Quarterly*, 32 (2005), p. 89.

³⁶ See Rosemary Radford-Ruether's *New Woman, New Earth- Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation* (1975), Susan Griffin's *Women and Nature - The Roaring Inside Her* (1978) and Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature - Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (1980). None of these texts actually articulate an 'Ecofeminism' per se. However, they all provide important historical evidence for the Western association of women with nature. Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology* (1979) is sometimes framed this way also, and although D'Eaubonne influences her choice of title, this is not strictly speaking an ecofeminist text. In an activist context, the women's movement during the 1970s was clearly intertwined, with a peace and environmental movement. By 1980 these connections had coalesced into ecofeminist activist groups and conferences on both sides of the Atlantic (see Sturgeon 1997: 26). Ecofeminism as an academic discourse did not develop until the mid to late 1980s (e.g. Salleh 1984, Plumwood 1986 & Warren 1987). The diversity of Ecofeminism is illustrated by its geographical spread, having a significant academic and activist presence in the US, Canada, Northwest Europe, India and Australia.

patriarchy, are replaced by non-hierarchical, non-dominating forms of social organization. They consider the overthrow of capitalist patriarchy as a requirement for human liberation and planetary survival. Secondly, Cultural Ecofeminists often employ spiritual or associative, poetic modes of expression. They argue that women and men are endowed with innate qualities that are the outcome of their biology, and further, these qualities are understood to be fixed. Thus, all Ecofeminists regard the Western domination of ‘women’ and ‘nature’ as conceptually linked, and believe that the processes of “inferiorisation” have mutually reinforced each other.

Ecofeminist movements have already taken root in various parts of the world. In India, the women’s ecology movement emerged in the late 1980s, to protect nature and their communities from the threat of destruction arising from development projects – dams, highways, power plants and toxic and hazardous industry.³⁷ Current work on Ecofeminism is progressing in two directions. First, Ecofeminists are examining the roots of the ecological crisis and misogyny and their interweaving linkages – which is central to Ecofeminism. The Ecofeminist theory envisions alternative philosophical and social conceptual frameworks based on a gracious and kind relationship between human beings and nature, rather than on the mutually supporting systems of domination. The second direction of Ecofeminist work is towards a “global analysis of agency”, namely collecting data and insights on the Who, What, Why, Where and How of the global socio-ecological crisis. This plays a great role in assessing power or dealing with the international economic system, trade patterns, militarism, ill-development, and consumerism within the contexts of growing social instability, ecological ruin, environmental refugees, and the desperate life conditions of women, which take up the attention of this work.³⁸

Ecofeminism does not deny the differences among human beings or between human beings and the natural world. Rather, it is about building up our community and the universe, and envisioning new ways to live in the earth with an integrated mind and body. In the words of Rose Mary Ruether, “Ecofeminist culture must reshape our basic sense of self in relation to the life cycle. The sustaining of an organic community of plant and animal life is a continual cycle of growth and disintegration. (...) In order to learn to recycle our garbage as fertilizer for new life, as matter for new artefacts, we need to accept our selfhood as participating in the same

³⁷ Vandana Shiva, *Women and Economic Globalisation: Searching for an Alternative vision*, New Delhi: System Vision, 1995, p. 1.

³⁸ Heather Eaton, “Ecological-Feminist Theology”, pp. 77-78.

process. Humans also are finite organisms, centres of experience in a life cycle that must disintegrate back into the nexus of life and arise again in new forms.”³⁹ Thus we need to remake our relations with one another, discovering anew the true nexus of relationality that promotes and sustains life, rather than exploit and destroy.

6. Deep Ecology

The Deep Ecological movement was started in 1972 by the distinguished Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess and thinkers like Bill Devall and George Sessions.⁴⁰ Arnes made the distinction between ‘shallow’ and ‘deep’ ecology. Shallow ecology views humans as the source of all value and ascribes only instrumental (or use) value to the nonhuman world. On the other hand deep ecology rejects the anthropocentric image in favour of the relational, total-field image.⁴¹ Organisms are viewed “as knots in the biospherical net or field of intrinsic relations.”⁴² Thus humans are just one constituency among others in the cosmic community.

Deep ecology is founded on two basic principles: one is a scientific insight into the interrelatedness of all systems of life on Earth, together with the idea that anthropocentrism – human-centeredness – is a misguided way of seeing things. Deep ecologists say that an eco-centric attitude is more consistent with the truth about the nature of life on Earth. Instead of regarding humans as something completely unique or chosen by God, they see us as integral threads in the fabric of life. They believe we need to develop a less dominating and aggressive posture towards the Earth if we and the planet are to survive.

The second component of deep ecology is what Arne Naess calls the need for human self-realization. Instead of identifying with our egos or our immediate families, we would learn to identify with trees and animals and plants, indeed the

³⁹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Ecofeminism: Symbolic and Social Connections of the Oppression of Women and the Domination of Nature,” in Roger S. Cottliebe (ed.), *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, New York: Routledge, 2004, p. 397.

⁴⁰ Warwick Fox, “Deep Ecology: A New Philosophy of our Time?”, in Andrew Light and Holmes Rolston III (eds.), *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2003, p. 252.

⁴¹ Warwick Fox, “Deep Ecology: A New Philosophy of our Time?”, p. 252.

⁴² As quoted in Warwick Fox, “Deep Ecology: A New Philosophy of our Time?”, p. 252.

whole ecosphere. This would involve a pretty radical change of consciousness, but it would make our behavior more consistent with the well-being of life on Earth. We just wouldn't do certain things that damage the planet, just as you wouldn't cut off your own finger.

Arne Naess gives the following eight points for Deep Ecology:⁴³

1. The well-being and flourishing of human and non-human Life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes.
2. Richness and diversity of life-forms contribute to the realizations of these values and are also values in themselves.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital human needs.
4. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of human population. The flourishing of non-human life requires such a decrease.
5. Present human interference with the non-human world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
6. Policies must therefore be changed. These policies affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.
7. The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life quality (dwelling in situations of inherent value) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great.
8. Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation to directly or indirectly try to implement the necessary changes.

Deep ecology thus examines the symbolic, psychological and ethical patterns of destructive relations of humans with nature and suggests strategies for replacing this with a life-affirming culture.

7. Eco-philosophy (Ecosophy)

During the last thirty years philosophers in the West have critiqued the underlying assumptions of Modern philosophy in relation to the natural world. This

⁴³ Arne Naess, "The Deep Ecological Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects", in "?", in Andrew Light and Holmes Rolston III (eds.), *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2003, p. 264.

development has been part of an ongoing expansion of philosophical work involving cross-cultural studies of worldviews or ultimate philosophies. Since philosophical studies in the West have often ignored the natural world, and since most studies in ethics have focused on human values, those approaches which emphasize Eco-centric values have been referred to as Eco-philosophy. Just as the aim of traditional philosophy is *sophia* or wisdom, so the aim of Ecophilosophy is Ecosophy or ecological wisdom. The Practice of Eco-philosophy is an ongoing, comprehensive, deep inquiry into values, the nature of the world and the self. Thus Eco-philosophy is aimed at exploring a diversity of perspectives on Human-Nature contexts and interrelationships. It fosters deeper and more harmonious relationships between place, self, community and the natural world.

Other authors prefer to employ the term Ecosophy. Arne Naess defines it thus: “By an Ecosophy I mean a philosophy of ecological harmony or equilibrium. A philosophy as a kind of *sophia* (or) wisdom, is openly normative, it contains both norms, rules, postulates, value priority announcements and hypotheses concerning the state of affairs in our universe.”⁴⁴ According to Thomas Manickam, “Ecosophy, as a rational, critical, evaluative and relational understanding and vision of all beings in nature and the universe in their mutual interdependence, has a new vision of human life to offer. It is a vision of a co-existential, mutually tolerant and mutually accepting and respecting way of adjustment and adaptation in life. It is a vision of partnership in living and growing, a vision of collaboration and contribution in view of the preservation of the elements as well as the sustenance of the biosystems, which are essential for the survival of life on this planet”⁴⁵

Some contemporary philosophers who have concerned themselves with nature are Martin Buber, Martin Heidegger and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin to name a few. For Buber, nature is a ‘Thou’ with which one can enter into an ‘I-Thou’ relation, provided that nature is accepted for what it is, and not reduced to a mere object. As Buber says:

I consider a tree. I can look on it as a picture...I can perceive it as a movement...the suck of the roots, breathing of the leaves...I can classify it in

⁴⁴ Alan Drengson <http://www.ecospherics.net/pages/DrengEcophil.html>

⁴⁵ Thomas Manickam, “Ecosophy: Toward a New Vision of Human Life”, in Augustine Thottakara (ed), *Eco-dynamics of Religion: Thoughts for the third Millennium*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2000, p. 59.

a species and study it as a type...I can subdue its actual presence and form so sternly that I recognise it only as an expression of law...I can dissipate it and perpetuate it in number...In all this the tree remains my object...It can, however, also come about...that in considering the tree I become bound up in relation to it. The tree is now no longer an 'It'.⁴⁶

Heidegger believed that nature could and would show itself as it really is, but only to those who allowed it to. He opined that modern life, science, technology, industry, commerce, tourism and economics entrap us so that we forget, lose sight of, or become alienated from both ourselves and our world, making us live 'inauthentically'.⁴⁷ In other words, we fail to recognise things for what they are, to treat nature mindfully and with care. Heidegger was quite aware of the sociological and ecological implications of technology. In "The Question Concerning Technology" Heidegger suggested that the disaster that technology is becoming compels us to look more closely at the genus and *essentia* of the whole process in which we have become involved. In fact, the very character of the disaster brings out the specific nature of that genus; for the disaster is a human disaster, having the scope of affecting the whole human role and destiny on earth. Technology is a destining that has involved the human role in revealing, that is, in bringing-to-presence truth; and consequently, it raises the issue of why and for what wider cause humans possess their particular station as conscious agents in the whole process of truth happening.⁴⁸

We must stare into the depths of all that is and was and can be and recognize, above all, that what humans essentially are is, in some mysterious way, a "grant." So Heidegger says. "Only what is granted endures. That which endures primarily out of the earliest beginning is what grants."⁴⁹ If technology is seen as an imminent threat to humans, it comes to focus human attention upon that which is granted to human life since what is granted is precisely what is most threatened. As we view the specific history of that grant in the development of technology from antiquity onward, we can begin to understand that which is granted to humans in a deeper sense. This is why

⁴⁶ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1959, p. 7. See also Thomas Manickam, "Ecosophy: Toward a New Vision of Human Life", p. 58.

⁴⁷ Vernon Pratt et al. *Environment and Philosophy*, London and New York: Routledge, 2000, 76.

⁴⁸ See Heidegger, Martin, "The Question Concerning Technology," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. Ed., intro., and trans., Lovitt, William, New York: Harper & Row, 1977, 3-35.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

Heidegger could suggest that the saving power begins to grow precisely within the greatest danger. "The essence of technology is in a lofty sense ambiguous. Such ambiguity points to the mystery of all revealing, i.e., of truth."⁵⁰

Yet another great contemporary priest, scientist, philosopher and mystic was Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who can be considered as the prophet of ecology. His world vision is a great contribution to the present day ecological renewal.⁵¹ His consciousness of the immensity of the earth and its people, their common origin and destiny, came fully into its own after he had travelled extensively and worked for quite a few years in China. During his reflections in the trenches of the First World War the whole world had already appeared to him as one great "thing", as if perceived from the moon.⁵² For Teilhard de Chardin "Man is made up of very same *Weltstoff* that constitutes everything in the universe."⁵³ For he felt the basic rootedness in and with nature. He felt close to nature, and spoke of Mother Earth as the bosom of God. He was able to come to "communion with God through the Earth."⁵⁴ Therefore he invites us to "plunge ourselves into matter, to love the earth and to participate in bringing all things to their fulfilment."⁵⁵

Commenting on the ecological vision⁵⁶ of Teilhard, the eminent Teilhardian scholar Ursula King says:

The experimental, scientific starting point for Teilhard's views was the concrete contact with the earth and its surface, its rocks and stones, its soil, plants and animals, and a long history of their life. (...) Teilhard discovered

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 33.

⁵¹ See J. Kureethadam, "The Glow at the Heart of Matter: a Possible Contribution of Teilhard de Chardin for Ecological Renewal," *Divyadaan*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 2003, pp. 61-100.

⁵² Ursula King, *Christ in all Things: Exploring Spirituality with Teilhard de Chardin*, New York, Orbis Book, 1997, 149.

⁵³ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Mans Place in Nature*, trans. René Hague, London: Collins, 1966, p. 113

⁵⁴ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "Cosmic Life", in: *the Prayer of the Universe: Selected from Writings in Time of War*, p.41.

⁵⁵ Brennan r. hill, Teilhard's vision and the environment, in: *horizons* 28th January 2001, p.53.

⁵⁶ For the ecological vision of Teilhard de Chardin, see his magnum opus *Phenomenon of Man* as well as *Man's Place in Nature*, *Le Milieu Divin*, and *the The Mass on the World*. Here we find the description of the integral link between the natural, human and divine.

the unity between the earth and humankind, a humanity that is being drawn ever more closely together but is still searching for a centre, a heart.⁵⁷

Today's ecological philosophy cannot but recognise "our deep, holistic awareness of the interconnectedness of all life must be lived awareness that we experience in relation to particular beings as well as the larger whole."⁵⁸

Conclusion

In today's globalized world, ecology permeates every sphere of human life. It is pertinent to ask whether our ecological concerns call for a deeper commitment to protect and preserve nature. It is a commitment to the sanctity of life, a commitment to unity irrespective of caste, creed and nationality. The need of the hour today is an enhanced consciousness about the deteriorating environment. Ecological pluralism, thus, promotes and fosters Eco-centricity rather than Ego-centricity. It is an invitation to rediscover and develop a new wholeness and holiness, and at the same time remain fully sensitive, committed and completely involved with the world of today.

⁵⁷ Ursula King, *Christ in all Things*, p. 150.

⁵⁸ As quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 149.

FEMINISMS AND PLURALISMS

A Philosophical Perspective

Pushpa Joseph

“If there is a common condition that feminism must address, it is one of unequal patriarchies and disparate genders. The imperative, then, is to recognize how asymmetries and structures of privilege may have prevented solidarities; and to struggle on many fronts to enable the development of more viable feminisms.”¹ (Mary E. John)

The main argument of this paper is that difference and pluralism has been an integral part of the emergence and subsequent journey of feminism. Such pluralism emerges as a result of the multi-perspectival experiences of women, which is the starting point of feminist philosophizing. The first part of this paper is expository in nature. Using the interpretative lens of difference and pluralism it argues that the emergence of feminism both in the West and in the East or in India, was predicated on difference. The paper then examines feminist philosophical work on epistemologies with a view to investigating the challenges and the contributions they have to offer for a viable feminist pluralism. The ensuing model for a radical feminist pluralism must ensure a transformation of society and ideology if it is to be true to the goal of feminism.

Introduction

Feminism is a *mélange* of voices that is best named in the plural. Owing to their diverse methodologies and wide-ranging roots, feminist critiques result in a highly varied corpus.² Ecological feminists like Vandana Shiva and Rose Mary Radford Reuther highlight earth-cultures and natural preservation. On the other hand socialist feminists like Martha Nussbaum or Mary John from India seek to reveal oppression, achieve economic equity, and embrace non-hierarchical sharing. Standpoint, ethnic and third world feminists like Rajeswari Sundar Rajan endorse empirical studies of local narratives constructed at the margins of society. There are those who think of feminism as a critical practice and others who think that pure positive images of women are possible, that there is some essence of femininity out there to be captured. In a similar vein liberation feminists oppose the dichotomous approach of essentialist/French feminists who believe language is gender based. Feminist critiques of the legal system call for inclusion of personal narratives as evidence and punishment of offensive performative utterances. In short as Foss and Griffin have made clear, "Feminist perspectives are numerous, not easily categorized, and not mutually exclusive."³

¹ Mary E. John, “Feminisms and Internationalisms: A response from India,” *Gender & History*, Vol. 10. No. 3, November 1998, pp. 539-548. See 544.

² In my view feminism is not a static system, it is rather a viewpoint and process, which offers a critical evaluation of cultures, philosophies and discourse thus rupturing the cultural codifications of patriarchy. For the elaboration of such a view please refer to my article entitled “Philosophizing From Feminist Perspectives” in the 2005 publication of ACPI.

³ Foss, Griffin and Foss, *Feminism: An Analysis*, (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1981).

In recent years, Pluralism too, as a concept and practice, has become a central concern across a variety of disciplines. Chris Weedon, in her book titled *Feminism, Theory and the Politics of Difference*⁴, identifies numerous reasons—social, cultural, political and economic—for this phenomenon. Recent developments have enhanced the salience of pluralism and accentuated its conflictual character. Migrations facilitated by the modern technological revolution have diluted the character of the nation-state and introduced new diversities and particularities in several societies. In Third World countries, years of neglect of various cultural communities, at times their brutal suppression, and the failure of the nation-state project to deliver the goods has made pluralism a major source of tension, conflict and violence. As a response to this, particular social and philosophical theories and movements such as feminism has cast difference in a positive role by calling attention to previously absent or marginalized concerns.

In normal parlance the term Pluralism is defined as “a theory or system of thought which recognizes more than one ultimate principle.”⁵ Context centered philosophies nonetheless invest pluralism with a more political thrust by describing it as the existence of diversity of ethnic or cultural groups within a society or state.⁶ In feminist phraseology pluralism is the existence of diversity of theories, interpretations, or methodologies in enquiry, methodological procedures and epistemological content. Feminism as a political theory and praxis subscribes to a model of pluralism that goes beyond mere toleration of diversity to an approach to pluralism that celebrates diversities as a way of firstly exploring the possibilities for a healthy co-existence and co-operation and secondly as a project of affirming the identity formation of individuals and groups.⁷

Feminism has transformed and is itself transformed in contemporary practice. Feminist poet, Marge Pierce evocatively captures the self-critiquing and self-evaluating predisposition in feminism when she says, “If what we change does not change us we are playing with blocks.”⁸ This dynamic nature of feminism is the outcome of the experience-centered methodologies of feminist epistemologies. Feminist epistemologies ensure the pluralistic fabric of wo/men centered knowledge because of a philosophizing that is rooted in the bodily nature of experience.⁹ Moreover experience feminist linguists affirm never comes uninterpreted. There is no pure or positive experience. The corporeality of experience thus gives rise to an embodied pluralism which centers on the social and relational nature of understanding as a heuristic praxis.¹⁰

In the following section we will explore the history of difference and the genealogy of pluralisms in the discipline of feminism both as a philosophy and a transformation oriented movement.

Genealogy of Pluralism in Feminism

⁴ Chris Weedon, *Feminism, Theory and the Politics of Difference*, (London: Blackwell Publishers, 1999).

⁵Online Dictionary, <http://www.freesearch.co.uk/dictionary/pluralism>,10

⁶ Online Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, <http://www.freesearch.co.uk/dictionary/pluralism>, 30

⁷ Online Encyclopedia of Feminism, <http://www.freesearch.co.uk/dictionary/pluralism>, 56

⁸ Marge Piercy, *Circles on the Water*, Knopf (New York, N.Y., 1985), p. 85. (From the poem titled “A Shadow Play for Guilt.”)

⁹ For an elaboration of the centrality accorded to the bodily nature of experience in feminist epistemology see my article titled, “Philosophizing from Feminist Perspectives” in the 2005 Publication of ACPI. Also Cf. Lois Gehr Livezey, “Women, Power and Politics: Feminist Theology in Process Perspective” in *Process Studies*, pp.67-77, Vol. 17, Number 2, Summer, 1988. Online version <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=2744> , 8. Downloaded on 04.06.2004

¹⁰ For a relational understanding of the self, See Susan Brison, “Outliving Oneself: Trauma, Memory and Personal Identity” in Diana Tietjens et. al. (eds.) *Feminist Rethink the Self*, (Colorado: Westview Press, 1997), 4 – 50.

Feminism emerged from reflection on the difference that sex differences between men and women should and should not make to women's opportunities, power, self-conception, and material conditions. In the West, the first wave feminism which emerged in the 1800s and early 1900s, and the second wave feminism in the 1960s and 1970s focused almost exclusively on the politics of difference between women and men. During the late 1970s and 1980s, black feminists like Bell Hooks, Audre Lorde, and Barbara Smith helped to inaugurate a new politics of difference in Western feminism. They criticized feminists for equating 'woman' with 'white woman' in their theorizing and political agenda and for failing to acknowledge politically significant differences between black and white women's situation. Thus the variable of *race* became a significant critical differential marking the emergence of a groundbreaking detour in feminism's odyssey. The result was an extensive effort to develop a feminist theoretical framework and a feminist political agenda that respects differences among women.

In the article titled "Theorizing Difference from Multiracial Feminism," Zinn and Dill draw on a conceptual framework which they call "Multiracial Feminism."¹¹ This perspective is an attempt to go beyond a mere recognition of class diversity and difference among women to examine structures of domination, and specify the importance of race in understanding the social construction of gender. Despite the varied concerns and multiple intellectual stances, which characterize the feminisms of women of color, they share an emphasis on race as a primary force situating genders differently. It is the centrality of race, of institutionalized racism, and of struggles against racial oppression that link the various feminist perspectives within this framework. Together they demonstrate that racial meanings offer new theoretical directions for feminist thought.

The founding story of feminism in India¹² too is based on women's experiences of difference through discrimination against them either in the structure of personal laws¹³ or increased violence on their bodies through rape,¹⁴ dowry deaths, religious fundamentalism and the like. In her analysis of the origins and history of the women's movement in India Rajeswari Sunder Rajan remarks:

There could be no complacency either when it became clear that violence against women was on the increase, as cases of rape in police custody, deaths inside the family, and sexual harassment at work-sites and on the streets, came to be reported widely in the media; when discrimination against women in the structure of personal laws developed into a crisis of national proportions in the Shah Bano case in 1986; when religious fundamentalism and communal and caste tensions were fought on the site of gender and on women's bodies; when gender gaps in 'development', employment, nutrition, land distribution and inheritance became impossible to overlook.¹⁵

¹¹ Maxine Baca Zinn and Bonnie Thornton Dill, "Theorizing Difference From Multiracial Feminism," in *Feminist Studies*, vol. 22, 1996.

¹² This article refers only to the history of the women's movement in Post-independent India because the 1970s is understood as a point of origin for the contemporary phase of the women's movement.

¹³ For an enlightening study of the Shah Bano Case and its role in the making of the Indian feminism see, Samita Sen, "Towards a Feminist Politics? The Indian Women's Movement in Historical Perspective," in Karin Kapadia (eds.), *The Violence of Development: The Politics of Identity, Gender and Social Inequalities in India*, (New Delhi: Kali, 2002) 459-524.

¹⁴ That the Mathura rape case, the rape of a young tribal girl while in police custody in UP, is one of the significant episodes that triggered the birth of the Indian Women's Movement is by now a known fact. For a detailed analysis of the issues centered around the emergence of the Indian Women's Movement, See Mary John, "Gender, Development and the Women's Movement," in Rajeswari Sunder Rajan (eds.), *Signposts: Gender Issues in Post-Independence India*, (New Delhi: Kali for India, 1999), 101-123.

¹⁵ Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, "Introduction" in Rajeswari Sunder Rajan (eds.), *Signposts: Gender Issues in Post-Independence India*, (New Delhi: Kali for India, 1999) 1-16, see p. 3.

Within the broad identity of the women's movement in India, differences of class, caste and community, and the rural-urban divide among women was increasingly highlighted from the late 80s. Urban and middle class feminists were accused of being homogenous and western in their approach. This awareness resulted in the upsurge of different strands of Indian feminist approaches rooted in the specific nature of women's experiences. As a result new feminist philosophies and movements like dalit feminism, tribal feminism, ecological feminism, self-employed women's associations and so on emerged. In all these discourses, disciplines and sites of action, gender began to figure as an issue as well as a category of analysis. The prominence of gender is related, in the obvious level, to women's role in the political process, their identity as citizen-subjects, gender gaps in nutrition, land distribution and so on which became issues of difference that could not be ignored.

Economic globalization too has made its own contribution, which led to a wider wrestling with issues of pluralism in Indian feminism. The 1990s has seen transformed contexts as a result of the debates and policy initiatives around development in the country. Indian women were shaken by the absence of women's perspectives in the overall development process and by the insensitivity of the policy makers and planners. As Indu Agnihotri and Veena Mazumdar poignantly articulates, "The marginalization and impoverishment of the majority of women within the transforming economy became the entry point for academics into the movement."¹⁶ The 1990s thus was momentous in the history of the movement in India as feminists brought their political and intellectual engagements on to new and fruitful terrain. This involvement led to a broadening of the feminist conceptions of economy itself thus "rescuing the concept of gender from its ritualistic incantations, and making it really work for a more emancipatory and inclusive social order."¹⁷

The decade of the 90s also saw the resurgence of a new component in the history of Indian feminism. The path breaking subaltern project undertaken by Indian historians and political scientists triggered this novel venture of Indian feminists. The awareness that the project of nationalism had ignored the life stories and histories of different groups of marginal women from varied locations led to diverse researches and contributions from women in varied disciplines. These studies and involvements were also enriched by an in-depth analysis of caste hierarchies and the interlocking grid of caste, gender, class, cultural, communal, religious patriarchies.

The emergence of the eco-feminist strand of Indian feminism is also significant at this juncture. Events like the Chipko movement became the spring bed for the birth of eco-feminism in India. Led by such contextual happenings and inspired by the feminist ascription of connections between women and nature, particularly in the sense of being dominated by patriarchy, eco-feminism provided another site of feminist activism. Again, difference was conceptualized as a positive source of strength. Women's physical relation to the body of the planet allowed them to conceive of political action that was grounded in a quasi-maternal concern for the care taking of the environment.

This study has made it evident that at every significant stage in the history of feminism plurality/difference nurtured by experience played a great role in determining its forward journey and its detours or diversions. Feminists have also argued that women's history/herstories, which are marked by differences, are fragmented narratives. Feminist philosophers symbolize this dimension with poetic and philosophical power through the imagery of weaving, quilting and so on. (Thus history writing envisioned as 'quilting' feminist history becomes transformative praxis.)

¹⁶ Indu Agnihotri & Veena Mazumdar, "Changing Terms of Political Discourse: Women's Movement in India, 1970s-1990s," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 30, no. 29, 1995 July 22, p. 174.

¹⁷ Mary E. John, "Gender, Development and the Women's Movement," in Rajeswari Sunder Rajan (eds.), *Signposts: Gender Issues in Post-Independence India*, (New Delhi: Kali for India, 1999), 121.

Indian feminists from different communities have taken issue with unitary theories of gender at least since the 1980s. Speaking simultaneously from “within and against” both women's liberation and anti-caste movements have insisted on the need to challenge systems of domination, not merely as gendered subjects but as women whose lives are affected by their location in multiple hierarchies. Thus difference and diversity infuse contemporary Indian Feminist Studies.

Feminism and the Politics of Difference

In the next session we will look at various feminisms and their methodologies and epistemologies in order to see how the play on difference becomes crucial in delineating the approach of different schools.

The Politics of Women's Differences from Men – Sexism

Sameness Feminisms

Sameness Feminisms are also referred to as Liberal Feminism or Equal Rights Feminism. The emergence of the liberal or Enlightenment school of feminism, which is historically one of the earliest schools in feminism, emerged as a result of the awareness that women's social and political experiences are different from men's because they are based on stories of exclusion from the institutions of education, politics, law and other institutions of the public sphere. Liberal Feminism defines equality as ontological sameness. According to this approach, gender difference is the evil of women's situation because it enforces the non-sameness of women and men.

Feminist theorist and theologian Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza contends that Liberal feminism has wrongly been alleged of struggling to be like men in postmodern discussions. Rather she opines, “[It] struggles to improve wo/men's present situation as much as possible while generally aware that finally equal rights and justice for wo/men cannot be won without the struggle to change sexist institutions and power relations.”¹⁸

These women struggled for equality in structures of society. Liberal feminism or enlightenment feminism accepts the general structures of society, but believes that women have been excluded from participating in that society. In general liberal feminists do not believe in getting rid of basic social structures such as capitalism, representative democracy and so on. They insist that women should be allowed to participate fully in these structures. Thus liberal feminists are often concerned with whether or not women can become CEOs of companies, whether they can be ordained as priests, and whether they can serve in the military or other major institutions of society. An important exponent of this school was Mary Wollstonecraft whose seminal contribution through her book titled *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*,¹⁹ is one of the earliest classics in Liberal Feminism.

Feminist Epistemologist and Philosopher of Science, Sandra Harding, in her classification of feminist epistemological work highlights three general schools:²⁰ Feminist empiricism, Feminist Standpoint theory and Feminist Postmodernism are the three approaches. The school of liberal feminism is similar in its approach to the epistemological methodology of feminist empiricism. Feminist

¹⁸ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, (New York: Orbis Books, 2001) 60.

¹⁹ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, (London: Johnson, 1792)

²⁰ Sandra Harding, *Is Science Multicultural? Feminism, Post-colonialism and Epistemologies*, (Indiana: UP, 1998).

empiricism identifies the problem of androcentric bias in philosophy as simply “bad philosophy,” correctable through more careful adherence to existing empiricist methodology. Social biases are seen as entering and corrupting the process of enquiry in the choice of problems, the design of research, and the interpretation of evidence. Feminist empiricists therefore argue that with a larger number of women philosophers and a growing recognition of the feminist critique, feminist empiricism will be sufficient to create work which is free of gender bias and representative of a broader, more accurate perspective on the world. Such approaches to issues of gender are also evident among feminists in religion. The corresponding school of feminism in religion is called the school of feminist apologists in religion.

Feminist empiricism, in largely accepting the dominant epistemology, is more readily accepted in its turn. It is critiqued by other feminist theorists, however, as contradicting the very base of the empiricism it seeks to uphold and reform. In claiming that women and those aware of the feminist critique will produce superior work, it subverts the empiricist tenet that the enquirer, through application of the objective method, is necessarily separate from any social identity. It challenges the very idea of objectivity as defined by empiricism.

Difference Feminisms

Feminisms of difference argue that women and men have essentially different natures. They call for a positive re-evaluation of difference. This school of feminism has branched into many strands. One area in which this theory developed was in cultural feminism, which examined the question of a specifically feminine, or female aesthetic. Theorists like Luce Irigaray looked to women’s specific ways of knowing through the literary notion of *écriture féminine* – women’s writing.

Complementarity feminism, which is an offshoot, assumes that masculinity and femininity complements each other to make a whole in which the female is either the deficient or the better half. Masculine-feminine dualism is seen in this context not as oppositional but as corresponding. Radical feminism, still another development, as its name suggests, is the most radical in its view of contemporary society. This strand of difference-feminisms hold that men and women are equal but ontologically different. Radical feminists insist that it is important to rely on women’s experiences as sources of knowledge. While not as coherent a political movement as the other forms of feminism, radical feminism has been influential in its belief that modern society has been completely and in many ways incurably infected by the structures of patriarchy. Thus, radical feminists often try to create, or at least advocate the creation of absolutely new and different social relationships and institutions. This sometimes involves the creation of new religions or other forms of alternative social lifestyles as a way of embodying a new female-centered social structure.²¹ Radical feminism has a contradictory legacy and presence in feminist history, being both empowering and limiting in its valuation of difference. It paved the way for other evaluative reversals and new entries into the discussion around difference as a positive attribute.²²

Post-structuralism and postmodernism were taken up by feminists who were interested in new ways of conceptualizing difference. Difference within postmodernist and poststructuralist thought is

²¹ In the area of religion there are Christian feminists struggling to transform their tradition; and there are post-Christian feminists who have decided that Christianity can’t be transformed. There are Jewish feminists and post-Jewish feminists, Buddhist feminists and post-Buddhist feminists, Muslim feminists and post-Muslim feminists. There are wiccan feminists and native feminists and secular feminists. There are African and African American feminists, Hispanic feminists, Asian feminists, Middle Eastern feminists, European and European-American feminists. There is in truth no one path called feminism.

²² See Chris Weedon, *Feminism, Theory and the Politics of Difference*, for an analysis of the pros and cons of Radical feminism and Difference Feminisms in general.

conceptualized as a productive element. However, as Weedon cautions, postmodernism has tended to reify difference as an idea which has been stripped of its material effects, and does not ask “what differences matter?” or “different for whom?” In addition, liberation feminists argue that postmodernism’s and post-structuralism’s focus on discourse as the site of examination has tended to ignore or erase material conditions, causes, and effects of discursive production.²³

Socialist Feminisms – The Politics of Class Difference

Socialist feminism focuses on material conditions, particularly class, and how these create oppressive societal structures. It emphasizes efforts to reform communities and institutions by stressing social relationships more than individual rights. Social feminism takes as its point of departure the belief that society as a whole has been damaged by the structures of capitalism, and that women particularly have suffered under these social structures. Thus Social Feminism, while at the same time critiquing classical forms of Marxism and socialism for their patriarchal biases, is influenced by Marxism and socialism in its analysis of culture and society. For social feminists, economic structures and the institutions that support those structures are the primary areas of concern. By changing those structures, social feminists believe that the subordinated role of women in society will be transformed. The Indian feminist school of development that has offered trenchant critiques of the modern concept of development that has given rise to the culture of liberal market economy and globalization subscribes to this philosophy of feminist thought.

Standpoint Epistemology and the Politics of Knowledge

Feminist standpoint theorists claim that the position and perspective of women—their standpoint as observers and knowers of the world—can result in clearer and more accurate views of reality. Feminist standpoint theories originate in the philosophy of Hegel. Hegel posited the world views as represented by a master and a slave. The master’s dominant position leads to a universalizing perspective in which the master’s values, rules, and benefit are extended to be held true for all people, places, and times. The slave’s position allows a fuller view of reality because it must comprehend both the master’s and the slave’s perspectives. The master sees the world as an extension of his own being and will, but the slave can see a broader reality and question the unexamined assumptions. Thus, the standpoint of the slave, or of any social group to which the slave’s subordinated position is analogous, is held to be superior to that of dominant, powerful social groups. Following Hegel, the structures of social reality are better seen from the outside because this allows the expanded perspectives necessary for clear vision and thus maximizes objectivity, rather than decreasing it.

Ethnic and Third World Feminism

Among those who question the usefulness and the validity of any single Archimedean standpoint are third world feminists in general and Indian feminists in particular. These writers critique the standpoint theory primarily on the grounds of fractured and diverse identities, claiming that there is no one “women’s” viewpoint.²⁴ While all women share the experience of oppression in ubiquitously patriarchal societies, this experience differs profoundly by race, class, caste, and culture. Instead of a single standpoint, there are multiple perspectives, all with equal validity and (sometimes) equal claims to truth. Thus, third world feminism accepts the critiques made by standpoint theorists of empiricism, but

²³ See Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 62

²⁴ Lois Gehr Livezey, “Women, Power and Politics: Feminist Theology in Process Perspective” in *Process Studies*, pp.67-77, Vol. 17, Number 2, Summer, 1988. Online version <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=2744> , 10.Downloaded on 04.06.2004.

goes beyond them in also rejecting Enlightenment goals of finding absolute truth. There is no one true story which is valid for all places and people at all times, rather there are many small stories. The possibility of universal or totalizing theories is rejected, because all knowledge is seen as temporal, dynamic, and contextual. They also dispute the Enlightenment conception of the transcendental subject who can be outside of the historical and social forces shaping others.²⁵ Finally, as with so many feminist thinkers, they also challenge dualities such as reason/emotion, subject/object, public/private, theory/practice, and knowledge/experience. Feminists have long recognized the parallel between these dualities and the male/female duality—and the fact that in all these oppositions it is the second of the two concepts, which is devalued. By placing these concepts in opposition, we miss their linkages; by conceiving of each pair in a hierarchical relationship, we inappropriately privilege one half; and by creating a firm division, we exclude the possibility of an integrated whole or even of overlap. Third world feminisms emphasize differences among women (caste, race, ethnicity, class, etc.) and focus on coalition-building among different groups of women.

Indian feminism too has a long and a complicated history of pluralisms, disparities and divisions. As Mary John says the question of the dominance or hegemony of colonial rule, the uneven transformation of modes of existence both economic and cultural, problems concerning ongoing or new dependencies – Third world, neo-colonial, post-colonial, the reconstitution through colonial and Western frames of the very notions of pluralisms and difference themselves – all of these are live issues yet to be resolved.

Feminism speaks in many different voices and uses an array of intellectual, rhetorical and emotional registers. The differences among various feminist theoretical frameworks and political goals are considerable and rich. Some of these theories and practices seem exclusive of each other while others have great affinity, overlap and flow into each other. In the ensuing section we will look into the commonalities in these various approaches in order to explore the various possibilities they present for considering a viable pluralism within feminisms.

Commonalities in the Approaches

First, all feminist philosophies highlight the hazards involved in patriarchal structuring and andocentric linguistic modes of conceiving reality that give rise to androcentric conceptions both in thought and praxis. They are critical of a linear thinking which forms the underpinnings for the construction of a linear understanding of development. They critique the assumption that logic and science, particularly technology, can solve our problems. These critiques are highly suspicious of grand narrative, preferring local or personal narratives from which truths can be induced. They seek to furrow out "false consciousness," particularly the masculine and Enlightenment "false consciousnesses" because of the damage they have done to women.

Second, feminist critiques of patriarchy in social and religious structures see gender as constructed by discourse. The underlying philosophy behind such an idea is that social experience is gendered. That is, the social order creates, assigns, and influences our roles, values, opportunities, status, environments, and perspectives in part based on gender. Gender itself is a social construct distinct from the biological category of sex. Gender is not an ontological given, but is "an effect of relations of knowledge and power which permeate all areas of life."²⁶ In addition, the forms which this gender organization takes, are not neutral, but "involve interests which construct the meanings of difference in competing and often contradictory ways."²⁷ Gender, then, is not simply a difference with symmetrical or

²⁵ Maithreyi Krishnaraj, "Motherhood: Power and Powerlessness" in Jasodhara Bagchi (eds.), *Indian Women: Myth and Reality*, (Hyderabad: Sangam Books, 1995), 34-43.

²⁶ Weedon, 5.

apolitical configurations, but rather has been developed with relations of power and discourse. Presently in most cultures gender is informed largely by binary thinking which positions male and female as opposites whose pairing is 'natural' and analogous to a variety of other dualisms: mind-body, intellect-body, reason-emotion, and so forth.

Third, most feminist critiques seek to prevent reason from dominating the search for truth; instead spirituality and emotion, to name just two alternatives, are given new influence. Most feminists recognize the failure of reason and science to solve societies problems. Feminist highlight that the 20th and 21st centuries have unleashed immense violence and cruelty on humanity especially children and women. To go beyond such violence and find new solutions to old problems, feminists respect such emotions as empathy to break through to new truths, while others embrace a rhetoric of spirituality that leads to an appreciation of the rhetorical corridors to transcendence. In this regard it is important to underscore that four distinctive features structure the ethics and epistemology of feminism: (1) a relational ontology; (2) a relational ideal; (3) a methodology of caring attentiveness; and (4) an insistence upon knowledge of the particular.

Fourth, feminist critiques attempt to endorse a new kind of *forensic speaking*. Whether it be the use of situated, local, and/or personal narratives for evidence in the court room, or the call for treating certain phrases as performative utterances, feminist legal theory would reconfigure forensic speaking to take into account many of the postmodern themes of Foucault and Lyotard. Such an undertaking also benefits from the 'strong objectivity' of Harding's theory by grounding its evidence in reality and recognizing that social knowledge is constructed. The implications for research into connections between rhetoric and the law are significant. This move towards considering speech as performative is based on the philosophical notion that all theory, like all practice, is inherently political; it necessarily either perpetuates or challenges the status quo. The development of knowledge and its application through action are social enterprises, and therefore have political and ethical aspects, which cannot be disassociated from them.

Fifth, feminist philosophy has explored the relationship of power and knowledge to demonstrate that by keeping important information from others one participates in a kind of enslavement. Feminist studies have also explored further how the latter has worked in the news media to symbolically annihilate women.²⁸ Indian feminists like Jasodhara Bagchi has analysed how the media rhetorizes news with a masculine bias. In essence she asks, 'How can we free women from the tyranny of media messages limiting their lives to hearth and home?' Feminist rhetorical scholars have answered this question by dialoguing with audience members, putting speakers on an equal par with their audiences, and calling for more inclusiveness in public address. In like manner, Foss, Griffin and Foss call for an invitational rhetoric that is "built on a new set of values. . ."²⁹ This approach is founded on the philosophical notion that subjects and objects are not and cannot be separated. A relationship exists between knower and the object, and each necessarily affects the other. Theory and practice are more accurate and clear when this reflexivity is consciously accepted, rather than attempting the scientific ideal of objectivity through separation. A corollary of the above is that personal experience and grounded research are valid forms of knowledge.³⁰ Feminist thought directs attention to and admits a broader range of experience as legitimate and valid knowledge. Other forms of knowing and other knowers exist beyond the limited authorities and expert status granted by traditional scientific method and the dominant patriarchal culture.

²⁷ Ibid., 5.

²⁸ See Margaret Shanti and Corona Mary (eds) *We Dare to Speak*, (Trichy: Worth, 1994)

²⁹ Mary Romero and Abigail Stewart, (eds.) *Women's Untold Lives: Breaking Silence, Talking Back, Voicing Complexity*, (New York: Routledge, 1999).

³⁰ Elisabeth Porter, *Feminist Perspectives on Ethics* (New York: Longman, 1999), 51.

Sixth and related, some feminists infuse the public realm with consideration of interpersonal situations and relationships. The emphasis on the interpersonal brings to light the intimate, which means that feminist rhetoric focuses on different issues than masculine rhetoric. The importance of caring relationships also affects a speaker's relationship with her/his audience while at the same time empowering those who seek caring relationships or care giving. Thus feminist philosophy on interrelationality gives an alternative understanding of power, which does not seek for itself but in order to empower others.³¹ Noted Afro-American feminist Lorde emphasizes empathy and equality, and thereby embodies the notion of power.³² She also urges women and the marginalized groups to use their position as "outsiders within" to reject imposed hierarchies and take up new positions that they define and determine. This relational ontology also leads to the understanding that theory and practice cannot and should not be separated. Feminist theory is explicitly emancipatory and critical. Most theorists believe that knowledge contains an imperative to action; theory and praxis are seen in a mutually reinforcing, reflexive relationship.

These six contributions are born of an assessment of the multi perspectival approach of feminist criticism. These commonalities, I propose, offer a refreshing challenge to the notion of pluralism in feminisms. Mary E. John rightly remarks, "As we approach the twenty-first century in the global context of a uni-polar world order, struggles by women and by feminists have never been more critical for thinking about and working toward a more democratic and equal world. If there is no single universal method that will take all of us there, the specific paths being forged in particular locations must be our starting point."³³ This paper as it recognizes, acknowledges and celebrates the diversity in feminism will also try to see how this diversity, which emerges as a result of various experiences, can be politically organized in a manner that is more inclusive than the liberal or exclusive models.

The point of the exercise done above was to show how feministic pluralism is intrinsically related to women's experiences. The heterogeneous nature of women's experiences both of exclusion, violence, oppression and resistance, historical, philosophical, religious agency calls then for the understanding of a pluralism not of the liberal breed instead a pluralism that ensures healthy, emancipatory structures for all especially the poor and marginalized.

Pluralism with a Perspective

A feminist pluralism does not require that all social experience be reconciled into a single harmonious framework, but it does demand recognition of political and social situatedness. Feminist pluralism is a radical and democratic pluralism. The word radical is derived from *radix*, which means root. What I mean by democracy here is not representative government nor majority rule but the root-sense of democracy, which means the exercise of power by people who are all equal. In my opinion equality should be the driving force for a radical feminist pluralism. By equality, however, I do not mean sameness. To feminism, equality means the aspiration to eradicate not gender differentiation, but gender hierarchy. The feminist issue is not the gender difference but *the difference gender makes*, the *social*

³¹ Diana Meyers, "Feminist Perspectives on the Self" in Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Online version <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-self/#BM2> Downloaded on 18.01.2005 Also see Elisabeth Porter, Feminist Perspectives on Ethics (New York: Longman, 1999), 7.

³² Audre Lorde, *The Erotic in Feminist Theory*, (London: Blackwell. 1984) 4-12.

³³ Mary E. John, "Feminisms and Internationalisms: A response from India." Op. Cit., 546

meaning imposed upon women's bodies—what it means to be a woman or a man is a social process and, as such, is subject to change.

As such radical equality means the abolishment of existing dehumanizing inequalities engendered by domination so that justice is done and diversity is celebrated. Rousseau's definition of equality is relevant here. In his *On the Social Contract*, book 2, chapter 10 he writes,

With regard to equality, this word must not be understood to mean that degrees of power and wealth should be exactly the same, but rather that with regard to power, it should be incapable of all violence, and never exerted except by virtue of status and the laws; and with regard to wealth, no citizen should be so opulent that he can buy another, and none so poor that is constrained to sell himself.³⁴

Feminist pluralism is not a liberal, non interventionist diversity which fails to engage with the known effects of unjust social power. What Manoranjan Mohanty rightly observes about social movements can be applied to feminist pluralism which is to be put at the service of the least in society. "As expanding efforts for the creative transformation of society," feminist pluralism from the perspective of the most marginalized communities of women, "seek to alter the prevailing structure of power, project values of justice, equality and freedom adding new dimension to them."³⁵

A radical pluralism, I insist, while it stresses the importance of recognizing difference and diversity, is not an invitation to ethical abdication, in other words any form of injustice and oppression are not simply other valid perspectives. The liberation goal of feminism resolves some of this dilemma, as it always highlights the necessity of self-conscious examination and reflexivity. Moreover not all knowledge is equally defensible empirically. Even as we recognize the contextuality, partiality and fallibility of truth and knowledge, evidence does exist that allows us to say some knowledge and belief is less false than others.

Radical Pluralism Is not Interest Group Liberalism

Liberal pluralism is defined by its emphasis on Individuals or "Interest groups" as the key unit of political action. These groups most often act out of the desire for self-interested economic rewards. The model assumes that interest groups are homogeneous and easily defined, making it possible for representatives to represent accurately myriad holders of the interest. It also assumes, and celebrates, the notion that if interests are organized well, and are supported by ample resources, participants with those interests will find success. And importantly, the model stresses open access—the penetrability and heterogeneity of the political system. Feminists critique interest-group liberalism, which they call a 'vulgarized' version of pluralism. They lament the fact that the model negates what they see as the transformatory mode of political life—a focus on philosophy, morality, and dialogue. Instead, they argue, this existing form of pluralism focuses on the rituals of the competitive process. The management of interests has replaced the more noble notions and practices of politics. The application of the theory of Interest Group liberalism as pluralism always favors the groups in existence against those in the process of formation.³⁶ With such limited and frozen participation, pluralism—in both theory and practice—became, in Weedon's words, biased. A biased pluralism is one in which some concerns,

³⁴ As quoted in Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 7.

³⁵ Manoranjan Mohanty, "Social Movements in Creative Society: Of Autonomy and Interconnection", in M. Mohanty et al. (eds), *People's Rights: Social Movements and the State in the Third World*, (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1988) 65-66.

³⁶ See Weedon, *Op. Cit.*, 64.

aspirations, and interests are privileged while others are placed at a serious disadvantage. There is no protection, in the model or practice, for un-represented minorities, whether cultural, ideological, caste, sex or class-based. A radical feminist pluralism highlights the importance of empowering the institutions of civil society and thus increasing people's—men and women—powers.

A Pluralism That Moves from Cultural Politics to Accepting Differences

Rajni Kothar says, “Diversity is not to be seen as a ‘problem’ to be managed but a resource to build upon, a basic resource emanating from the very nature of both human and natural orders. Diversity happens to be the essential ‘nature of nature’; it also happens to be the essential characteristic of culture throughout human history. The same is the case with any lasting and self-sustaining polity.”³⁷ Fostering an inclusive approach, a feminist pluralism will be enhanced by stories of struggle of Indian wo/men. It will respect the heterogeneity of women and yet foster unity in diversity. It will lead to the embrace of a threefold movement: the inward, the outward and the forward. As Ann Cooper says, “The more appropriate image for women's spiritual journeys today is a spiral. For a spiral travels inward, outward and forward. These are not opposing directions, but part of a flow; a flow that moves inward to encounter the indwelling and transcendent God—the sacred in oneself, outward to encounter God and the sacred in others—in human communities, and the larger community of life; and forward in conscious and active participation with God in shaping future history.”³⁸

The Other as Other: Hearing, Listening, Understanding

Ann Diller, in her paper titled “Pluralisms for Education,”³⁹ argues that neither a laissez-faire nor a cooperative conception of pluralism is adequate to “the relational tasks of human communities.” Models of pluralism, if they are to lend themselves to the building of communities, must ask more of us than simply getting along with one another. Pluralism has to mean actively attending to others, appreciating their distinctive perspectives, not just letting them be different. As a student once put it, in a course I taught on feminism and pluralisms, “What’s the good of everyone learning to express themselves better if no one’s listening anyway?” Speaking assumes the presence of a hearing Other — not just someone who knows the language but, as Derrida argues, a friend, a sympathetic and interested interlocutor.

To hear is not yet to listen, and to listen is not yet to understand. While there are affinities between hearing, listening, and understanding, there are also important differences which must be recognised and honoured if pluralism in feminisms is to bear witness to an exchange between men and women and to make room for the unexpected to emerge. Feminist pluralism is an effort to effect a revolution in personal relations. Such an enterprise entails a respect for the other—a respect that in turn calls for humility: the recognition that I am not the whole, that I have much to learn from the other, that the words of the other are not reducible to my own. Without such respect and humility the project of pluralisms risks becoming an appropriation through which the other, the word of the other, are reduced to me, to my own.

³⁷ Rajni Kothari, *Rethinking Development: In Search of Humane Alternatives* (Delhi: Ajanta, 1990), 224.

³⁸ Ann Cooper, “The Political Economy of Women: Reflections for a Women Centered Spirituality” in Edith Tracy (eds.) *The Ekklesia of Women*, (NY : Orbis, 2002) 36

³⁹ Ann Diller, “Pluralisms For Education: An Ethics Of Care Perspective,” in *Philosophy of Education* , Online version, Downloaded on 16th March 2006 from http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/EPS/PES-_docs/Thompson.HTM Yearbook/92

Feminism points out that embracing difference does not mean doing away with conflict. Relationships consist not only in our agreements with one another but also in our differences — Derrida observes, for example, that conflict between friends, for example, is not a problem for friendship but simply a fact about it. To become friends is not to erase difference but to bring it into play in fruitful ways. *Hearing* a friend means something more than recognizing what she says (empathizing), or caring about what she says (sympathizing); it means participating in what she is undergoing, being made party to it. We tend to assume that difference is an obstacle to understanding, yet it is through the very play of differences that meaning is constructed. As Irigaray says, “If we keep on speaking sameness . . . as we have been taught to speak, we miss each other, fail ourselves.”⁴⁰

A Pluralism Predicated on Equality

Pluralism of the liberal kind is of limited value in effecting a transformation of social relationships. A liberal pluralism predicates personal autonomy on simply letting others be — whether that means leaving them alone or appreciating their distinctiveness. The differences of sex, class, caste, gender, race, ethnic groups and so on cannot be understood simply in terms of each group’s distinctive cultural values and practices, for those differences are also a function of power relations. Group experiences in a patriarchal and capitalist society are not only coordinated with and adjusted to one another but structurally interdependent such that the assumptions, needs, privileges and entitlements of dominant groups shape the experience of the groups that they exploit or oppress. In Lani Robert’s phrase, they are co-ordered.⁴¹ Being upper caste male means what it does because of the specific relations they have in our society with oppressed dalit groups. Insofar as Brahminic values are parasitic upon the perpetuation of oppressive social relations, they cannot be treated simply as parallel to those of oppressed groups. Nor are the values of subordinated groups unproblematically autonomous. In upper class and upper caste liberal societies, those values designated as feminine, for example, help to obscure the shortcomings of liberalism — in effect, they mediate and legitimate patriarchal power. Celebrating women’s emotional responsiveness and sensitivity without asking what role these play in gender relations means ignoring the role women play in perpetuating oppressive social conditions.⁴²

Radical pluralism or pluralism with a perspective, would entail co-ordering different forms of experience in recognition of their interdependence. It would mean giving definite structure to social relations such that a dominant group does not set the conditions for others’ participation. In liberal pluralism, on the other hand, members of the dominant groups set the terms that protect their own privileges and ensure their own flourishing. Pluralism is the flexibility given to other groups to claim their own meanings and values so long as they refrain from challenging the privileges of the dominant group. A liberal pluralism guarantees protection of the values of the groups in power.

What we can do, however, is to become critically aware of our own assumptions and sense of entitlement — and be willing to call them into question.⁴³ The argument of many black, Indian, and

⁴⁰ Irigaray, Luce: *This Sex Which is Not One* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York: 1985), p. 205.

⁴¹ Lani Roberts, “From Invisibility to Inspiration: Feminism and Philosophy” a paper prepared for the lecture series, “Ideas Matter,” at the Department of Philosophy, Oregon State University, and presented on February 3, 1994. Online Version, Website: <http://oregonstate.edu/dept/philosophy/ideas/papers/lroberts.html> downloaded on 12.03.2005

⁴² Susan Wadley, “Women and the Hindu Tradition”, in Rehana Ghadially (ed.) *Women in Indian Society*, (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1988) 23-43

⁴³ See W. Feinberg, “A Role for Philosophy of Education in Intercultural Research: A Reexamination of the Relativism-Absolutism Debate,” in *Philosophy of Education 1989 (Normal Illinois: Philosophy of Education Society, 1989)*, 2-19 for such an analysis. Also Audrey Thompson, “Radicalizing Pluralism” in *Philosophy of Education*,

socialist feminists is that those of us with privileges have to be willing to forego them. Appreciating others and enabling them to flourish may call for giving up something from our own stance, not simply affirming all stances. Relativism assumes that all perspectives have an equal claim to making sense of the world; the problem for relativism is how to reconcile divergent accounts of overlapping experience. Insofar as pluralism is modelled after relativism, it confronts the same problem: how to bridge difference, how to get beyond co-existence to co-knowledge and co-acknowledgement.

A radical form of pluralism is one that valorizes difference, plays with difference, and acknowledges diverse groups without relinquishing political judgment. We cannot afford to ignore the ways in which differences have to do with power. Feminists have argued for a form of pluralism that identifies perspectives as co-ordered and not merely co-existing. Particular viewpoints never represent the ultimate or definitive word; rather the tensions among various standpoints testify to their “transitional” status. They are intermediaries to knowledge, rather than a guarantee of knowledge.

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

A Philosophical Critique

George Karuvelil

Introduction

Plurality of religions is a stubborn fact that has refused to be subdued by “crusades and colonialism, preaching and proselytizing, argument and apologetics.”¹ This calls for serious thinking and response on the part of philosophers and theologians. An important response has come to us in the form of the so-called pluralistic theology of religions. Once touted as the Christian theology of the future and ardently embraced by lots of self-styled liberal Christians all over the world, this “pluralistic” stand seems to have lost its steam in the more recent years. And this does not seem to be merely due to pressure from the Vatican authorities, but also due to serious doubts about its tenability. But it is one thing to criticize the pluralists, and quite another to be able to respond to the phenomena of religious diversity in a way that can make these religious differences a means to human flourishing and not a source of strife and destruction. And the challenge is to do this in a way that does not undermine or trivialize the faith of the believers. If we are to do this we need greater clarity regarding certain basic issues that have plagued the pluralistic thinking. More specifically, there are two kinds of issues about which I think we need more clarity. One is about the nature of the pluralistic discourse and the other is about the epistemology of pluralism. And my hope is that this paper help bring greater clarity to both. Accordingly the paper is divided into three parts. The first under the subtitle of “Ethics of Pluralism” is meant to clarify the logical and ethical status of pluralistic discourse and how it differs from religious discourse proper. The second part is meant to throw light on certain problematic aspects of the pluralists’ epistemology. Then in the last part, I shall suggest a new way of conceiving epistemology in general and epistemology of religious experience in particular. Let us begin, however, with some basic terminology.

Broadly, ‘pluralism’ as opposed to ‘monism’, is defined as any doctrine that holds that there are ultimately many things or many kinds of things.² Applied to religion, then, it means that there is a variety of beliefs and practices that go under the name of religion. Some authors, however, would not use the word ‘religious pluralism’ to refer to the sheer fact of the multiplicity of religions; they use the word ‘plurality’ for this.³ Distinguishing ‘religious

¹ Philip Quinn, “Religious Pluralism,” in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, version 1.0, London: Routledge, 1998

² Edward Craig, “Pluralism,” in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, version 1.0, London: Routledge, 1998.

plurality’ from ‘religious pluralism’ they use the latter term to refer to a certain positive attitude towards religious plurality, an attitude and evaluation that considers plurality as something good and desirable and not merely a brute fact to be grudgingly tolerated. This position is contrasted with exclusivism and inclusivism which I shall explain shortly. What is the reason (the motive) for urging such a positive outlook? And what are the philosophical grounds on which this positive outlook is advocated? The next two parts of the paper are built around these two questions.

1. Ethics of Pluralism

The reason for urging a positive outlook to other religions than one’s own is predominantly moral. This is a common thread running through the works of various pluralistic thinkers. Gandhi, for example, defines pluralism (*syadavada* or *anekantavada*) as the view that both he and his honest critics are right from their respective points of view, goes on to say, “And this knowledge saves me from attributing motives to my opponents or critics.”⁴ Surely, his concern here is moral. Similar is the case of Western pluralists like John Hick and Paul Knitter. They define their “pluralism” in opposition to ‘exclusivism’ and ‘inclusivism’, seen as two versions of absolutism.⁵ Exclusivism, in this scheme, is the view that there is, or there can be, only one religion which is true or which can be an effective means of salvation. Inclusivism is the view that only one religion possesses the final truth (or is really the only effective means of salvation) and other religions are more or less true (or more or less effective means of salvation) to the extent they approximate to this one religion. Thus, both exclusivism and inclusivism privilege one religion over the others. Needless to say that the privileged religion is one’s own. It is this privileging of one religion over the others that the pluralists repudiate. They see this privileging as imperialistic and morally repugnant. Christian absolutism, in particular is seen to have lent itself to the “validation and encouragement of political and economic evil.”⁶ Therefore, the only tenable stand in the face of multiple religions, according to them, is pluralism.

The irony of the situation is that the very accusation the pluralists make about the inclusivists and exclusivists comes to be directed at them. In the words of Mark Heim, “It is

³ See for example, Mathew Jayanth, “From Plurality to Pluralism: Constructing a Sociological Theory of Religious Pluralism,” *Vidyajyoti: Journal of Theological Reflection*, 64/11 (2000), 807-24.

⁴ M.K. Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. XXIX. Delhi-6: The Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India, 1968, p.411

⁵ Although this threefold division of one’s stand with regard to religions is found to be defective, this has come to be accepted as almost canonical in the Christian literature on religious pluralism.

⁶ John Hick, *Disputed Questions in Theology and Philosophy of Religion*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1993, p.78

clearly stated that those without a pluralistic understanding of their faith stand urgently in need of fulfilment and enlightenment. Without such conversion they and their traditions are at least latent threats to world peace and justice, morally dangerous as well as theologically wrong. Oddly enough, these opponents of religious claims to superiority see no hope, not only for the Christian tradition but for all other religions and the world itself, unless their [i.e., pluralists'] views prevail.”⁷ He puts it very strongly when he says, “Thus pluralism repeats the dynamic of the strong exclusivism it opposes: those who disagree are not rational or not worthy or both”.⁸ Heim also denies any discernible direct link between conflict and religious diversity.⁹

Hick responds to this criticism. He says, “Pluralism is ... not another historical religion making an exclusive religious claim, but a meta-theory about the relation between the historical religions. Its logical status as a second-order philosophical theory or hypothesis is different in kind from that of a first-order religious creed or gospel. And so the religious pluralist does not, like the traditional religious exclusivist, consign non-believers to perdition...”¹⁰ He also makes it very explicit that the terms he uses, like the “Real”, the “Transcendent” the “Ultimate” and so on, are formal categories without specific religious content like God, Allah, Brahman and so on. It is clear, therefore, that he is engaged in a meta-level inquiry. The critics, to be sure, are not satisfied. Who is right? In order to answer this question we must realize that what we took to be essentially an ethical question has turned out to be a more complex one involving three different dimensions –logical, moral and the existential. Let us examine, therefore, all these three aspects of the question.

1.1 The Logical Dimension

It is easy to see that John Hick is indeed right in the matter of formal logic. Confusing two logically distinct levels of discourse can lead to inexorable paradoxes. There are a number of such paradoxes familiar in philosophy. Take Cretan's paradox, for example. When a Cretan says, "All Cretans are liars," this statement is true only if it is false, i.e., if the speaker is saying the truth. Then his statement is false because there is at least one Cretan to whom that statement does not apply. Bertrand Russell realized that the paradox appears because we treat a class on par with its members. And the paradox would disappear the moment we recognize that a class of individuals is not itself an individual, that it belongs to a

⁷ Mark Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995, p.102.

⁸ Ibid., p. 143.

⁹ See, especially chapter 7.

¹⁰ John Hick, “The Possibility of Religious Pluralism: A Reply to Gavin D’Costa,” *Religious Studies*, 33, (1997), p. 163.

different logical level.¹¹ Similar is the case when an internal understanding of a religion (Christianity or Islam, as an *individual* of the class ‘religion’) is confused with an external understanding (the class ‘*religion*’). Inclusivism and exclusivism are internal understandings whereas pluralism has the status of a meta-theory, an external understanding. Therefore, it is not to be treated on par with an internal understanding.

1.2 The Ethical dimension

This logical solution, however, leaves the ethical question untouched. The pluralists may not condemn others to perdition in the manner of some religious believers, but aren’t they saying that their position is more enlightened and just towards other religious traditions than the exclusivists and the inclusivists? Paul Knitter, at least, explicitly acknowledges that from being a missionary of Christian religion he has become a missionary of religious pluralism.¹² And why would anyone do that if not for the conviction of being right? And this seems inevitable, given the very nature of philosophical convictions, at least the significant convictions. In the words of Mark Heim,

Philosophical positions are not opinions but judgements. And ... we are not in a position to concede that someone else’s basis of judgment is superior to ours. Someone else’s expertise or information may well be so. Such data enriches and expands the basis for our evaluation. But to acknowledge that others have better values or beliefs *by* which to judge is in effect to adopt their perspective and drop any other.¹³

Philosophical positions are definite perspectives, and perspectives cannot be combined. They come one at a time to a customer.¹⁴ To think otherwise is to deceive oneself. We might say, therefore, that the pluralists, in not recognising this situated character of philosophy, carry on their work in the manner befitting the typical children of moderns like Descartes, pursuing the mirage of a supposedly disembodied reason.

1.3 The Existential Dimension

A related issue we must consider in this context is the existential nature of religious and theological discourse. More than anyone else, it was that passionate Dane, Kierkegaard who recognised this. Opposing “objective” thinkers like Hegel who leisurely go through the process of *approximating* to the one final mega-truth, Kierkegaard challenged his contemporaries to *appropriate* even a bit of truth they possess and be converted, a process that he called “subjective” thinking.¹⁵ In contemporary times, even a thinker like Wittgenstein

¹¹ See, "Logical Paradoxes," in Paul Edwards (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

¹² Paul Knitter, *One Earth Many Religions: Multifaith Dialogue & Global Responsibility*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995, p.18.

¹³ Heim. *Salvations...*, p.137

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 134

(who had no particular religious affiliations) recognised this character of religious discourse. He elaborates on this theme rather extensively. Here is one of his well-known examples:

Suppose someone were a believer and said: "I believe in a Last Judgement," and I said: "Well, I'm not so sure. Possibly." You would say that there is an enormous gulf between us. If he said "There is a German aeroplane overhead," and I said, "Possibly. I'm not so sure," you would say we were fairly near.¹⁶

He would go on to say that it is not a question of being anywhere near him, but "being on an entirely different plane".¹⁷ What does this enormous difference between the two kinds of beliefs –an objective or ordinary matter of fact belief like the German aeroplane being overhead and a religious belief in the Last Judgment consist in? The difference is that religious truth claims constitute a way of life. According to Vincent Brümmer, "they are 'existential' in a way that the truth claims of science are not. It might make sense to say: 'It is true that the planet Jupiter exists and is the largest planet of our solar system, but I don't really care much about that.' It is however, absurd to say that God exists and is the personal creator of the universe, but I don't really care much about that.'" ¹⁸ One can truly believe that the aeroplane overhead is a German one without in anyway affecting one's way of life; so too with the planet Jupiter. But if one believes truly in the Last Judgment or in a personal Creator it cannot but affect the way one lives. Such beliefs are not one more belief among others, but beliefs that guide everything else. This is what led Kierkegaard to define truth in terms of passionate involvement and subjective appropriation rather than neutral, dispassionate observation and eventual approximation. It is the same existential character of religious discourse that is brought out by Paul Tillich in his discussion of "ultimate concern".¹⁹

This raises a serious question about the nature of the pluralistic discourse. If the pluralistic theory is really a meta-level discourse, it is hard to see why they should be calling the faithful to cross "a theological Rubicon"²⁰ and effect a "Copernican revolution"²¹ in theological thinking, since it is doubtful if theology ever was, or was ever meant to be, meta-theory. One does not have to have any high level of profundity to realize that theological statements like "The Lord is my shepherd", or "Jesus is the saviour" and so on are not meta-

¹⁵ Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, translated by David F. Swenson; completed and edited by Walter Lowrie. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944, see part II in particular.

¹⁶ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology, & Religious Belief*, ed. Cyril Barrett. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970, p.53

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Vincent Brümmer, *Model of Love: A Study in Philosophical Theology*. Cambridge: CUP, 1993, p. 18.

¹⁹ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*. Vol.1. London: Nisbet & Co. Ltd., 1953. see in particular, pp.14-15

²⁰ John Hick and Paul Knitter, eds., *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*. London: SCM Press, 1988, p.viii.

²¹ John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*. London: Fount Paperbacks, 1977, p. 120ff.

level discourse. They are rather, first order religious discourse arising from one's religious experience. As such they are also existential in the manner we have discussed, and not meta-discourse of a detached observer who approximates to a better and better hypothesis. To call a meta-theory as theology, therefore, is to mistake the very nature of theology and its existential character. But there is, and there has always been, the danger of substituting first order discourse of theology with a theoretical discourse detached from its experiential roots. The traditional dictum, "Theology is to be done on one's knees", was meant to ward off this danger and ensure that theology arises from one's own religious experience (or one's appropriation of the Christian experience). We might conclude this first part of our discussion, therefore, by saying that John Hick is indeed right in claiming a different logical status for his theory than those of religious statements; but by that very same admission, his theory loses its claim to be a (Christian) theological stand. Moreover, he does not really face the ethical challenge posed by the critics.

2. The Pluralist Strategies

The second question we raised was about the philosophical grounds that enable one to affirm a positive outlook to religious diversity. There have been broadly two ways in which this has been done. One may be called the theoretical or essentialist approach and the other is an empirical or family resemblance approach. A theoretical approach without sufficient respect for the empirical differences provides an Essentialist pluralism whereas an empirical solution without sufficient theoretical insight gives us a sort of Pure pluralism. And both these are unsatisfactory, as we shall see.

2.1 Essentialism

Essentialist Pluralism is the idea that there is a common core or essence to religions together with the idea that it is this core that is important and not the accidentals that are diverse. This is the popular Indian approach, popularised by modern thinkers like Gandhi, Radhakrishnan and others. It has its sanction in the Vedic text: "Being (Sat) is one, but sages speak about it variously".²² All religions are thus essentially the same, plurality is a matter of different people speaking differently about the same reality. Calling himself an *anekantavadi* or *syadavadi*, Gandhi goes on to give the story of the blind men and the elephant. "The seven blind men who gave seven different descriptions of the elephant were all right from their respective points of view, and wrong from the point of view of the man who knew the elephant. I very much like this doctrine of manyness of reality."²³ Other favourite imageries

²² *RigVeda*, I, 164,46

that explain pluralism include those of the different rivers leading to the same ocean, and different paths leading to the same summit. This is essentialism: There is one elephant, one ocean and one summit beyond the perceived plurality. Similarly, all religions are said to have an essence beyond their pluralistic manifestations. The title of a recent book says it all: *We Are One*. The Author says, “Since the Supreme God, the Parameshwar, Allah, Ahura Mazda or Hari is one, there has to be and there is an essential unity of basic teachings in the Scriptures”.²⁴

In the West, Immanuel Kant is credited with an essentialist view. He distinguishes between “pure religious faith” that can be convincingly communicated to everyone and “historical faith” that differ. The content of “pure religious faith” is the understanding of moral duties as God-given.²⁵ John Hick’s theory of pluralism may also be considered essentialist. This may surprise some because Hick suggests explicitly that religion be seen as a family-resemblance concept (to be discussed in the next section) than as exemplifying one common essence.²⁶ We will have more to say about Hick’s essentialism later on. But for the moment we merely note that he sees different religions as different responses to the Transcendent, the Real, or the Ultimate. And each of these responses, i.e., traditional religions, provide “a more or less equally effective context” for salvation/liberation.²⁷ John Dewey draws a distinction between “religion” and the “Religious”. He takes various “religions” with their diverse beliefs and practices as having nothing in common, but considers the “Religious” as an attitude common to humans.²⁸ The attempt is to anaesthetize the Religious from the concrete, plurality of religions as they exist. Dewey, like Hick, takes the plurality of religions with their various creeds, codes, cults etc. to be so many different historical, cultural sedimentations.

But how does the essentialist know about the common core at the heart of diverse religions? Opponents of this view argue that in order to judge that what is seen by the different blind men were only parts of the same elephant, there must be one man who is not blind. In the case of religion, we must be God to have such a view of the whole picture of what is seen by the blind men of different religions. And we humans, they say, are not in such a position to have a God's eye view of the different religions. Hick escapes this charge by

²³ M.K. Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*. Vol. XXIX. p.411

²⁴ George Kaitholil, *We are One*, (Mumbai: Better Yourself Books, 2003), p.16.

²⁵ I. Kant, *Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone*, cited in Paul J. Griffiths, *Problems of Religious Diversity* (Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 2001), p. 37-8.

²⁶ John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989, p.4

²⁷ Ibid. p.369

²⁸ John Dewey, *A Common Faith* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934).

claiming that his arrives at his position by means of an inductive generalization.²⁹ But this cannot be said of the Advaitins who claim to have a direct experience of the nirguna Brahman. But of course, the more common way for them is scriptural exegesis, an exegesis with which other schools of Vedanta disagree. As far as Hick's formal abstraction is concerned, I have already referred to its neglect of the existential nature of religious discourse. Apart from that, another important difficulty with all essentialist views is the reduction of plurality to the non-essentials. Plurality and difference among religions, according to this view, is not essential. They are considered accidental, a matter of *tatastha lakshana*, as classical Advaitins put it.³⁰ For Dewey, Hick and others actual religions as they exist are cultural sedimentations. Hick takes these cultural sedimentations to be a matter of "mythical truths" involving matters of "appropriate dispositional response".³¹ In each case the differences do not seem important.

The result is that whatever the followers of a religion consider to be unique features of their religion would be neglected by the essentialists. Modern Hinduism is a typical example of this. In theory, modern Hinduism is an all-accommodating religion. But in practice, it cannot accommodate what is genuinely different. As John Fenton has observed, "Hindu toleration is paternalistic: other religious orientations contain truth, but not enough truth for genuine liberation."³² Therefore, it neutralizes the uniqueness of other religions.³³ This is done either by absorption or by exclusion. A common conference of Hinduism and Buddhism that was to be held in Bangkok in 1995 had to be cancelled because of what was perceived as a subtle attempt to absorb Buddhism within the Hindu fold.³⁴ Similar complaints are also heard from the Sikhs, and the tribals. Christianity and Islam are religions that are sought to be neutralized through exclusion. Obviously, neutralising the uniqueness of one's religion is not acceptable to the adherents of those religions. What is said of modern Hinduism in relation to other religions, can also be said about different schools of traditional Hinduism. There are marked differences between Vedanta and other *darsanas* and important differences even

²⁹ John Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*. London: MacMillan Press, 1985., p. 97

³⁰ The classical example is that of indicating Devadatta's house by pointing out the direction of its location through the extended branch a mango tree nearby. The tree has nothing to do with the object described, but helps to locate or recognize the house. This is contrasted with essential characteristics or *svarupalaksana* where one describes the house as built of bricks with a tiled roof and painted green.

³¹ John Hick, *Disputed Questions*, p.117.

³² John Y. Fenton, "Mystical Experience as a Bridge for Cross-Cultural Philosophy of Religion: A Critique," In *Religious Pluralism and Truth: Essays on Cross-Cultural Philosophy of Religion*, edited by Thomas Dean, 189-204. Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1997 (Indian edition), p. 198

³³ Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*. Edinburgh: T&T Clarke Ltd., 1988, p.60

³⁴ Felix Wilfred, "Towards a Subaltern Hermeneutics: Beyond the Contemporary Polarities in the Interpretation of Religious Traditions", *Jeevadharma* XXVI, 151 (1996), p. 53 n.13.

among the subdivisions within Vedanta, each considering their own position as the ultimate truth. This is not at all surprising in the light of what we have said about the nature of philosophical convictions.

2.2 Empiricism

Pure Pluralism repudiates the idea of there being any common core or essence to different religions. There is "no such thing as an essence that can be purely distilled from any one religion or from all of them together."³⁵ This conclusion goes along with Wittgenstein's idea of "family resemblance". As against a venerable tradition that goes back to Plato, Wittgenstein suggested that our use of words and the basis of our classification of reality need not be based on any one essence common to all the members of a class. Our use could be based on some criss-crossing and overlapping similarities and differences –such as build, gait, eyes, temperament and so on— as found among the members of a family. Although there could be similarities among various of its members in some of these respects, there may not be any one thing common to all the members.³⁶ Here the approach is distinctly empirical. As Wittgenstein said, "don't think, look!" After enumerating different kinds of games he asks:

What is common to all of these? -- Don't say: "They [different games] *have to* have something in common or they would not be called 'games'—but rather *look and see* if there is something in common to all of them. –For if you look at them, you will not see something common to all; you will see similarities and relationships –a whole series of them. As I said: don't think, look!"³⁷

This is an admirable injunction that should put a break on the essentialist approach. However, it is one thing to caution about *a priori* theorising without paying attention to the phenomena, and quite another to come to the conclusion that there is nothing common to the variety of phenomena that we call 'religion'.

If this conclusion is right, it has a paradoxical implication. It would make it impossible to have an informed understanding of religion as such. One can have a Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, Islamic, or Jewish perspective, but not a religious perspective as such that can be differentiated from, say, a naturalistic perspective. One can study particular religions, but there is no scope for the study of religion as such. And when one cannot go beyond one tradition and is still called to philosophize about religious diversity, it is

³⁵ Paul Knitter, *No Other Name: A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*. London: SCM Press, 1985, p.202. Knitter writes in his "Preface" to the *Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, p.x: "Pluralism tells us that there is no 'one' that can be imposed on the 'many'".

³⁶ Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958, para 66,67.

³⁷ Ibid., para 66.

inevitable that one would generalise from the tradition that one knows, which is one's own. The all-accommodating Pure Pluralism with its exclusive focus on differences, then leads to the following paradox: we can only know that which is within our own perspective, i.e., our tradition, our religion, our language-game and form of life. This, of course, is a version of postmodern scepticism, as we shall see.

2.3 Mysticism: A third way?

There is a view –not very uncommon— that religious experience, especially mystical experience, provides a viable alternative, a third way to escapes the Scylla of essentialism and the Charybdis of empiricism. But if the study of mystical experiences is any indication, this is only an illusion. Until recent times, the dominant view regarding mystical experiences used to be that “mysticism is essentially one and the same whatever may be the religion professed by the individual mystic.”³⁸ Today the most ardent advocate of this view is Robert K. Foreman who defines mysticism rather narrowly and arbitrarily in terms of a contentless Pure Consciousness.³⁹ This view has been repudiated by other scholars, the most prominent of whom is perhaps Steven Katz. Katz argues that mystical experiences are irreducibly plural since they are shaped by the differing conceptual structures of different mystics. He writes: “All ‘givens’ are ... the product of the process of ‘choosing’, ‘shaping’, and ‘receiving’. That is the given [in experience] is appropriated through acts which shape it into forms which we can make intelligible to ourselves given our conceptual constitution.”⁴⁰ Mystical experiences, then, are irreducibly plural. Although Katz does not use the postmodern jargon, it is not hard to see that this is a typical postmodern stand. Katz uses the term “contextual” for his approach. Others have termed it “empirical” since it pays close attention to the different historical, cultural and linguistic background of the mystics.⁴¹ The result is also the same as what we noted regarding the empirical approach. While we can study the mystical experiences of individual persons or experiences of persons of a given religious tradition and the prior conceptual structures involved in those experiences, we should not be talking about mystical experience as such. The point is that mysticism does not offer a third way of

³⁸ R.C. Zaehner, *Concordant Discord* (London: 1970), p.194. This is not Zaehner's own position, but the position that sets out to disprove.

³⁹ Robert K. C. Forman, *Mysticism, Mind, Consciousness*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999, pp. 4-7

⁴⁰ Steven Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism," in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, Katz ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978, p.59.

⁴¹ Denise Lardner Carmody and John Tully Carmody, *Mysticism: Holiness East and West*. Oxford: OUP, 1996, p.6.

approaching pluralism. Scholars of mysticism, rather than provide a third way, seem to replicate the essentialist and empiricist strategies in their work.

2.4 Two Sides of the Same Coin?

Essentialism and Pure pluralism appear very different from one another: one holds the conviction that all religions are the same at its core and the other repudiates any common essence. In spite of this fundamental difference between them, it is interesting to note that both lead to the same results. Both pave the way for absolutizing one's own standpoint or religious tradition. There is no place for criticism and dialogue across religious traditions: in Essentialism it is because the differences are insignificant, in Pure pluralism it is because one cannot go beyond one's own tradition. Thus, essentialism and Pure pluralism turn out to be two sides of the same coin. In spite of appearances, therefore, both the strategies employed by the pluralists for arriving at a positive evaluation of religious diversity lead to the same results.

Since both are two sides of the same coin, it is not surprising to see both converging in the philosophy of John Hick. He calls his epistemology Critical Realism, according which (1) there is a mind-independent world, which is known to us only through an interpretative process.⁴² The first half of this sentence refers, obviously, to the realist component and the second half to the critical. (2) In order to hold both these components together he uses the basic Kantian framework –the mind-independent reality is the *Numenon* and the experienced (interpreted) reality is the *phenomenon*.⁴³ (3) All our experience of the world (knowledge/cognition), with some insignificant exceptions, is an “experiencing-as”: i.e., it involves an unconscious interpreting process.⁴⁴ (4) Critical *religious* realism affirms that there is a mind-independent religious reality, for which Hick uses terms such as the “Real” and the “Transcendent”. Religious believers experience (interpret) the world in religious terms, whereas the naturalists do not. (5) But reality or the universe is so ambiguously structured that we cannot, in this life, really and rationally decide whether a naturalistic or a religious interpretation and experience of reality is the correct one.⁴⁵ (6) Believers, however, are rationally entitled, on the basis of their religious experience, to believe in the existence of a mind-independent religious reality.⁴⁶ (7) Religious plurality is a matter of diverse culturally conditioned responses to this Transcendent. Any rational adjudication among these varied

⁴² Hick, *An Interpretation...*, p.172ff; *Disputed Questions*, p. 3ff.

⁴³ Hick, *An Interpretation...*, p.240 ff.; *Disputed Questions*, p.158.

⁴⁴ Hick, *An Interpretation...*, p.140 ff.; *Disputed Questions*, p.17 ff.

⁴⁵ Hick, *An Interpretation...*, p. 73 ff.

⁴⁶ Hick, *An Interpretation...*, p. 210 ff.; *Disputed Questions*, p. 31.

responses is neither possible,⁴⁷ nor needed because in all ("axial") religions a parallel salvific transformation of human life is taking place. Therefore, the differences are not really significant in this life.

Of these, thesis (4) points to Hick's essentialist side and (5) and (7) to the skeptical side. Hick begins his explorations by adopting the family resemblance notion of religion. Then he chooses to focus on belief in the Transcendent. One should not find fault with this: after all, one has to choose something to study. The question is whether he has any basis for this choice. The basis, he tells us, is that the Transcendent is a feature present in most religions.⁴⁸ This still has not come to the core issue: is there any one notion of the Transcendent found across religions? He avoids this difficult question by making his notion of the Transcendent, Real etc., a formal notion without content. Since these are formal notions, unlike the actual Transcendent found in any religion such as God, Brahman, Sunyata etc., it does not seem proper to accuse Hick of essentialism. But there are two other points to be noted about it. The first is that his practice does not seem to keep pace with this theory. In practice his Transcendent seems to be a substantive entity which is a characteristic of "those theistic traditions that are historically related (e.g., Judaism, Christianity and Islam)."⁴⁹ From a Zen perspective, he has been accused of being an "ontological monomorphist".⁵⁰ It is these factors that gives us the suspicion that his Transcendent is more than formal and is close to the Christian understanding of God. That he should fall back on some sort of Christian understanding is not surprising because no formal description of the Transcendent is religiously satisfactory and nothing more can be had in his family resemblance approach, one is forced to fall back on one's own tradition, as we have noted.

The second point is the implied skepticism of his position. The formal Transcendent is said to take different forms depending on the cultural conditions and lead to the actual Transcendent (God, Brahman, etc.) found in different religions. The question is whether these differences in terms of the actual Transcendent have any cognitive significance? Is one description (say, Allah) better (more correct) or worse than another (say, *saguna* Brahman)? While the essentialists give a negative reply to this question, the Pure Pluralists do not have the wherewithal to answer this question. Therefore it is not surprising to hear John Hick say,

⁴⁷ More accurately, Hick holds that there are various levels of beliefs, and some levels of beliefs are decidable in principle, though not in practice; there are other levels which are not decidable. See, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, p. 95; *An Interpretation...*, pp. 372-75.

⁴⁸ Hick, *An Interpretation...*, p. 6ff.

⁴⁹ Sumner B. Twiss, "The Philosophy of Religious Pluralism: A Critical Appraisal of Hick and His Critics," *Journal of Religion* 70 (October 1990), p.557, n.37.

⁵⁰ See, Jung H. Lee, "Problems of Religious Pluralism: A Zen Critique of John Hick's Ontological Monomorphism," *Philosophy East and West*, 48/3 (July 1998) pp. 453-77.

“whilst it is not correct to say, for example, that the Real is personal, it is also not correct to say that it is impersonal –nor that it is both personal and impersonal, or neither personal nor impersonal.”⁵¹ The scepticism underlying this epistemology seems obvious. Hick’s defence is that he is using the Kantian scheme where no categories can be applied to the Numenon. But there is a problem here. Unlike the invariant Kantian categories, Hick is using variable, culturally conditioned categories. And Hick does recognise that the “phenomenal world is the noumenal world, as humanly experienced”.⁵² And the concept of truth applies to propositions that result from such experiences. Therefore, he cannot hide under the Kantian mantle and will have to consider whether any description can be considered better or worse than another. Not having the resources to answer this question places him in the same camp as the religious sceptics: the naturalist and the believers of various doctrinal hues and practices all stand equally justified or unjustified. Obviously, it is not a position that is acceptable to the believers, or even the naturalists. And at this point epistemology ceases to have any meaningful function.

The moral of the story is this: a theoretical accommodation of plurality by means of a formal essence that neglects the particularities of different religions is inadequate. Equally inadequate is an empirical approach that neglects the commonalities. In practice both tend to bring in one’s preferred version of religion through the back door. No epistemology that permits no more than a formal description of the religious Ultimate and dumps all actual descriptions found in religions either into the bin of insignificance or to the bin of scepticism can be adequate. Some differences may indeed be insignificant, and there may be reasons for being sceptical about certain specific religious claims. But these are matters to be decided after the investigation and not before. The finding that neither Essentialism nor Pure Pluralism can do justice to the phenomena of religious diversity does not mean that we can go the way of exclusivism and intolerance. What it shows is the urgent need of a more adequate epistemology that can do justice to both the commonalities as well the differences. Finding such an epistemology, it seems to me, must be the foremost concern of any philosophy of religious pluralism.

3. Towards A New Epistemology of Religious Pluralism?

I suggest that we can make a new beginning if we re-conceive epistemology broadly in the manner suggested by Alvin Goldman.⁵³ He sees epistemology as a multidisciplinary

⁵¹ Hick, *Disputed Questions*, p.177

⁵² Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, p.105

⁵³ Alvin I. Goldman, *Epistemology and Cognition*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986.

affair where empirical sciences like cognitive psychology have a very important contribution to make. Epistemology, however, cannot be reduced to psychology, as some views of naturalized epistemology go, because it has also a normative or evaluative role. The normative will be affected by the descriptive, but not reducible to it.

If we follow this intuition, epistemology would be a more complex process where description, interpretation, explanation and justification would each play a role. Hermeneutics and justification, constructing meaning and testing the tenability of those constructions, discovery or intuition and the testing of its truth would be seen as two irreducibly distinct stages of this epistemology. Presently there is hardly a distinction seen between meaning and truth, hermeneutics and epistemology, discovery and justification. The result is a theoretical procedure that ignores the empirical, an epistemology that neglects hermeneutics, or a hermeneutics that neglects justification. The present suggestion of a two-stage process will be an improvement on this procedure. The first stage a matter of arriving at an acceptable hermeneutic of the concerned phenomena and the latter is a matter of logic and evidence.

In terms of religious pluralism what it implies is that empirical studies, i.e., phenomenology and history, psychology, sociology and anthropology of religions play an important role in formulating an adequate theory of religious plurality. But an empirical and phenomenological investigation would remain blind without theoretical insight, as we have seen. More specifically, if we are to focus on the study of religious experience, for example, the received wisdom says that the mystical and the numinous are different kinds of religious experiences. Similar dichotomies (not mere distinctions) are drawn between contemplative and prophetic religious experiences. In neither case is there any attempt made to see how they may be related. I consider this to be theoretical blindness. Therefore, empirical and phenomenological studies, rather than be taken as end points, should be considered as invitations to theory-building. On the other hand, no theory must be allowed to get away in the manner of Essentialism. Having come up with a theory of religious experience from the available empirical phenomena, it must be tested by its ability to handle important cognitive conflicts, issues such as the oneness or the manyness of religious reality, the personal or the impersonal nature of that reality and so on. In handling such cognitive disputes it is logic and evidence, analysis and arguments that comes into play, not psychology or sociology or history of religions (all of which may have a role to play in the origination or the discovery of a theory of religious experience).

FROM ETHICAL RELATIVISM TO ETHICAL PLURALISM

Insights from Alasdair MacIntyre

Ashley Miranda

India's Argumentative Tradition

Amartya Sen's latest book, *The Argumentative Indian*, is a very insightfully delightful book that outlines the long history of, what Sen calls, the "argumentative tradition in India,"¹ its relevance for our present times marked by intolerance and fundamentalism and the sad decline of this tradition which has left us all much poorer.

Sen claims that deep within the Indian psyche and ethos there exists a very spontaneous acceptance of heterodoxy and dialogue. This, he says, is primarily responsible for the simultaneous flourishing of many amazingly different and diverse convictions and viewpoints in India down the centuries. India is and has always been a land of great paradoxes and it would be incorrect to claim that India has ever been a perfect paradise of respect and dialogue. There have indeed been many conflicts and wars that have led to much senseless violence and bloodshed. There is no denying this reality but Sen is convinced that at the end of the day if one were to place this reality of sporadic violence and war side by side with India's rich tradition of dialogue and respectful acceptance of difference one would be left with little or no doubt that the latter has characterized the Indian people like nothing else has.²

India is the birthplace of many of the rich religious movements of the world. This has led many to mistakenly conclude, that India lacks a solid 'intellectual heritage' and is essentially 'a land of uncritical faiths and unquestioned practices'. In Sen's view nothing is further from the truth.³ He admits that the Indian society has always been stigmatized by 'deep inequalities along the lines of gender, class, caste and community'. He also accepts that 'argumentational participation' was not something that all sections of the population had equal access to. The 'male elite' have hogged more than their fair share of space in the argumentative moves that have characterized India. This is true about most cultures, traditions and nations of the world. But what is refreshingly significant about India, according to Sen, is that "some of the most celebrated dialogues [of India's argumentative tradition] have involved women, with the sharpest questionings often coming from women interlocutors".⁴ He goes on further to say that not only women, but also men and women of socially disadvantaged classes and castes are often portrayed as active protagonists in many of the 'argumentative encounters' found in Indian literature.⁵ Protest, rebellion and resistance against orthodox presumption and beliefs has been a distinctive feature of many of the great works of Indian literature.⁶

¹ Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2005), ix.

² Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian*, x – xii.

³ Cfr. Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian*, xiii- xiv.

⁴ Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian*, 7. Words in parenthesis mine. To support his contention Sen cites the examples of Gārgî and Maitreyî in the *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* and of Draupadî in the *Mahābhārata*. Cfr. Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian*, 7-10.

⁵ Cfr. Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian*, 10.

The Contemporary World Scenario

With the above expose of Amartya Sen's views on India's glorious tradition of heterodoxy and tolerance, we have now set the stage for us to deal with the issue that we have at hand. Do we in India still treasure heterodoxy even today? Are matters any different at the level of our globalized world? Is heterodoxy the same as relativism and subjectivism? How is it related to pluralism? What is the difference between relativism and pluralism, more precisely, ethical relativism and ethical pluralism? Does pluralism mean that one can no longer speak of right and wrong, good and bad, truth and untruth? It will be my endeavour in this paper to deal with the above questions and with other questions of related nature. In the process of doing so I hope to be able to establish that ethical relativism has fulfilled an important function in the whole debate/reflection geared to trying to make sense of our human lives. However, it is now time to move from a situation of unbridled relativism and subjectivism to one of genuine pluralism in which every voice is heard, but at the same time, truth is sought in dialogue, lived with commitment and defended with courage.

When one looks at the contemporary ethical scenario, both in India in particular and in the world at large, one is struck by the presence of paradoxical trends. On the one hand we see that fundamentalist and sectarian movements seem, with each passing day, to be winning new converts. In India, for example, recent years have seen a phenomenal rise in the popularity of the concept of 'hindutva'. This concept is a relatively new one used primarily in the political sphere. 'It has been used to severely challenge the 'spacious and absorptive concept of Indianness' that has characterized India for a long time.⁷ Hindutva is a sectarian movement and has in recent years been the cause not only of violent physical actions, including the 'killing and terrorizing of minorities,'⁸ but also the attempts to doctor and rewrite Indian history making it appear to be exclusively Hindu, unitary and religious.⁹ This growth of fundamentalism and intolerance is seen also in the rabid attempts of what is called the 'morality police'¹⁰ to impose their narrow vision of moral propriety on the common man and woman intent on enjoying some of the perfectly harmless and legitimate delights of the contemporary world.¹¹ What is true about India is in a very

⁶ Cfr. Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian*, 10. Sen claims that large parts of early Buddhist and Jain literatures contain powerful expositions of protest and resistance. He points out that radical skepticism of orthodox beliefs is also found in the *Mahābhārata*, the *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa*, and in the medieval mystical poets. Cfr. Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian*, 11.

⁷ Cfr. Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian*, 51.

⁸ Cfr. Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian*, 52.

⁹ Cfr. Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian*, 57, 63-64. In Sen's view the 'hindutva' movement has contributed to the 'miniaturization of India'. He defines it as "a sustained effort to miniaturize the broad idea of a large India –proud of its heterodox past and its pluralist present – and to replace it by the stamp of a small India, bundled around a drastically downsized version of Hinduism." Cfr. Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian*, 72.

¹⁰ Cfr. Pritish Nandy, "We are not an under-age nation", Nashik Times of India, 7th January, 2004.

¹¹ It must be admitted that not all the benefits that the new openness to the large world has made possible are harmless or innocent. There is no denying that some of the effects of this new openness are indeed positively detrimental both the individual and the common good. But the point is that these modern moral policemen have been so overly zealous, panicky and even violent in furthering their moral vision that they seem to have lost their sense of balance. Everything and anything seems to hurt their sensibilities. And in instances where

real sense true about the whole world. We witness today an alarming growth of sectarianism, terrorism, intolerance and fundamentalism in many parts of the world¹². There is every danger that instead of a 'globalized world' we may end up with a sharply 'polarized world'. [In fact there is a very strong case made for the argument that globalization is a very deceitful movement that under the guise of trying to create a more united world is itself the principal agent of polarization, injustice and 'exclusion'].¹³

On the other hand we see that there is increasingly a tendency to do away with any talk of right and wrong, good and bad. We seem to be living in some kind of 'post-moral' world in which these distinctions are insignificant, if not nonsensical altogether.¹⁴ Some social commentators assert that we have entered into the 'post-embarrassment age.'¹⁵ The in-thing today is to be non judgmental. Nothing is held sacrosanct anymore. Every value is open to challenge. While it is fashionable to speak of human rights, perhaps, no age in the history of our race, has witnessed so much trivialization and instrumentalization of the human person and so much large scale violation of human rights of the underprivileged, the poor, the voiceless and the weak as ours has. It is true that many forms of freedom have been won which people not very long ago didn't even dream of, but the 'everything is OK from a certain perspective' attitude has led to new forms of slavery into which we humans seem to be sinking deeper and deeper.

One may argue that we have focused too much on two extremes—fundamentalism and post-moralism—and that we would do well to pay attention to the whole range of political, social and ethical philosophies that lie in between. The point however is that the contemporary world appears to thrive on extremes. These two extremes are in reality two sides of the same coin. They are the expressions of the same ethical crises that the world at large is going through. Innumerable ethicists, teachers, parents, philosophers, and social scientists have cried themselves hoarse warning all those who may care to listen about this crisis that surrounds us and have suggested a number of strategies to resist and possibly even to overcome it. Ray Billington in the "Preface" to the second edition of his book *Living Philosophy* says with more than a note of alarm, "the world generally has plummeted downhill into an abyss of such self-indulgent violence that it threatens to annihilate the entire human species. One wonders if there is anyone, anywhere, who can declare with sincerity, 'Things are better than they were'."¹⁶ Similar concerns are expressed by Benjamin Wiker in an article entitled "The End of Morality." He writes,

violence is done to the dignity to women, for example, they tend more often than not to blame the victims rather than their aggressors.

¹² Contemporary politics seems to thrive on polarization, in the division of the world into 'us' and 'them', friends and foes, conservatives and liberals, the developed world and the developing world, etc. Politicians – not all of course – are masters at diverting the attention of the masses from real social issues by creating for them real or imaginary enemies to vent their spleen on.

¹³ Cfr. Vandana Shiva, "The Polarised world of Globalisation", <http://www.zmag.org/sustainers/content/2005-05/27shiva.cfm>, 13.08.2005

¹⁴ Cfr. K. S. Mahadevan, "The Media in a 'Post-Moral World'", <http://www.chennaionline.com/columns/life/life75.asp>, 2.5.2005.

¹⁵Cfr. Chidanand Rajghatta, "It is the silly Season of Slime and Sleaze", The Times of India, December 13, 2003. Rajghatta is of the view that in India it would perhaps be more appropriate to call our times the 'Age of Shamelessness'.

¹⁶ Ray Billington, *Living Philosophy*, Third Edition (London: Routledge, 2003), xv.

The greatest moral crisis is now upon us. The real moral crisis is this: that we, among all human beings who have ever lived, face the end of morality as such. What we face, then, is the ever more speedy replacement of moral questions with technical questions, so that the moral question “*Ought* we to do this?” is giving way to the merely technical “*Can* we do this?” As the “cans” become ever more technically effective, the “oughts” will sputter out their respective swan songs, fade, and then dissipate.¹⁷

Christina Hoff Sommers, in a very insightful article on moral education entitled “Are We Living in a Moral Stone Age?” very pithily asserts that we have a ‘hole in our moral ozone’¹⁸ which seems to be growing day by day. She sounds a note of warning saying, “Today’s young people are suffering from ‘cognitive moral confusion.’ They not only have trouble distinguishing right from wrong — they question whether such standards even exist. The threat this moral relativism poses to society is greater than any external danger.”¹⁹ Here, I think, it is also appropriate to remind ourselves of what Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger — now Pope Benedict XVI — said of the looming “dictatorship of relativism” in the much-noted homily he preached to the cardinals on April 18, 2005 just before the conclave at which they elected him pope. He said in no uncertain terms, “whereas, relativism ... looks like the only attitude (acceptable) to today’s standards. We are moving towards a dictatorship of relativism which does not recognize anything as for certain and which has as its highest goal one’s own ego and one’s own desires.”²⁰

A Moral Catastrophe That Has Gone Unnoticed

Perhaps one of the best analyses of the ethical crisis that has enveloped us like fog that suddenly creeps up and surrounds the unsuspecting traveler making all movement extremely hazardous is the one provided by Alasdair MacIntyre. It is to this analysis that we shall presently turn.

In his brilliant — some would say ‘pessimistic’²¹ — work, *After Virtue*, MacIntyre first provides us with a very insightful diagnosis of the moral crisis of our times and then goes on to suggest a strategy by means of which we could counter the

¹⁷ Benjamin D. Wiker, “The End of Morality”, *Crisis*, <http://www.crisismagazine.com>, 27.09.2004

¹⁸ Christina Hoff Sommers, “Are we Living in a Moral Stone Age?”, <http://catholiceducation.org/articles/education/ed0166.html>, 12.01.2004

¹⁹ Christina Hoff Sommers, “Are we Living in a Moral Stone Age?”.

²⁰ Cfr. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, “**Homily of his Eminence Card. Joseph Ratzinger**”, 18 April, 2005, http://www.vatican.va/gpII/documents/homily-pro-eligendo-pontifice_20050418_en.html, 9.06.2005.

²¹ One critic has called the book ‘a sermon in despair’. Cfr. Benjamin Barber, *The Conquest of Politics: Liberal Philosophy in Democratic Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988, 190 cited in John Horton and Susan Mendus, ‘Alasdair MacIntyre: *After Virtue* and *After*’, in John Horton and Susan Mendus (eds.) *After MacIntyre* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 5. My view is that while the book is rather critical it is in the ultimate analysis more a ‘sermon of hope’ than a ‘sermon of despair’. I am inclined to agree with MacIntyre that pessimism, which seems to be very much in fashion, is a cultural luxury “that we shall have to dispense with in order to survive in these hard times.” Cfr. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. 2nd Edition (London: Blackworth, 1985), 5

worst effects of the relativism that has gripped us. The very first chapter of *After Virtue* is entitled “A Disquieting Suggestion.” And the disquieting suggestion is this:

... ... in the actual world which we inhabit the language of morality is in ..
(a) state of grave disorder... What we possess ... are the fragments of a conceptual scheme, parts which now lack those contexts from which their significance derived. We possess indeed simulacra of morality, we continue to use many of the key expressions. But we have – very largely, if not entirely – lost our comprehension, both theoretical and practical, of morality.²²

MacIntyre’s contention is that the contemporary world is suffering the after effects of a moral catastrophe of apocalyptic dimensions that took place at the time of the so-called ‘Enlightenment’. According to him this catastrophe has so distorted the language of morals that meaningful dialogue on moral issues has become extremely difficult if not altogether impossible. In response to the question that if such a global catastrophe did take place why is there no record of it in history, MacIntyre replies that academic history is a discipline that was born only after this apocalyptic event. In fact the very moral and other evaluative presuppositions of academic history have been derived from the disorders that brought this catastrophe about. Modern academic history prides itself from adapting a value-neutral point of view and from this point of view the history of moral philosophy is just a succession of events, one morality succeeding another. The language of order and disorder, good and bad is unavailable to it.²³

Signs of Moral Disorder

The two features of the moral disorder of our times, which MacIntyre finds particularly striking are the innumerable disagreements in virtually every area of moral life and the apparently interminable character of these disagreements. Moral debates begin as rational reflections but very often end up as a clash of headstrong wills, each bent on obstinately sticking to its point of view. This is because at the basis of many of the ethical positions that people adopt today lie subtle non-rational and arbitrary decisions.²⁴ Another reason for the interminability of contemporary ethical dialogue is the fact that the concepts and arguments to which the different parties in the supposed dialogue have recourse to not only originate from very different contexts but are often used without even a minimal knowledge of the contexts in which they were once at home.²⁵

MacIntyre cautions us against being deceived by the apparently broad-minded pluralism of our times. In his view the pluralism that we are witnessing today is not really a pluralism that is the result of a well ordered dialogue of different viewpoints which can speak to each other meaningfully. Instead contemporary pluralism is the consequence of the fact that most our dialogue today is a talking at cross-purposes. If one goes below the surface rhetoric one is likely to

²² Cfr. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2.

²³ Cfr. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 3-4.

²⁴ Cfr. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 8-9.

²⁵ Cfr. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 10.

find that what we really have are a number of moral philosophies that are fundamentally relativistic and emotive in character.²⁶

The Cultural Power of Emotivism

One of the biggest obstacles to genuine pluralism according to MacIntyre is emotivism. Emotivism is a philosophical position that enjoys immense cultural power in our present times. MacIntyre defines it as “the doctrine that (holds that) all evaluative judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are *nothing but* expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character.”²⁷ It is true that it is rare to find a philosopher who thinks of oneself as an emotivist; this notwithstanding, one sees that something akin to emotivism’s attempted reduction of morality to personal preference recurs time and again in the writings of very many philosophers working in widely different philosophical contexts.²⁸

Emotivism is an ethical stance that obliterates any genuine distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative social relationships. MacIntyre points out that if the sole purpose of moral utterances is to align the attitudes, feelings, preferences and choices of another to one’s own then the other would be extremely vulnerable to manipulation. In MacIntyre’s view this is in fact the case in our contemporary times – manipulation has become so much part of the social and political system in virtually every part of the world.

Here, to explain his point further, MacIntyre introduces the notion of character. He defines characters as the moral representatives of a culture or age in as much as they tangibly embody in the social world the moral and metaphysical ideals of the people of that culture or age.²⁹ In his view the three characters which best represent our age are the *Rich Aesthete*, the *Manager* and the *Therapist*. The *rich aesthete* is one who is only interested in the immediate gratification of his desires. He seeks enjoyment and he sees people and things as a series of opportunities to amuse himself. The *manager* is one whose primary interest is matching means to ends economically and efficiently. He never questions ends. His concern is with techniques, with effectiveness and with profits. The *therapist* too treats ends as predefined and outside his scope. Even though he does not have any rational basis on which to gauge psychological effectiveness, he accepts as sacrosanct the very limited concept of human ‘well-adjustedness’ presented to him and seeks through his practice to help his client to cope with the world.³⁰

The Historical Roots of Contemporary Emotivism

In MacIntyre’s view, in order to understand how emotivism came to take such deep roots in the contemporary cultural climate, it is important to look at the history of philosophy. According to him both the general culture and the academic philosophy of our times are offspring of a culture in which philosophy constituted a

²⁶ Cfr. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 10.

²⁷ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 11-12.

²⁸ Cfr. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 20.

²⁹ Cfr. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 28.

³⁰ Cfr. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 24-30.

central form of social activity. It is the failure of this culture to resolve its practical and philosophical problems that led not only to the marginalization of philosophy but also to the inordinate growth of the problems central to the present day social life and practice.

The culture that MacIntyre is referring to is the eighteenth-century culture of the Enlightenment. One of the key features of this culture is a radical change not only in beliefs but also in the modes of belief. Among the questions that gripped the attention of the intellectuals of the enlightenment, perhaps the most important and most representative of the preoccupations of those times was the question about the rational justification of belief, moral belief in particular.³¹ MacIntyre calls this the 'Enlightenment Project'³². And it is his contention that the breakdown/failure of this project that ultimately gave rise to the predicaments of our own time. He analyzes the moral philosophies of Hume, Diderot, Kant and Kierkegaard and by means of a very ingenious method of recounting the history of the Enlightenment project backward shows how with Kierkegaard the epitaph of the failed project finally came to be written.³³

In his book *Enten-Eller* [1842], Kierkegaard presented his readers with an ultimate choice between the aesthetic and the ethical way of life. He presented this choice not as a choice between good and evil but as a choice about whether or not to choose in terms of good and evil in the first place. At the heart of the aesthetic way of life is the attempt to lose oneself in the immediacy of the present whereas the ethical way of life is one of accepting commitment and obligation through time, in which the present is bound by the past and to the future. Kierkegaard held that no ultimate reasons could be offered for preferring one option to the other. In a later book *Philosophiske Smuler* [1845] Kierkegaard invoked the idea of radical and ultimate choice to explain how one becomes a Christian. In MacIntyre's view this novel concept destroyed the whole tradition of rational moral culture altogether and led to the demise of the Enlightenment project at least as far as providing a rational justification for moral beliefs is concerned.³⁴

Why the Enlightenment Project Failed?

MacIntyre goes a step further to say that one shouldn't be surprised that this project failed. It is his view that it couldn't have been otherwise. This is because the enlightenment philosophers inherited a hopefully incoherent scheme of moral beliefs to begin with.

In order to explain his point MacIntyre turns our attention to the moral scheme that was overwhelmingly popular in Europe around the 12th century. There existed many different moral philosophies, but in each of them a fundamental contrast was made between a concept of man-as-he-happens-to-be and a concept of man-as-he-could-be if he realized his essential nature. Ethics was considered to be the discipline that enables men to understand how they are to make the transition from the former state to the latter. Within such a moral scheme reason had a two-fold role, one to instruct humans about their true end and two to direct them about

³¹ Cfr. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 38.

³² Cfr. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 39.

³³ Cfr. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 39.

³⁴ Cfr. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 41.

how to reach it. In the medieval times the theistic proponents of this moral scheme held that the true end of man could be known both by revelation and by reason. But with the advent of Protestantism and Jansenist Catholicism aspersions were cast on the power of reason. MacIntyre cites the example of Blaisé Pascal who famously said that about ends reason must be silent. It is essentially calculative in nature and can only speak about means.³⁵

The Protestant and Jansenist Catholic rejection of the power of reason was followed by a secular rejection of both Protestant and Catholic theology. In the 17th century, with the development of science, the Aristotelian world-view and especially his concept of *telos* came to be strongly challenged and even considered obsolete. This led to the fragmentation of the till then popular moral scheme. Minus the concept of *telos* it lost its internal coherence. It was this fragmented moral scheme that the philosophers of the Enlightenment inherited. In MacIntyre's view this doomed their project right from its very inception.

The Options before Us: Nietzsche or Aristotle?

Going on to reflect on how we can escape from the stifling clutches of the relativism of our times, MacIntyre says that we have two options before us. That is, either to choose to follow Nietzsche or to follow Aristotle. Nietzsche was the first to correctly perceive the corruption and fragmentation that much of moral philosophy of his time had been reduced to. We have already mentioned that in MacIntyre's view contemporary moral utterance and practice is nothing but a series of fragmented survivals from an older past that renders meaningful moral philosophizing or dialogue well nigh impossible. He acknowledges that much before him Nietzsche came to the very same conclusion. The only difference is that Nietzsche generalized from the condition of moral philosophy in his own time to the nature of morality as such. Nietzsche was critical of the moral philosophers of the Enlightenment who sought to discover the foundations for an objective morality. He held that the claims to rationality of the various moral philosophies are without much substance and hence it is best to reject so called reason altogether and consider ourselves as autonomous moral subjects. MacIntyre labels Nietzsche's philosophy the philosophy of 'prophetic irrationalism'.³⁶ To many people today 'prophetic irrationalism' seems the only viable option open to us given the complexities of modern life. MacIntyre, however, thinks differently. In his view there is another option which we would do well to consider; an option that offers us a very real alternative to the 'prophetic irrationalism' of Nietzsche.

This option is the moral philosophy of Aristotle. In response to the question, why Aristotle and not some other philosopher, MacIntyre says that this is because from the historical perspective Nietzsche's moral philosophy is matched specifically against Aristotle's. On one side of the Enlightenment we have Aristotle and the whole moral tradition that drew its inspiration from his thought. In fact, Aristotle's thought formed the core of the tradition rejected by the Enlightenment. When the Enlightenment philosophers launched their attack against an older world a great majority of them understood that it was Aristotelianism that had to be repudiated and

³⁵ Cfr. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 54.

³⁶ Cfr. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 114.

overthrown. On the other side we have Nietzsche and all his existentialist and emotivist successors. It was the failure of the Enlightenment project and the confusion that ensued that created the fertile ground for them to launch their apparently successful attack on all previous morality.

MacIntyre is of the view that the Enlightenment rejection of the Aristotelian moral tradition, lock stock and barrel, was a mistake. The philosophers of the Enlightenment encountered a corrupted version of the Aristotelian moral tradition and mistook it for the real thing. He thinks that if we can vindicate and reestablish in our times the Aristotelian moral tradition or something very much like it then we wouldn't have to accept the Nietzschean enterprise as the only meaningful option before us and we would be able to create the cultural climate necessary for the flourishing of holistic ethical/moral reflection. MacIntyre points out to his readers that the option between Nietzsche and Aristotle is not merely an option between two moral theories. Instead, he says, the option between the two is a question of choosing for morality or for no morality at all.³⁷

The Aristotelian Moral Scheme

What is so special about the Aristotelian moral scheme? How does it differ from the other moral philosophies that have been proposed in the course of history, especially from the time of the Enlightenment right up to the present day? It needs to be noted that MacIntyre does not regard Aristotle as an individual theorist but as a representative of a long and glorious tradition of moral reflection that began in the Greek times, flourished in a wide variety of contexts over many centuries, endured till the time of the Enlightenment when it was arbitrarily rejected and substituted by a totally different moral scheme.³⁸

In MacIntyre's view the main features of Aristotle's moral scheme are the following:

[a] The Fundamental Question – 'what sort of person am I to become?'³⁹ After the Enlightenment the basic question becomes 'what rules ought we to follow?' The Aristotelian moral scheme was not something designed to provide one with a ready reckoner of *does* and *don'ts* in crisis situations. Instead it was a scheme designed to affect the very quality of everyday life. It was a scheme that helped both the individual and the community give shape to one's/its life. Not that it totally ignored crisis situations but the understanding was that the one who gave serious thought to shaping one's life would, when the crisis arose, have the internal and communitarian resources to deal with it adequately.

[b] The Concept of *Telos*. Aristotle held that human beings just like members of all other species have a specific nature, a specific nature towards which their whole being is oriented and at the same time gives unity to their whole life. This *telos*, or good for

³⁷ Cfr. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 117-118.

³⁸ MacIntyre is not referring to the particulars of Aristotle's moral philosophy. He is referring instead to the moral scheme of which Aristotle is perhaps one of the most famous representatives.

³⁹ It is interesting to note that Nietzsche agrees with Aristotle that the question "what sort of person am I to become?" is indeed the first question any moral philosophy should address if it is to be relevant. The moral philosophers of the Enlightenment seem to have bypassed this question altogether. Cfr. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 118.

man, is on the one hand local and particular (located in and defined by the *polis* that he belongs to) and on the other hand cosmic and universal.⁴⁰ Aristotle did not consider the *telos* to be some kind of a reward to be gained in the future as a crowning of all one's efforts. Instead he held that the *telos* is gained in the very way one's life is constructed.⁴¹

[c] The Notion of *Eudaimonia*, roughly translated as blessedness, happiness or prosperity. Aristotle thought of *Eudaimonia* as integral well-being, as 'the state of being well and doing well in being well'.⁴² He kept the issue of the content of human 'well-being' largely open, but very early in his moral reflection he ruled out against equating or identifying 'well-being' with money, honor, status and pleasure. These things are essential for the good life but do not define it.

[d] The Concept of Virtues. Aristotle's moral theory is called the ethics of virtue. He defined virtues as habits or traits of character cultivating which one gradually acquires happiness and lacking which ones movement towards the *telos* is radically frustrated. For Aristotle the virtues are not a means to happiness. He held that the good for man is a complete human life lived at its best, and the exercise of the virtues is an indispensable and constitutive part of such a life.⁴³

[e] The Importance of the *Polis/Community*. In Aristotle's moral scheme the *polis* has a very important role in the cultivation of virtue and the achievement of the *telos*. The community is not only the context in which the individual understands what the *telos* for man is but it is also that which sustains him in his quest for the good. Aristotle spoke at length on the indispensability of good friendships for the living of a virtuous life. Friendship, for Aristotle, is not a private relationship characterized by a particular kind of emotional state. Instead it is the common allegiance of those involved in the pursuit of the good.⁴⁴

[f] Personal Good and the Good of the Community. Aristotle held that our good as individual human beings is one and the same as the good of those others with whom we are bound up in human community. A person who pursues his/her own good in a way that is detrimental to the good of the community is one who has made a fundamental mistake about where his own good lies. The good is never anyone's private property and therefore one's genuine good and the good of the community can never be in opposition.⁴⁵

[f] The Role of Rules. For Aristotle rules are secondary to virtues. Every society needs to spell out laws prohibiting actions that would seriously compromise the community's quest for the good. But laws in themselves are not sufficient because an individual's ability to understand the laws and to apply them appropriately itself depends a great deal on the cultivation and possession of virtues, especially those of justice and prudence.

[g] The Unity of the Virtues. Within the Aristotelian moral scheme the whole of a person's life was viewed as a unity. Making a distinction between the different aspects of one's life and treating each aspect as independent of the others was not considered to be legitimate. MacIntyre emphasizes the point that for Aristotle 'not only are the intellectual virtues related with the virtues of character, but the virtues of

⁴⁰ Cfr. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 148.

⁴¹ Cfr. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 175.

⁴² Cfr. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 148.

⁴³ Cfr. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 149.

⁴⁴ Cfr. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 156.

⁴⁵ Cfr. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 229.

character themselves are intimately related. So much so that to possess any of the virtues in a fairly developed form one needs to possess also the others.’⁴⁶

[h] The Narrative Unity of Life. Within the Aristotelian moral scheme life is considered in its unity, in its narrative character. Aristotle presents an integrated picture of life. In his philosophy there is no separation between morality and other parts of life. Not only are the different aspects of human life linked together in a unity but life itself has a narrative character because of which the past affects the present and both in turn have an effect on the future.

[i] Practical Rationality. Aristotle was convinced that one’s rationality is not only supported by but is also partly constituted by one’s membership in and integration into a social institution. He also held that in order to be practically rational one must first be virtuous and in order to be virtuous one must already possess the ability of practical rationality. In other words, one has to be a particular kind of person if one wants to arrive at the knowledge of what is truly good. Moral truth is not something independent of the standpoint that all can equally well discover no matter what their personal commitments.⁴⁷

[j] Justice and Prudence. Two virtues which are pivotal within the Aristotelian moral scheme are the virtues of justice and prudence. Justice is considered to be the virtue of both internal and external harmony. It involves giving everyone and everything its due. The virtue that ensures justice is prudence. Prudence of course is not a question of being diplomatic, of sitting on the fence. It is considered to be the virtue that enables one to do the right thing at the right time in the right way, without exaggerating on the side of excess or that of defect. When prudence is lacking justice is not done.

The Revival of the Aristotelian Moral Scheme in Our Times

Now that we have considered MacIntyre’s analysis of the moral confusion that characterizes our present age and his presentation of the Aristotelian moral scheme that could possibly help us to resolve this confusion we need to turn our attention once again to the question of what would genuine pluralism in our present times mean? The various relativistic philosophies of our times taken by themselves do not have the internal resources to contribute to a healthy and holistic dialogue on the moral life. In order that genuine pluralism characterized by meaningful dialogue may flourish we need to resurrect once again in our age the Aristotelian moral scheme or something very akin to it. This is MacIntyre’s view; a view to which I would like to wholeheartedly subscribe.

Of course this does not mean we could blindly adopt the moral philosophy of Aristotle and apply it directly to the moral questions of our age. Aristotle lived in a world far different from ours and the moral issues he had to face are greatly different from the issues we, in our times, have to grapple with. Actually not everything is perfect about Aristotle’s moral philosophy. Enlightened men though he was one can see very radical inconsistencies in the moral philosophy he spelt out. His views on women, foreigners and slaves are inconsistent with the very lofty ideals of the moral scheme of which he was one of the most famous representatives. We are primarily

⁴⁶ Cfr. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 155.

⁴⁷ Cfr. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (London: Duckworth, 1988), 128.

interested in the moral scheme forwarded by Aristotle, and not so much in the particular moral views he held.

What is being suggested is that we need to appreciate and treasure the traditional moral philosophies that still endure in our times [possessing a conceptual scheme and internal cohesiveness similar to the one advocated by Aristotle], in spite of the predominance of philosophies that are fundamentally emotivistic in character. All is not lost as yet; if we can inject new life into these philosophies and create conditions that will foster the growth of the traditional moral philosophies which still retain a degree of cohesion then we could perhaps create networks of ‘genuine moral dialogue’ that would lead us to a deeper insight into the meaning and *telos* of our human lives and the good that we must actively pursue as individuals and as groups in order to realize this *telos*.

There are a number of such moral philosophies which do possess elements of the Aristotelian moral scheme, even though they do not perhaps retain the vibrancy of their past. In the case of some of these philosophies some core concepts have fallen into disuse or have been marginalized. One such moral philosophy is the moral scheme proposed by the Church through her moral and social teachings found not only in the directions of its pastors and the reflections of its best philosophers and theologians but also in the life of faith of its people. As a case in point let us consider the papal encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*.

The language used in this encyclical may not be typically Aristotelian and more emphasis may have been given to moral laws and obedience to God than to the cultivation of the virtues, but many other key Aristotelian concepts are dealt with at length and related together into a unity that is truly consistent and cohesive. This encyclical drives home the point very forcefully that to be human is to possess their incomparable dignity and sanctity.⁴⁸ Our *telos* is to have life in abundance and in union with Christ to conquer death and rise to everlasting life in fellowship with the triune God.⁴⁹ What we are called to do is to recognize the dignity of all human life and defend this dignity in all its stages and in every condition from the vicious and subtle attacks launched on it today, and to love it as a precious gift from God.⁵⁰ The virtues we need to cultivate both in ourselves and in our children in order to live out this vision fully are the following: (a) ‘absolute respect for every innocent human life’⁵¹ (b) ‘courage to look truth in the eye and call things by their proper name’⁵² (c) selflessness, a sense of justice, cordial openness, dialogue, generous service, solidarity, genuine compassion and all the other virtues which help people to live life as a gift.⁵³ Another important insight found in this encyclical is that what may seem like a virtue could in reality be a vice if it is disconnected with the human *telos*. In a number of places reference is made to ‘misplaced compassion’ and to ‘false mercy’.⁵⁴ This encyclical contains some very clear teaching on certain important moral

⁴⁸ Cfr. John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae* (1995), no. 2, 3. Virtually every article of this encyclical speaks of the inviolable dignity of the human person.

⁴⁹ Cfr. John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, nos. 36, 38, 101.

⁵⁰ Cfr. John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, nos. 42, 77, 101.

⁵¹ Cfr. John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, no. 89.

⁵² Cfr. John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, no. 58.

⁵³ Cfr. John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, nos. 92, 66.

⁵⁴ Cfr. John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, nos. 15, 19, 66.

questions such as capital punishment, abortion, suicide, and euthanasia among others. Appeal is made to natural law and the law of God.⁵⁵ What is interesting to note however is that the long tradition of the church⁵⁶ is also given a great deal of importance. Also reflection on these particular questions is always within the context of the overall Christian vision of human life, its *telos* and its inviolable dignity⁵⁷. Finally, this encyclical recognizes very clearly that morality is not a personal enterprise and that the living of the good life requires the mutual cooperation of support of different people of good will.⁵⁸

Just like the moral scheme consistently outlined by the Church in her teachings, there still exist other moral schemes in other religious or sometimes even secular traditions that still retain a certain degree of internal consistency and wholeness similar to that displayed by the Aristotelian moral scheme. These moral schemes, both secular and religious must be brought into dialogue if we want genuine moral pluralism to flourish in our times.

Genuine Pluralism, Relativism and New Ethical Movements

Genuine moral pluralism in my opinion is a pluralism that is deeply committed to the integral well-being and realization of every human being and the whole human being. Pluralism is expressed in dialogue. An attitude of ‘let’s not discuss matters, you keep your views I keep mine’ is not an expression of genuine pluralism. Perhaps it is a sign that the truth about the human person is not so important to us. Of course, the opposite attitude of ‘I am totally right and you are completely wrong’ is only a sign of arrogance. At the heart of pluralism is the conviction that moral truth, that is, truth about the true nature of the human being, exists and that is important for us to discover it together. Pluralism is founded on the belief that this truth can be known and can be shared and can be lived ‘together’.

None of us exists in a vacuum. Our existence is a rooted existence and hence our understanding of what it means to be human, what is right and wrong, good and bad is born and nurtured in the society, the tradition, the faith that we belong to. This is something we must treasure and try to understand from within – not as spectators, not only with our heads but with our whole being. Only then are we ready for dialogue. If we believe in nothing, if there is nothing that draws us so much that we are ready to commit our entire lives to it, then we have nothing to dialogue about; nothing to share. Our first encounter with the truth, the truth about ourselves, about human life is always within the particular family, community, faith or tradition that we are born into. As we grow and mature and encounter other people who understand the truth about human life differently from us we are challenged to dialogue with them. Not to prove them wrong but to understand what we already hold to be true better, to correct the blind spots if any in our comprehension of the truth. In the process of this dialogue we may even end up helping others and that too is a valuable consequence of dialogue.

⁵⁵ Cfr. John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, nos. 48, 62, 65, 72. chpt. III.

⁵⁶ Cfr. John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, no. 61.

⁵⁷ Cfr. John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, no. 71.

⁵⁸ Cfr. John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, nos. 88, 89.

Here a word of caution would be in place. The assertion that our understanding of the truth about ourselves is always rooted in a particular community, faith and tradition does not in any way mean that truth is relative to particular traditions. Relative truth is no truth at all. Our understanding of the truth is situated and contextual and that is why we need to dialogue. There is objective truth that all of us need to discover and grow into in the course of our lives if we are truly to realize the full potentialities of our being. This truth is not something that we can exhaust or grasp completely and hence the need for continual openness and ongoing dialogue. Truth is something greater than us, something to which all of us must align our lives.

What of ethical relativism? Is it not something that we must all accept in order to guarantee tolerance and mutual respect between people? Is it not a historical truth that innumerable crimes have been committed in the name of 'truth'? Would we not be better off without the authoritarianism, intolerance and fundamentalism that 'truth claims' breed? In my view, radical relativism is unsustainable. It is indeed true that the world has been the witness to unimaginable sufferings perpetrated in the name of 'truth' but it is also equally true that grave crimes and radical denials of freedom have been committed and are still being committed in the name of "ethical relativism". Relativism renders everything negotiable, everything open to bargaining. And in such a situation those who have no bargaining power, those who have no voice inevitably lose out.⁵⁹ Relativism can be as tyrannical as the 'arrogant truth' that it intends to shelter us from. Here it needs to be mentioned that truth, if properly understood, can never detrimental to a human being. Rather it is something that fulfills and completes us. The problem is arrogance. Arrogance and truth cannot go together. Truth arrogantly held soon deteriorates and becomes a lie. Truth can only be held in humility and courage.

Is a dialogue with 'ethical relativism' possible? Would it be legitimate to dismiss all moral theories that are implicitly or explicitly relativistic as superficial and irrelevant? I do think that 'ethical relativism' must be taken seriously and that rejecting theories that seem to be relativistic as irrelevant would be a great loss. Ethical relativism may lack the characteristics of an internally consistent and holistic moral tradition but it serves the important function of challenging the *status quo*, thus contributing to the development and purification of traditions. Relativism not only calls to question many of our sureties but also helps to direct our attention to areas of our lives and to people we may not have paid sufficient attention to. Relativism forces us to look at our convictions once again and get in touch with our reasons for holding them.

What about the many new distinctively contemporary ethical movements? Will dialogue with them serve any purpose? I think it would and a very important one at that. Many of these contemporary movements seek to highlight the views and hopes of groups and peoples, which past times did not take too seriously and very easily ignored. The feminist movement, for example, has done a great deal to draw our attention to the moral issues and problems that women are especially sensitive to. It has presented us with a woman's perspective to the important questions of life, to what it means to be human, what the *telos* of human life is, and what needs to be done in order to realize this *telos*. So also is the case with post-modern ethics. By

⁵⁹ Cfr. John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 70.

challenging the validity of meta-narratives and demanding that small narratives be taken seriously it has contributed a great deal to making the silent voices of those on the margins heard. Environmental ethics is another example. It has helped to draw our attention to the truth that our destiny as human beings is closely linked with the future of the other species on earth. If we continue to live as we do it will only be a matter of time before we as human beings will perish and go the same way as the many species, which we have condemned to extinction. Channels of communication and dialogue must always be kept open. The more we are open, the more likely it will be that we human beings both as individuals and a race will reach that stage where the truth begins to hold us and bring us to that fulfillment for which our hearts long.

Here is a final point to close our reflection on dialogue. True dialogue is not merely an intellectual exercise. If it were merely intellectual it would lack the power to transform us. Dialogue must ultimately be on the level of our lives. Our lives must do the talking. In the ultimate analysis, there is no message as powerful as the message of a life well lived, with integrity and commitment.

Conclusion

We began by speaking about India's rich argumentative tradition of dialogue and debate. It is this tradition that we need to treasure and to revitalize if we hope to adequately address the many political, social and moral problems that challenge us today. While we can rightly boast of our rich and varied culture and traditions there is much from our past which we need to reject and challenge if we are to become a truly great nation in which the ideals expressed in Tagore's famous prayer for a free India are realized.⁶⁰ For this dialogue is essential; constant, relentless, courageous dialogue, between our past and our present and between our present and our future. There is a need for serious open-minded dialogue between our different traditions and cultures, between those from the North and South and East and West and every other place.

On the 23 July, 2005 the Mumbai edition of *The Times of India* carried a very interesting article by Harbans Mukhia with a very catchy title: *Let Every Truth Become Suspect*. While the contents of this article may not be directly relevant to our paper, what Mukhia says in the conclusion of his article is very pertinent. He quotes the Urdu poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz who is supposed to have said, "let every established truth become suspect" and then adds the comment that "(it) is only through this self-questioning that we shall be able to renew ourselves."⁶¹ How very true!!! There is so much redundant historical baggage that we are saddled with and need to get rid off. Of course, we need to ensure that we do not get addicted to 'holding truths suspect'. We need to question certain long-held truths so as to be able to distinguish between that which is genuinely true and that which only masquerades as truth. We need to question truths not because we can do without the truth but in order that we may be able to hold on to what is genuinely true with greater zeal and commitment.

⁶⁰ Rabindranath Tagore, "Where the Mind is Without Fear...", *Gitanjali*
<http://webpages.charter.net/classicpoetry/tagorewherethemind.htm>, 10.10.2005.

⁶¹ Cfr. Harbans Mukhia, "Let Every Truth Become Suspect," *The Times of India* (Mumbai).

EDUCATION AS OPENNESS TO PLURALITY¹

Samuel Lepcha

Swadesh Pujiyate raja, Vidvan Sarvatra Pujiyata

(A King is respected in his own kingdom while a learned person is worshipped everywhere)

Introduction

Stark reality of the other, inter-dependency, inter-relatedness among the multiplicity of realities greet a child as soon as s/he leaves the security of the mother's womb.² Tremendously globalized milieu surrounds her/him. A sort of diversity/ plurality engulfs her/him right from the cradle.³ Varied faces and languages encounter her/him even before s/he begins to interact with familiar face of the mother or utters a human language. Right in her/his home s/he is being touched by the otherness. Greeted with such a strange reality around her/him, the child cries bitterly as if to say, although inconvenienced in many ways, s/he is ready to adjust and adapt amidst these familiar and unfamiliar others, known and un-thought of circumstances that prevail upon her/him. Gradually, the child begins to realize that her/his survival depends on the rate of his openness to this strange milieu but not on weeping over the lost protective shell of the closed womb of the mother.

Prevailing Diversity of the World

Diversities of the world continue to prevail upon the life and experiences of the child necessitating more openness. S/he is required to be more and more open to the plurality of social, religious, ethno-cultural contexts. These interactions are not without any tension between the individual and social interests. A fast growing fact of globalization intensifies this tension more and more with increased phenomena of heterogeneity and plurality. Every little babe that is born is thrown into this heterogeneous existence of life without any choice.

¹ Plurality signifies the simple phenomenological reality of differing and conflicting traditions (or world views) arising in different communities with different histories...The problem of plurality involves the problem of different communities, with different identities, coexisting, and so raises questions of tolerance. Cf. Ian S. Markham, *Plurality & Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: University Press, 1994), 9.

² According to Freud, (also its our experience) there is a radical immaturity in a child at birth. Compared to other animals, the infant human is vulnerable in many ways-born naked, unable to feed itself, appears incomplete. [The movement towards completion and fulfilment begins even as early as he begins relating to people and realities other than himself/herself.] (Cf. Bernard Jolibert, "Sigmund Freud (1856- 1939) in Thinkers on Education volume 2, ed. Zaghoul Morsy(India: UNESCO Publishing/Oxford & IBH Publishing, 1997),462. also see. "karl Jaspers" by Herman Horn in the same book, 735.

³ We shall use these two words diversity and plurality as synonymous terms.

Yet there is no end to it. A great social mobility and fast developing information technology have brought the peoples of different cultures and languages together in the 21st century. People move from one corner of the globe to the other for various reasons. Thus, the numbers of the global citizens or the Diasporas are growing day by day.⁴ With this increases the density of diversity of all kinds. People have to learn the art of living together amidst these diversities.

Traditional wisdoms of the people show that a very responsible move towards diversity with openness has served good the humans from the dawn of their existence on this earth. It is this openness to the multiple realities around them that has enabled them to adapt, adjust and evolve. If the humans have been able to evolve as the crown of evolution, the credit goes to this openness to the plurality/diversity.⁵ Not only the human survival but also that of the evolving realities of the world depend so much on this openness. Thus, today, openness is not only a felt need but also an indispensable human attitude for a symbiotic existence of humans among themselves and also with other realities around their lives.

In this paper we approach the challenges posed by plurality/diversity from the perspective of education. According to John Locke, “Of all the men we meet with, nine parts of ten are what they are, good or evil, useful or not, by their education.”⁶ It has tremendous influence in shaping the human minds and their characters. Thus, considering education of a child as one of the best ways of addressing this global phenomenon more strategically and radically, we propose “Education as openness to plurality” as a viable option. It stands in support of plurality of any kind. It is explicit then how colossal a responsibility a system of education has to carry out. As educators today, we have to address the challenges and problems brought by multi-racial and multi-cultural societies with courage without forgetting though, that even the brave steps of great nation like America towards openness had to suffer initial oppositions.⁷

Education as Openness

⁴ According to Manorama Yearbook 2005, the estimated total No. of the people of Indian Origin and Non-residential Indian alone is 1,78,00428. (Cf. K.M. Mathew *Manorama YearBook 2005* (Kottayam: Malayala Manorama, 2005), 498-499.

⁵ Plurality is seen in almost every area such as social, religious, cultural, political and intellectual etc.

⁶ As quoted by Michelle E. Brady, “The Nature of Virtue in a Politics of Consent: John Locke on Education,” in *International Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol., 45, No.2, Issue No. 178 (2005): 157.

⁷ A retrospective perspective of the whole issue of plurality based on the multiculturalism and multi-racialism had not received a hearty welcome even in the United States of America. Referring to the history of the past civilization Dinesh D’Souza wrote, “In all of human history, there is no example of a successful multiracial and multicultural society. Empires such as the Roman and the Hapsburg absorbed diverse peoples, but their enterprise of multiculturalism was marred by fatal flaws and failures.”(Cf. Dinesh D’Souza, *Illiberal Education* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), xx.

Etymological definition of the word education manifests its dynamic nature.⁸ It is a process open to movement. It is an intellectual movement, which is open to knowledge. Thus, openness is part and parcel of education. Teilhard de Chardin in his book *The Future of Man* writes, “Education is a specifically human phenomenon...”⁹ Therefore, this openness in education enhances multi-faceted growth in human beings endowed with sensitivo-rational and spiritual faculties inviting them to a process of being brought up in a growth-conducive milieu, to be nourished, shepherded and trained for a purposeful and meaningful living. Humans evolve intellectually, “breathing the atmosphere of human education as we do from the moment of our birth...”¹⁰

The word education is loaded with varied meanings; thus has been approached from different perspectives in order to meet different needs of people in different times. Its history shows that openness in education has been in a way exploited by thinkers, educators and reformers as it unfolds itself gradually.¹¹ Down the centuries, humans in search of meaning and totality of life have laid their trust on education. The long history of education shows that various thinkers have used their seminal ideas in solving various problems of the human society.¹² Thinkers around the world have knocked at the door of education in search of answers to their varied problems. Thus, the Greek thinker Plato used education as a means for self-perfection,¹³ Swedish educationist Ellen Key approached education for independent individuality,¹⁴ German philosopher Immanuel

⁸ Education comes from three Latin words: *Educare*, meaning to bring up, to nourish, to rear or to train; *Educere* meaning to draw or to lead out and *Educo*, means to extract out or to lead forth.

⁹ Teilhard de Chardin, *The Future of Man* (London: William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., 1964), 28.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹¹ German Educationist Froebel (1782-1852) said, “Education is unfoldment of what is already enfolded.”

¹² Some of these great educators could be named along with their ideas: Brazilian educationist Paulo Reglus Neves Freire (1921-1997): *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*; Japanese Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835-1901) in *Fukuzawa Yukichi on Japanese Women*, showed tremendous concern for the Japanese women of his time; M.K. Gandhi (1862-1948), the father of the Indian Nation in *Problems of Education* advocated a holistic education system that would globally counter the faulty realities of western education; Al-Ghazali (1058-1111) a Persian philosopher of religion and ethics taught that education should go beyond mental training and intellectual fuelling but these intellectual, religious, moral and physical education should bring each character closer to God; Spanish educationist Francisco Giner De Los Ríos (1839-1915) advocated education for ‘National regeneration’ or ‘National redemption’ where genuine teachers and professors would be the great law makers and the reformers effecting emancipation of people; A Greek Philosopher, educationist and politician Dimitri Glinos (1882-1943) lived for educational reforms for the reformation of the society-social consciousness and education were intrinsically related; Tāhā Hussein (1889-1973), one of the greatest thinkers of Egypt troubled by the fact that the colonized Egypt needed to retrieve cultural and national identity proposed an education which would make each citizen aware of the rich culture of the past and the abundant possibilities for the future.

¹³ Plato (427-347 B.C.) said, “Education develops in the body and in the soul of the pupil all the perfection he is, capable of.”

¹⁴ One of the central issues in education as understood by Swedish educationist Ellen Key (1849-1926) was freedom to be independent individual with necessary concern for others.

Kant sought in education the individual subjectivity and of the others,¹⁶ Brazilian educator Paulo Freire used education for liberation from oppression,¹⁶ German educationist Froebel, the founder of Froebel's kindergarten employed education in search of pure and perfect divine inner law¹⁷ Swami Vivekananda one of the great thinkers of India used education for the manifestation of the divinity within,¹⁸ for Chakalalakal, education should enhance humanness in human.¹⁹ The Indian seers and sages of the *Upanisadic* period believed in the salvific power of education,²⁰ the great mystic poet, educationist and thinker, the Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore believed that education was to be used for the vision of the reality,²¹ M.K. Gandhi, the father of the Indian nation introduced basic education stressing the 'becoming' aspects of a person so that a child would grow up to be all embracing, well characterized and efficient worker of the country.²² Education has been used for multifarious development of an individual,²³ which begins as openness to both contextual and ultimate.²⁴ Many people understood education as a time-bound process till recent times, however, the understanding is changing.²⁵ Sigmund Freud believed that education had demystifying and sensitizing

¹⁶ One of the greatest German philosophers Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) understood education as an aid to the humans in search of subjectivity. He abhorred those who treated the other as the non-subject (object).

¹⁶ Brazilian educationist Paulo Freire (1921-1997) who was awarded UNESCO "Prize for Peace and Education," in 1996, understood "education as Liberation". His enemy was dominant, unjust and oppressive ideologies. Thus he developed the notions of "Education as Liberation" and "Pedagogy of the oppressed" believing in people's ability to have a say and to re-create a just society.

¹⁷ Friedrich Wilhelm August Fröbel (1782 – 1852) a German educationist the founder of Fröbel's Kindergarten said, "the purpose of education is to encourage and guide man as a conscious, thinking and perceiving being in such a way that he becomes a pure and perfect representation of that divine inner law through his own personal choice; education must show him the ways and means of attaining that goal." (Cf. as quoted by Helmut Heiland, "Friedrich Fröbel" in *Thinkers on Education*, ed. Zaghoul Morsey, 2nd edition (India: UNESCO Publishing/Oxford & IBH Publishing, 1997), 473.

¹⁸ Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) said, "Education is the manifestation of divine perfection already existing in man."

¹⁹ Saju Chackalackal writes, "Education is primarily a method of initiating human person into humanness and into human community, which basically requires that his humanity and human life are enhanced." (Cf. Saju Chackalackal, Editorial "Business Ethics," *Journal of Dharma* 29,4 (October- December 2004), 409.

²⁰ In the *Upanisads*, education has been considered as a means of Salvation (*Savidha ya Vimuktaye or savidha ya vimokshadhat prada*).

²¹ Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) spoke of Education as the giver of the wealth of inner light.

²² Gandhiji (1869-1948) understood education as "an all round drawing out the best in child and man-body, mind and spirit."

²³ Multifarious development of a person (child) includes Socio-religious, psychosomatic and spiritual, aesthetico-cultural, moral-emotional, linguistico-intellectual developments.

²⁴ According to Paulo Freire, learners must understand their own reality as part of their learning activity (Cf. Heinz-Peter Gerhardt, "Paulo Freire" in *Thinkers on Education*, ed. Zaghoul Morsy Vol. 2 (India: UNESCO Publishing /Oxford & IBH Publishing, 1997), 439.

²⁵ Not all the countries were serious about this notion and its implication for a long- long time. Even the country like Germany did not show any seriousness till 1997. (Cf. Joachim H. Knoll, "One World, Many

impact on a learner facing the unfolding realities of life.²⁶ Different needs and awareness have given rise to different theories. However, in this changing world, the needs and the problems of the people are also changing. There is no once for all solution to any problem. If the educational methods of the bygone days are not compatible to the prevailing circumstances of this age, then a revamping is necessary. The problems and challenges of this century are not the same as that of the past centuries. Hence, an evaluation and a re-thinking of education are necessary.

Education as Openness to Plurality

Unity in diversity or plurality defines the situation of this 21st century. There is a continuous proliferation of pluralistic ideas, culture, belief and philosophy as it had never been before. In the pluralistic world today, the cosmo-zens turn towards education systems to be redeemed from the predicament brought in by the reality of plurality. Though education is being called in to address so many other challenging problems of the day, it has to begin with the so-called plurality of intelligences, which has become a well-established fact in the world today. Whether you call it plurality or diversity²⁷ the fact is that it is a global reality today in need of immediate and proper attention. It is the responsibility of the world of educators to educate the young minds to be open to the realities of plurality in the socio-cultural and religio-intellectual arena so that s/he is preserved along with the whole world.²⁸

Challenges in the Emerging Concept of Education

The concept of education is evolving rapidly. Education no more remains the monopoly of a privileged few. Right to education is a fundamental right of every citizen today. Education is a power, an answer and a solution today. In fact, so much is demanded from it. Both the success and failure of a person, a society or a nation is credited to the kind of educational training one receives. No educational system works in a vacuum. Its activities remain intertwined with the socio-cultural, political, historical and economic environment and the contexts.²⁹ Massive intertwining of socio-religious and

Cultures,” in *Towards an Open Learning World: 50 Years UNESCO Institute for Education*, ed. Maren Elfert (Hamburg: St. Pauli, 2002), 15.

²⁶ According to Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) the purpose of education is to bring about demystification and removal of illusions. He speaks of the primacy of reason and experience that plays important role in this disillusionment.

²⁷ Some authors like Arvind Sharma and Kathleen M. Dugan have distinguished between plurality and diversity saying, “strictly speaking, plurality is an inexact synonym for diversity. Several clones, for instance, would constitute a plurality without constituting a diversity. Cf. Arvind Sharma and Kathleen M. Dugan, Ed. *A Dome of Many Colors* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999), 1.

²⁸ Michelle E. Brady writes, according to Locke, “in the state of nature, one’s choices are all for the sake of ensuring comfortable self-preservation.” Cf. IPQ (2005): 159.

cultural intertwining is taking place. Thus, emerging socio-economic scenario of the world coupled with tremendous ‘social mobility’³⁰ today significantly renders to education a ‘master key’ like status. The proper use of this ‘master key’ opens up our world to different avenues.

Revamping of the educational systems around the world is taking place. There are new interpretations as to what education should be like. Modern day thinkers are blunt and sincere in telling the truth. “Our system [educational] is sick, it needs to change,” said one of the student participants during the NDTV 24x7 debate on education.³¹ Though the comment was within the context of Indian educational system, it is in fact a phenomenal expression that could summarize a global mood. This is because when we speak of education today, even though from a limited geographical context, it touches the whole gamut of global contexts.

Globally speaking we could cite some of these emerging trends as challenging trends in need of attention through education. They are: (1) Multi-Ethnicity (2) Multi-culturality (3) Multi-religiosity,³² (4) Multi-intellectuality (5) Religious Fanaticism (6) Militancy and terrorism, etc. Education today stands at the cross roads of human civilization, needing a retrospection and introspection. The whole concept of education is changing. It has moved from person-centric (value-centric) to service-centric (other centric), and to industry-centric (production oriented). In order to meet the demands of the rapidly changing understanding of education, some intellectuals are talking about a need of paradigm shift. The curriculum writers are asked to make their writings ‘child-inspired rather than just child-centred’. This child-inspired approach values the interactive aspect of a child in her/his learning.

The question we should raise here is whether the present system of education is able to address the emerging challenges of the world or not. Has it been able to infuse, nurture and develop in a person a lasting openness to the others and otherness? Does our

²⁹ Isaac Leon Kandel (1881-1965) one of the most leading comparative and international educator stressed that inter-contextual knowledge is very important in education.

³⁰ Less known outside his country, the Swedish educator and social reformer Torsten Rudenschöld (1798-1859) had thought of this fact of ‘social mobility’ as one of the important goal of education for social transformation.

³¹ Barqah Dutta conducted the interview on 25th September 2005, of the people involved in the ministry of education, in actual teaching at various schools and colleges and of a great cross-section of the students’ representative.

³² Selvaraj R writes, “ The plurality of religions is an undeniable historical fact; undeniable also is the fact of religions conflicting with one another. He also points out that how there are both inter and intra-religion disagreements such as between the Theravada-Mahayana Buddhists, Catholic-Protestant Christians, Digambara-Swetambara Jains, Sunni-Shia Muslims, Keshadhari-Sahajdhari Sikhs, and among innumerable sects of various religions.Cf. Selvaraj R., “Understanding the Phenomenon of Religious Plurality,” Sevartham, vol. 30, (Ranchi: Catholic Press, 2005), 119.

curriculum system help our students to appreciate what is her/his in their socio-economic and cultural environments? Is it all-embracing? Is our education system diversity-friendly? Kapila Vatsyana laments:

The need for more viable and productive system of education has become essential in world which has experimented with a monolithic design of living. It has not brought peace and harmony. Tension, conflict, violence and intolerance are widespread. As obvious is the lack of ethical values and the indiscriminate use of the power of religion and faith to create wars and not peace.³³

Today the value of educational institutes is being estimated on the scale of its pragmatic outputs. New interpretation of education has limited its understanding too. Good education today, for some, would mean something that trains the professionals to be fit in the job markets.³⁴ This limits education to a commercialized institution, which prepares professionally trained hands around the globe.³⁵ Unprecedented socio-religious and cultural mobility, technological know-how has made the world a global village. Human needs almost simultaneously become both local and global. One and many interact every day. Education today, even though imparted locally, works for the global citizens and their holistic formation. When the global village gets localized, its problems also get localized and intensified. This creates a tension. There is a strong need for synchronizing all these different values for a meaningful co-existence without overriding the rich values assigned to plurality.

Enlighten the Young

There is a need of having a right educational method, which will shape and guide the right mental attitudes of young people who will thus learn to accept the plurality of things, culture, traditions, religion, history and human knowledge at a young age. For this we should evolve a multidimensional educational method, which incorporates the needs of individuals, and that of collective individuals. An education system that prepares competitive individuals with highly developed sense of care and concern for other individuals around her/him. This requires all those involved in education to be aware of the proper balancing required between the tangible and intangible aspects of the education system in general. We need today an educational attitude that makes students competitive at the same time selflessly other-centric. The child should learn to respect the socio-cultural, religio-intellectual identity of the other from the very beginning. This will

³³ Kapila Vatsyana, in "Forward" to *The Cultural Dimension of Education*, ed. Baidyanath Saraswati (New Delhi: D.K. Printworld (P) Ltd., 1998), ix.

³⁴ Global education today manifests a trend, which limits educational institutions to a giant machine that produces employable individuals in the global job markets.

³⁵ Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) who brought a 'Copernican revolution in education' thought that the child need not become anything [the good doctor, soldier, priest etc.] other than what s/he is supposed to be. Child should primarily be a man [person] when he/leaves the place of education. Emile in his *Émile or Education* is the protagonist of his theory of education.

be an education system, which is commissioned to bring down contextually and globally experienced barriers. According to Kapila Vatsyana, this will be a challenge to the educators. We already have some of the pioneering institutions trying to instill such values even at the basic educational level.³⁶ Where hundreds of students are known to drop out as soon as or even much before their so called basic education is completed, this is the right time to begin with. Sr. M. Cyril of Loreto, Sealdah, while presenting her paper titled “School Transformation for the Kingdom of God” on the occasion of “All India Conference on Don Bosco Schools” held on 15th September 1999, said that the head of the institution takes care of both the tangible and intangible aspects. The tangible aspects are measurable, but not the intangible aspects. The latter is assessed around the qualities of an institution in the following words:

How people relate to each other, what their values are, their level of care for the people, the dignity, forgiveness accorded to one person by another. ... [the] well being of the school community is surely dependent upon such intangibles which affect the child and her development as a happy, caring, competent adult much more than the academic, information based aspect of education. It is the attitude, which often determine, more than anything else, whether a poor child will survive and blossom or drop out.³⁷

Openness to plurality is an attitude of tolerance,³⁸ which will not fall from the treetops. The parents and the teachers should already instill in the minds of the children at home and at local community level and early days of child’s schooling the value of tolerance. S/he should be taught to tolerate the differences of the others, respect their cultural, social and religious heritage make them behave unlike her. It is a very delicate issue today. The child should be exposed to the attitude of tolerance in the teachers s/he meets in the school, the companions s/he interacts with, the neighbors and parents s/he lives with. An institution, which is highly intolerant to the differences and diversities, will be geared to producing personalities who are only a “Silent Cancer” to the societal well being of a global community as we have today.

³⁶ Once again I would like to make reference to the system education, which Sr. Cyril has made. The children in her school are taught the values of love, compassion, tolerance and concern from very beginning. Except one Reader, there is no book prescribed for the children upto standard five. The instructions in the form of cultural programs, chart making, games etc will be centred around the local, national and international issues. All the teachers will be discussing with the students Puja celebrated by the Hindus when it is Puja time. When it is Id or any festival of the Muslims, the children will be discussing all the possible facts related to that feast, so also with regard to Christmas. The children after being introduced to the facts about various religions and religious ceremonies celebrate the feast in the school itself. This strengthens the bond among the children. They are taught to appreciate each other’s culture.

³⁷ S.M. Cyril, “School Transformation For the Kingdom of God” 15th September, 1999

³⁸ Markham writes, “Tolerance is itself contentious. Tolerance has personal, group, and political dimensions. All three dimensions are linked. All require willingness to accept differences (whether religious, moral, ethnic, or economic), of which, at whatever level, one might disapprove. Cf. Ian S. Markham, *Plurality & Christian Ethics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 10.

According to the findings of the International conference on education for child's openness to diversity we are reminded:

There is a growing need to develop the necessary skills to learn to see one's own knowledge as culturally conditioned, to discover that there are other ways of thinking and appreciating the world, different from one's own, and that there is no longer any room for one absolute truth...such display of openness and flexibility towards what is different and unknown, will (help) the learners of the twenty first century ...to discover the wealth in diversity and so become individuals with the ability to live in harmony with those of other origins.³⁹

A great scientist, poet, priest and a humble man Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, after studying what happens to the collective consciousness of the people because of educational influence said, "we see heredity pass through education beyond the individual to enter into collective place and become social."⁴⁰ We hope that these skills and openness developed in the individuals of this generation will pass on to the coming generation in order to safeguard the interest of one and many.

Conclusion

Paulo Freire writes, "To be human is to engage in relationships with others and with the world...man's [human's] separateness from and openness to the world distinguishes him as a being of relationships. Men, unlike animals, are not only in the world but with the world."⁴¹ Humans grow as a collective personality with the help of education. Teilhard de Chardin stressing the importance of education writes, "Far from being an artificial, accidental or accessory phenomenon in its relation to living creatures, education is nothing less than an essential and natural form of biological additivity."⁴² Education plays a vital role in the growth of a person in the society. For, "As a child grows from childhood to the adult age, so humanity has to grow from a collective childhood to a collective adult age through education."⁴³ Seen from this perspective, education should give proper direction to the rapidly conglomerating socio-cultural and religio-intellectual realities of the world today.

Thus, the future of humanity depends so much on the appropriateness of education that trains the young for diversity.⁴⁴ A proper education seen from today's

³⁹ <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/International/ICE/46english/46ws3e.htm> "Workshop 3, Common Values, Cultural diversity and education: What and how to teach?"

⁴⁰ Teilhard de Chardin, *The Future of Man* (London: William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., 1964), 30.

⁴¹ Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical consciousness*, (London: Sheed and Ward, 1973), 3.

⁴² Ibid., *The Future of Man*, 30.

⁴³ J. de Marneffe, "Teilhardian Thought as a Methodology for Discernment of Socio-cultural options in an evolutionary World," in *The Desire to be Human*, ed. Leo Zonneveld and Robert Muller (Netherlands: Miranda /Wassenaar Publishers, 1983), 199.

perspective will be the one, which can lead us to openness towards the integral reality of the world. With this openness humans go out discovering, accepting, and preserving the other. Their openness is thus preservative openness. In her/his openness the socio-cultural, religio-intellectual diversities of the world find protection and expression. Education seen from this perspective will be built on “model of our mutual relatedness ...[where] we are called to share our own story, to listen to the other’s story, and seek ways of working together to alleviate the ills of the world...called to be friends in our common home, the earth.”⁴⁵ If we were to use Gadamerian concept over here, then what happens during this mutual relatedness is the “fusion of horizons”. The two worlds of interactive people meet with each other at a point of understanding. Gadamer says, “In the process of understanding there takes place a real fusing of horizons...”⁴⁶

At this juncture, I would like to propose an educational method based on dialogical approach to life. Most of the problems of the world-community have been solved amicably when the affected groups came together around the dialogue table. Rational humans could use human tendency to dialogue in solving the challenges raised by plurality and diversity. A genuine dialogue brings fusion of differing worldviews. Indicating the importance of dialogue for the welfare of the humanity, Kuruvilla Pandikattu writes, “Future humanity has to be dialogical, affirming personal identity, respecting prevailing diversity and fostering meaningful dialogue.”⁴⁷ Dialogue implies openness and vice-versa. Humans are capable of living a complex interactive relationship with other humans, interacting with their paradigms and worldviews, with their dreams and aspirations, attractions and repulsions with marked openness if they wish. Thus, bringing up our children fermented with the spirit of dialogical openness would be a right paradigm shift in educating the future global citizens. This dialogical mode of education based on the curriculum prepared to bring all round development of the child will affirm “education as openness to plurality.” This is the ideal mode and the need of our highly globalized world community for its sustenance, continuation and preservation.

⁴⁴ Mike Ion, “Diversity, not division,” *Tablet*, (10 September 2005), 17.

⁴⁵ Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *Divinity & Diversity: A Christian Affirmation of Religious Pluralism*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 109.

⁴⁶ Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Tran. Garrett Barden and John Cumming (London: Sheed & Ward, 1975), 273.

⁴⁷ Kuruvilla Pandikattu, *Dialogue as Way of Life* (Mumbai: World-Life-Web & Zen Publications, 2001), 9.

MASS MEDIA AND PLURALITY OF VALUES

Robert Pen

1. Introduction

To be human signifies change as well as growth in every human person at all levels: physical, psychological, social, relational etc. Besides the personal and internalized changes, changes in people's external environment also impact the priorities they choose. Their external environment could include the value system of the country they live in or the value system of the organization in which they work. People's value priorities will also be affected by their profession or the group they belong to and the culture they are coming from. As their external environment changes, it impacts their internal value priorities.¹

The new media culture that we experience through the mass media explosion has affected and altered our value priorities drastically. Today mass media culture raises a new syllabus of questions, which need to be addressed by those religious, political and educational institutions which traditionally provided society's touchstones of value. What choices do individuals have about the value priorities they live by? Are their values merely rigid cultural and gender determinants that are programmed into their personalities because of who they are, where they grew up, and the careers they happened to choose, or are their value commitments constantly in a state of flux due to the onslaught of technological innovations and media explosion? What can be therefore called true values and how are we to differentiate them from seemingly apparent but meaningless values?

2. What Are Values?

While we keep in mind all the above questions, the immediate scope of this article is to present the plurality of values that one needs to face in this mass-media age, to evaluate them critically and to present a creative response that will help us to live in our times. Before arriving at the crux of the problem we need first of all understand what we mean by the terms 'value' and 'mass media'. For our clarification of the terminology regarding 'value' we shall turn to Bernard Lonergan.²

¹ Lazaro Revilla, *Incarnating the Christmas Story: The Salesian Transforming Presence* (Makati city: 2005) 33.

² Bernard Lonergan (1904-1984) was a famous Jesuit philosopher and theologian of our times who has been compared with Thomas Aquinas. He is also called 'the' Christian thinker of the twentieth century. He is well known for his great philosophical masterpiece "*Insight: A study of Human Understanding*" that aims at insight into insight or understanding itself and "*Method in Theology*" that suggests a method not only for doing theology but also applicable to all human sciences.

2.1. Notion of Value

The notion of value is a ‘transcendental notion’ in Lonergan.³ According to him, value is “what is intended in questions for deliberation, just as the intelligible is what is intended in questions for intelligence, and just as truth and being are what are intended in questions for reflection.”⁴ However, we must emphasize again, with Lonergan, that “such intending is not knowing.”⁵ “When I ask what, or why, or how, or what for,” he says, “I do not know the answers, but already I am intending what would be known if I knew the answers.” And so, “when I ask whether this is truly and not merely apparently good, whether this is or is not worth while, I do not yet know value but I am intending value.”⁶

Lonergan goes on to explain value in terms of its dynamism. He says: “As the notion of being is a dynamic principle that keeps us moving toward ever fuller knowledge of being, so the notion of value is the fuller flowering of the same dynamic principle that now keeps us moving toward ever fuller realization of the good, of what is worth while.”⁷ Value, is thus defined by Lonergan, as what is worthwhile or what is truly good.⁸

Lonergan makes a strong connection between meaning and values. In his analysis of meaning he shows that the human person constitutes meaning and these meanings are socially constructed and socially transmitted from generation to generation through communicative expressions.⁹ Further, for him value becomes the basic horizon of the person who lives authentically and tries to constitute one’s life so that it will express the values one holds and the value one is. Meaning, according to Lonergan, is on the levels of experiencing (potential meaning), understanding (formal meaning) and judging (full meaning). Value is on the further level of deciding. While meaning and being go together, value and good go together. In his opinion, meaning rises to its active level and becomes communicative when it is used in human actions, decisions and judgments of values.¹⁰ Thus meanings are eventually seen to be the same as the human good on its highest level: value.¹¹

³ Here we see the growth in Lonergan’s thought. In *Insight* under the title ‘The Notion of Value’, value is the good of order with its concrete contents as a possible object of rational choice that comes to light in moral consciousness. {Cf. Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, 5th ed., in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, vol. 3, ed., F. E. Crowe & R. M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992) 624}. Later, however, in 1968 in the article “The Subject” *A Second Collection*, eds. W. F. J. Ryan & B. J. Tyrell (Philadelphia Westminster Press, 1974) 69-86, Lonergan presents an explicit consideration of the notion of value as ‘transcendental’. Here, however, the transcendental notion seems simply to replace the former notion of value developed in *Insight* as part of a threefold division of the good: the particular good as object of desire, the good of order, and value. This value that is beyond the particular good and good of order is the transcendental notion of value, not the good of order itself with its concrete contents as a possible object of rational choice, as in *Insight*. {Cf. Walter E. Conn, “Bernard Lonergan on Value”, *The Thomist*, 40(1976) 247-248}. This notion of value as transcendental is further affirmed in his *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972) 34-36.

⁴ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 34.

⁵ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 34.

⁶ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 34.

⁷ Bernard Lonergan, *A Second Collection*, eds. W. F. J. Ryan & B. J. Tyrell (Philadelphia Westminster Press, 1974) 82.

⁸ Lonergan, *A Second Collection*, 84 and Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 35.

⁹ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 57-100.

2.2. The Division and the Scale of Values

In his book *Insight* Lonergan defines value as the good of order with its concrete contents and as the possible object of rational choice.¹² Based on it, he further gives us a triple cross-division of values. (1) They are ‘true’ insofar as the possible choice is rational, but ‘false’ insofar as the possibility of the choice results from a flight from self-consciousness, or from rationalization, or from moral renunciation. (2) They are ‘terminal’ inasmuch as they are objects for possible choices, but they are ‘originating’ inasmuch as the fact of their being chosen modifies our habitual willingness, our effective orientation in the universe and so our contribution to the dialectical process of progress and decline. (3) Finally, they are ‘actual’ (realized already) or ‘in process’ (in course of being realized) or ‘in prospect’ (merely under consideration).¹³

Lonergan further sketches the character of the various types of values. He distinguishes them as vital, social, cultural, personal and religious values in an ascending order. ‘Vital values’ are those of health and strength, grace and vigor. ‘Social values’ are such as the good of order which conditions the vital values of the whole community and are preferred to the vital values of individual members of the community. ‘Cultural values’ are those that help individuals discover, express, validate, criticize, correct, develop and improve meaning and value in their living and operating through their particular culture. ‘Personal value’ is the person in one’s self-transcendence, as loving and being loved, as originator of values in oneself and in one’s milieu, as an inspiration and invitation to others to do likewise. Finally, ‘religious values’ are at the heart of the meaning and value of human living and human world.¹⁴ After clarifying our notion of value and the hierarchy of values we can now move towards clarifying our understanding of the mass media.

3. Mass Media

We are living in a media-saturated age. We are witnesses to an unprecedented torrent of media messages that are making an impact by leaps and bounds. The mass media are the fruit of human ingenuity, research and hard work, passed on, with accelerated quality, potential and reach, from one generation to the next. They have shrunk the huge ‘undiscovered’ world of Christopher Columbus to the ‘global village’ of Marshal McLuhan and, from there, within the span of less than half a century, to the

¹⁰ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 74.

¹¹ Lonergan, *Insight*, 324 and Lonergan, *A Second Collection*, 82-84.

¹² Lonergan, *Insight*, 624. Also see, Bernard Lonergan, *Collection*, 2nd ed. in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, vol. 4, eds. F. E. Crowe & R. M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988) 108-109 and Bernard Lonergan, *Understanding and Being: The Halifax lectures on Insight*, 2nd ed., E. A. Morelli & M. D. Morelli ed., with assistance of F. E. Crowe, R. M. Doran & T. V. Daly in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, vol. 5, eds. F. E. Crowe & R. M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990) 226.

¹³ Lonergan, *Insight*, 624.

¹⁴ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 31-32. Lonergan treats the topic of religious values at length in the 4th chapter entitled “Religion” of his book *Method in Theology*.

computer friendly ‘global living room’ of Bill Gates and his contemporaries. In order to clarify our idea of mass media further we could look at the following eight points.

3.1. Varieties of Mass Medium

There were times when the human being was constrained only to the limited print media like newspapers and magazines. Today however we can boast of variety of mass medium that we can have access to. Besides the development in the print media we also have audio-visual media like radio, transistor, taper recorder, digital camera, television, VCR, large screen films etc. The revolution in the communication technology and electronic media has further introduced us to satellite channels, e-mail, websites and a host of internet facilities. Different styles, contents, channel sites abound in each of them. Whilst there are some fundamental ethical principles which we might advocate throughout this diversity (respect for other people, non-advocacy of racial hatred, telling the truth, etc), it would simply be silly to expect the same values in a documentary and a sitcom, a children’s magazine and an adult web-site. Generalized assessments and judgments are risky in so diverse a territory.¹⁵

3.2. Plurality of Mass Media Theories

Besides the plurality of the mass media there are also numerous theories about how media affects people and that there are periods when scholars seem to agree that media effects are powerful and other periods when they tend to think that media effects are weak. It all seems to depend upon which theories of ‘how the media work’ are in vogue with the social scientists who study the media.¹⁶ Theories arise, seem to be useful, are tested and generally found wanting in one respect or another, and are replaced by other theories.

3.3. Negative Outlook towards the Media

Talk of values often leads to criticism forgetting the positive contribution of the media. The older generation for example tends to point to the media for the destruction of the traditional value system and its forgetfulness by younger generation. The religious leaders blame the media for the lack of congregational attendance and diminishing spiritual values. While we all speak from our particular bias (that depends upon our social, political, religious and educational context), we need to become more and more aware of it so as to transcend it as much as possible to increase objectivity in our media perception and attain a balanced evaluation of media.

3.4. Shallow and Limited Vision of Media

TV and other media are sometimes seen as something unserious, if not frivolous, whose main role is just to provide entertainment. Without forgetting their fun dimension that brings joy and laughter to the tension filled human life we need to recognize their

¹⁵ Christ Arthur, “Values in the Media”, *The Month*, vol. I (1998): 183.

¹⁶ Arthur Asa Berger, ed. *Media USA – Process and Effects*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1990): 269.

deeper significance. We need to broaden our outlook of how media can be used in variety of manners for our personal as well as social growth in the field of psychology, politics, education and spirituality. Instead of limiting the usefulness of media for purely recreational purpose, we could extend it further for informative and educative purpose.

3.5. Difficulty in Scientific Measurement of Mass Media Effects

We all spend a great deal of time watching television, listening to the radio, reading magazines and newspapers, surfing internet for diverse web-sites and getting engaged with the e-mails. Yet, so many media researchers tell us that the effects of media on individuals seem to be trivial. That is, it is not possible to prove, scientifically, that media effects are powerful.¹⁷ While one may not be able to demonstrate and measure the effects of media scientifically, one cannot deny the fact that media are powerful and have a profound impact on people's lives and our social and political order.

3.6. Diversity of Media Audiences

While we look at the variety of media available at our disposable, we also need to keep in mind the media audiences, which too are diverse and varied. Just as there is enormous diversity within the media so too are media audiences diverse and varied. From a child to an adolescent and further to a fully grown up adult, everyone in the society is exposed to media in some way or the other. The diversity of media audience does not only consist in the age difference but it also depends upon gender difference, cultural heritage, social background, work experience, educational qualification and a whole lot of other factors. In fact each human person with its own mind and specific social, cultural, educational and religious upbringing provides a variety to the media audience. We need to take care not to assume that TV watchers, internet users and filmgoers are naïve, uncritical and impressionable. There is considerable sophistication and discernment in the way in which millions of people handle this aspect of their lives.¹⁸

3.7. Diverse Effects of Mass Media

The media have sizable direct impact on the public. Besides the oft-mentioned intended effects, they also include many unintended effects. We could delineate them as follows. Intended effects include: (1) the influence of commercial advertising on buying behaviour; (2) the impact of mass media in political campaigns on voting; (3) public service announcements' efficacy in promoting beneficial behaviour; (4) the role of prolonged multimedia campaigns in changing lifestyles; (5) monolithic indoctrination effects on ideology; and (6) the effects of mass-mediated ritual displays on maintaining social control.¹⁹

¹⁷ Berger, *Media USA – Process and Effects*, 269.

¹⁸ Christ Arthur, "Values in the Media", 184.

¹⁹ William J. McGuire, "Who's afraid of the big bad Media" in Arthur Asa Berger, ed. *Media USA – Process and Effects*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1990) 274.

The most often cited unintended effects of the mass media include: (1) the impact of programmes involving violence on viewers' antisocial aggression; (2) representation on the media as a determinant of social visibility; (3) biased presentation on the media as influencing the public's stereotyping of groups; (4) effects of erotic materials on objectionable sexual behaviour; (5) modes of media presentation as affecting cognitive styles; and (6) the impact of introducing new media on public thought processes.²⁰

3.8. Personal Responsibility in Media

It is the responsibility of each one to be self-critical in our role as media consumers/users. We often live in an illusory world thinking that we reign supreme in our own consciousness, that we are masters of what our minds accept or reject. One needs to become aware of the "mirage image" provided by the media and realize how the few self-appointed elites with their multinational industries and desire for total media control and try to manipulate people's mind with ideas. What each one of us accepts or rejects, what we think and decide...all these are heavily influenced by the media bombarded messages. One needs to bear personal responsibility to the problem of how much control we have over our minds and how susceptible we are to being influenced (if not manipulated) by the media.

Having clarified our understanding of the mass media in brief let us now move forward to delineate in a specific manner how it affects our value system. We shall first evaluate the new values that it introduces and then move on to the various values that are at risk in media and the issues that need to be confronted in media.

4. Values Promoted in Media

In the present generation many parents, teachers and social workers express their desire for a clear value-based media education programme in the schools, colleges and all other institutes of learning. Their concern stems from what they consider an eroding of moral standards especially through media-output. Their concern for a value-based approach is legitimate, especially since it comes from those who take direct responsibility for the formation of children and youth in our society. In reality however such an approach does not go down well with the young people, especially at the adolescent phase, as they are usually averse to moral condescension. Pedagogically speaking it lacks tact, since, more often than not, the educators end up discussing negative effects of mass media- the do's and don'ts of media consumption. Such an approach seems to be unfair to the media industry because of its tendency to see the media only in terms of what is right and wrong. Certainly there is much more to learn from the media than meets the eye of the conscientious objector. Here we shall look at the various positive values that are promoted by the media.

4.1. The Value of Creating Global Concern

²⁰ McGuire, "Who's afraid of the big bad Media", 274.

Value of universal unity of humanity and equality among each of its members is promoted through and along with other values such as global social concern, humanism and charity by mass media. Various films, songs, TV programmes and also some advertisements promote social cause like environmental cleanliness, ecology, abolition of dowry, the rights of the unborn, abolition of child labour, equal rights for the girl-child etc. For example: Songs like 'Give Peace a Chance' (John Lennon), 'We are the World' and 'Heal the World' (Michael Jackson) or Hindi serials like '*Buniyad*' and '*Nukkad*' were presented with a particular theme of social awareness. Through the use of media they aim to convey the message to the audience at large. During the natural catastrophes like Tsunami, earthquakes, droughts, floods or health epidemic like malaria and aids, the TV and newspaper news also carry appeal for the national and international economical and human resources support to overcome the tragedies.

4.2. The Value of Creativity

Creativity is promoted through and along with other values such as originality, innovation, change, hard work. We see this especially in the advertisements which use various creative elements such as colour, space, size, oddity and novelty to attract the attention of the consumer and sell the product. Besides this various other techniques such as language ads, association of ideas, see for yourself, testimony of science, before and after effect, models, keeping-up-with-the-Jones, repetition, sequential ads, brand names, jingles, sex appeal, gifts and sample ads, contests, guilt inducing ads etc. are used in advertising to commercialize the product.²¹ While one could doubt the motive for such creative techniques, in itself it does introduce us to creative imaging and thinking.

4.3. The Value of Education

The media has power to inform, to entertain and to educate the human minds. The value of education involves sharing of information, further learning as well as all round development in the audience. Besides being a source of entertainment the various media can have rich instructional content. Many TV programmes, novels and books have good content within a well-knit and enthralling plot. Some books, magazines, TV programmes are purely educative as they have been prepared for the learning purpose of the students. Certain TV news channels like BBC, CNN, NDTV help us to keep up abreast with the latest worldwide information while other channels like National Geographic are informative as well as educative in purpose.

4.4. The Value of Championing Cause of Truth and Justice

The media helps to capture the unjust events, to uncover the corruption and to put forward the truth in front of the public through documentaries, TV and newspaper news and feature articles. The news-photographs document events, true life occasions of importance and present the facts about who, what, when, where and how. They include portraits of important personalities, photographs of accidents, earthquakes, meetings, rallies, *morchas*, events, etc. The feature-photographs and feature articles do not merely

²¹ Peter Gonsalves, *Exercises in Media Education*, 2nd ed. (Mumbai: 1999) 57-60.

stop at documentation but further comment on the facts to present a point of view, a statement or question made by people present on the scene or have some kind of involvement in the event.²²

4.5. The Value of Communication

Communication becomes a value when as opposed to mere transmission it is seen as the ‘sharing of meaning’²³ especially if we take ‘meaning’ in its full sense of ultimate relevance. Mass media communication at times goes beyond exchange of information and knowledge, to imparting and sharing in a certain view of reality and a certain understanding of world. Deep meaning is shared by the media people who are sufficiently aware, alert, critical and open-hearted. Through their attentiveness to the reality, intelligent analyses, reasonable judgments and responsible decision making, in their process of searching for meaning and its adequate expression, they make their communication meaningful to the audience. Such a meaningful communication aims at communion, at the establishment and promotion of human community. It contributes to the globalization of our thinking, in building relationships and friendships to make this world a better place to live in.

4.6. The Value of Dignified Human Living

Media uses variety of body language that includes signs, symbols, gestures etc. to communicate our thoughts. Here the body is used as the symbol of our spirit, of what we think, feel and reflect about. It immediately conveys through human actions what one experiences within oneself. A person’s basic biological drives for food and drink, sex and reproduction, survival and growth can be signaled visibly by postures or movements of the body.²⁴ In and through mass media these drives are manifested in various dignified ways such as meal ceremonies with proper table mannerisms, courtship rites used with delicacy of body touch enveloped in romantic idealism, dances with colorful costumes and exquisite dressing up for all the important occasions. It is to realize aesthetic values in one’s own living, yield one the satisfaction of good performance confirmed by the admiration of others and to win respect and even affection of others in the world.²⁵ Mass media thus makes us aware that body is a gift and expression of our person and that there is value in dignified human living.

4.7. The Value of the Challenge to Risk

²² Peter Gonsalves, *Exercises in Media Education*, 156-157.

²³ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 356, Bernard Lonergan, *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1958-1964*, in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, vol. 5, eds. F. E. Crowe & R. M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993) 201.

²⁴ John Kelly, *A Philosophy of Communication* (London: Centre for the Study of Communication and Culture, 1981) 87. Also see Lonergan, *Insight*, 210.

²⁵ Lonergan, *Insight*, 211.

The mass media demonstrates that there is a value in showing courage and taking risks in order to be successful in communication. The deeper we share about ourselves, about what we think, the greater is the risk involved. The creators, producers and writers of mass media through their written, filmed and documented evidence stick their necks out to get their messages across the large variety of audiences. They can be held accountable for what they say, write and publish. And yet they take the risk to present the varied facets of reality, to bring live coverage of the present world happenings as well as to unearth corruption and injustice and break open the reality in front of the common people by shedding the masks of bullying personalities.

4.8. The Value of the Scientific Temper

The media often propagates the values of hard work, research based planning and collaboration. Be it a TV and radio programme, a newspaper article or a simple billboard advertisement, the media in any case have to identify in a specific manner the target audience. The owners as well as the creators of the media have to work tirelessly to determine how they will reach their target audiences. They have to assess when, where, what strategies and what media will be employed depending on the budget allotted to them. Besides creativity such an effort involves hard work, researched based planning as well as collaboration on the part of all those who are working towards its creation.²⁶ Their appropriate choice of words, symbols, work of art, rhyme and rhythm are an effort to work together to produce creative and harmonious product that will catch the attention of the audience. A tremendous amount of research and work is involved to choose the words, sentences, lyrics, symbols or works of art that will have deep and profound meaning. Thus not only the finished product but the scientific process itself of arriving at the finished product becomes a value.

4.9. The Value of Pluralism

Mass media introduces us to the rich diversity of culture, beliefs and meaning systems that are present in the world today. The problems of pluralism are often cast as problems with conflicting value systems. Members of different cultural groups, who are differentially situated in power and status, have very different beliefs about the causes, manifestations, extent, and remedies for social, political, and economic inequities. Yet few of us have had the formal multicultural educational experience that enables us to deal with these realities of cultural, political, and economic diversity as they affect our moral and civic responsibilities.²⁷ Mass media communication enlarges our horizons and broadens our perspectives so that we are able to transcend our particular cultural biases, limited patterns and stereotypes of our minds, and perceive and appreciate value in other cultural heritages and their meaningfulness.²⁸ In a way it propagates a democratic pluralistic society that will, while respecting the cultural diversity, inculcate common core values such as the value of freedom of choice, the value of equality, the value of participation, the value of respect for differences, and the value of cooperation.²⁹

²⁶ Peter Gonsalves, *Exercises in Media Education*, 63.

²⁷ J. Theodore Klein, "Cultural Pluralism and Moral Education", *Monist* 58 (Oct.1974), 684

²⁸ Lonergan, *A Second Collection*, 141.

5. Values at Stake in Media: Issues That Need to Be Confronted

While Media promotes a lot of new and good values, one cannot but deny the false, artificial, transient and meaningless values that it tends to give rise to. Such values challenge the existing and well established values that often lead to the degeneration and degradation of the cultural growth. We therefore need to look at these so called “new media values” that are at stake and confront the issues that give rise to them constructively.

5.1. Consumerism

Consumerism interferes with the workings of society by replacing the normal common sense desire for an adequate supply of life's necessities, community life, a stable family and healthy relationships with an artificial ongoing and insatiable quest for things and the money to buy them with little regard for the true utility of what is bought. An intended consequence of this, promoted by those who profit from consumerism, is to accelerate the discarding of the old, either because of lack of durability or a change in fashion. Consumerism sets each person against their own self in an endless quest for the attainment of material things or the imaginary world conjured up and made possible by things yet to be purchased. Weight training, diet centers, breast reduction, breast enhancement, cosmetic surgery, permanent eye make-up, liposuction, collagen injections, these are some examples of people turning themselves into human consumer goods more suited for the “marketplace” than living in a healthy balanced society.³⁰ Malls have replaced parks, churches and community gatherings for many who no longer even take the trouble to meet their neighbors or care to know their names. Consumerism thus paves way for negative values such as greed, stress, anxiety, false sense of well being by giving away old traditional values of simplicity of life and life style, generosity and trust in providence.

5.2. Blind Ambition

Consumerism and commercialization of mass media often works with the one goal in mind: that of making the profit. It then promotes the negative values such as one-upmanship and winning at any cost that leads to cut-throat competition. Values such as humility, generosity, patience and fortitude do not find place in life in this case. False pride in one's material possession often paves way for self-glorification, narcissism and self-conceit. With such ambitious attitude one links success with having money and being rich and famous. Status advertising and publicity through media gains priority in one's life. Life then is governed by the mass media norm “to be more, have more and if you want to lead, be the first to buy.”³¹ With this ambitious attitude people fall prey to the false thinking that having more and being successful is happiness often resulting into sad stories of unhappiness and meaninglessness in the lives of the so called rich and famous.

²⁹ J. Theodore Klein, “Cultural Pluralism and Moral Education”, 685.

³⁰ <http://www.verdant.net/society.htm>

³¹ Gonsalves, *Exercises in Media Education*, 68.

5.3. Conformity

All living beings by nature adapt themselves to their environment. They want to be socially accepted and therefore conform to the social and cultural patterns of their time and place. Mass media affects the way people look at their own identities and their relationships. Mass media culture either directly or indirectly imposes its unwritten norms and customs on the minds of its members. Like the atmosphere we breathe, the mass mediated environment affects individuals whose lives are being governed by the preoccupation of status, human respect, peer pressure, ostentation and the fear of ‘what will people think of us if we behave differently?’ Conformity to media culture often takes away one’s self-worth, acceptance and creative thinking and makes people blind followers of mass media created stereotype personalities and hero-worship leading to aimlessness. The spirit of crowd mentality that is created to keep up with the present mass media ideology often kills the individual initiative and creative thinking and gets them to conform to the mass media norms and ideology. What is more – each recipient imbibes the ideology and influences his/her circle of associates and thus, often blindly, the hold of the media culture on our lives is reinforced.

5.4. Bias and Prejudice

However careful we may be in what we communicate, we disclose something of ourselves, what shaped and formed us, what counts with us, what we value. When other people call that value into question, we may be tempted to classify them as biased not realizing the part bias plays in our own perception and communication as well. We are often taught to believe that everything that is printed is true to fact. But a closer and intelligent study of Television and news reports that appear in our papers and various TV programmes will prove that news reports are “packaged” accounts of the facts. This packaging is often affected by the social, political, cultural and religious biases of the news reporters and the newspaper.

Besides the bias in interpretation that every reporter brings to his/her reporting style and content, every newspaper, magazine and TV news channel too, has its own particular ‘slant’ in presenting the news reports that further alters the facts and truth content of the report. Some of the mass media unwritten norms such as ‘truth is what works best’, and ‘any means justifies the end’³² challenges and alters the basic concepts of truth and justice. It could bring relativism to every aspect of life allowing corruption and power-abuse that leads to injustice and inequality in the society.

5.5. Culture of Violence

³² Gonsalves, *Exercises in Media Education*, 42.

Researchers say that daily pressures of modern life are proving people to outburst of anger and violence. People are angry in their society against the corrupt politicians, workers are angry in their job places against their bosses and managers, students are angry because of plagiarism in exams and poor man on the street is angry with the very unjust situation and corruption in the society that has led to his downfall. Rampant dishonesty, corruption and bribery lead to adulterated consumer goods, bandhs, unions and social outbreak. The media and especially film industry manipulate the need of the common man to express his anger. Violence in cinemas feeds on this anger and hate. People find it easy to identify with the hero who stabs a politician or punches his way up the social ladder. Unable to right the wrong, they are happy to find justice on the screen when in real life it is hard to come by. A steady diet of heavy, graphic, fictional but visual violence in films tends to desensitize people to real life violence and increase aggressivity in their social behaviour. Mass media thus gives rise to the culture of violence that eradicates values such as peace, harmony and forgiveness and tends to promote values of aggression and vengeance.

5.6. Sexual Promiscuity

Sex is part of life. We are all sexual beings, for God made us both male and female to contribute to reproduction of the human species. Since we are social beings we have customs, and mores. Moreover each culture and religion has drawn up certain norms for the safeguard of its tenets vis-à-vis sex, romance and marriage. Since sex is god-given and therefore a noble, human and a great faculty, it is certainly wrong to trivialize, dehumanize and vulgarize it. Films and TV programmes instead of honestly portraying life, seem to thrive on creating the unreal world marred by sexual promiscuity and pornography. Media culture in the name of popularity has worked to remove the demarcation line between child and adult, and between private and public spheres. V-formula (violence and vulgarity) is apparently meant to woo the audience from satellite TV to the cinema halls. Dance has now become hip-thrusting, breast-shaking gyrations and the sky seems to be the limit. Sexuality has been distorted to the extent of pornography making sex trivial, uninteresting, vulgar and dull. The values such as love, commitment in married life, self-discipline, etc seem to be replaced by sexual promiscuity, licentiousness and permissiveness.

6. Conclusion

The media are powerful tools for communication. But because they serve as instruments and vehicles of the human mind they have the potency to build as much as to destroy. It is up to each individual to use these instruments for the benefit of humanity. 'Revaluation of values'³³ has been considered in the context of mass media and its consequent technological progress, but today it has proved to be an insufficient medium. We have an urgent need to undertake more effective and invigorating process of 'transvaluation of values' that will not only critically evaluate the values provided by the mass media but utilize them in a constructive manner and make them transformative for the betterment of the society.

³³ Rajeev Karan Reddy "Futurology And Values" *Darshana International*, 31/2 (1991) 14.

We need to be aware of the power of media to promote good as well as evil. It is incumbent on us to be critical consumers of the media's many messages and values. It is in our own interest that we exercise discretion in separating the chaff from the wheat, the real values from the reel values. We must see through the glamorous façade of the media that they are not concerned friends eager to help and take responsibility for what they propagate. They are rather big businesses that thrive on sensationalism that subtly influence, persuade and shape opinion to their advantage and for the benefit of greater profits. Caught in the whirlpool of a fat-aced media revolution, we are faced with the enormous challenge of staying sane, safe and sure.³⁴

Such an approach requires a commitment on individual as well as on community level. The essential values serve as an edifice to all our present and future structures in one form or another. But the outward or extrinsic values are bound to change and transform themselves with the growth of individual consciousness and transcending levels of awareness in societies and civilizations throughout the world.

We then have two options: Either to live a life from the depths of our being which is an option for a value-based life where ideals guide our choices or to live from the surface where what is transient and apparent alone matters.³⁵ In other words we will be allowing the image to replace our values and ideals. The example of the true heroes of history has proved that only the first option is a healthy and happy one. Only when we develop a discerning attitude within this ambient, when we are ready to stake all for the principles and values we wish to live by, when we are firmly grounded in the security that comes from believing in God, only then will we have the courage to ensure that 'we use the media' rather than 'allow the media to use us'.

Following the scale of values that is suggested by Lonergan and applying it to the mass media communication we could now come to the following conclusion. Mass media communication is essential both for human living as well as for human growth and development. It is therefore a *vital value* in as much as it has become an indispensable element of human life today.³⁶ It is a *social value* in as much as it is needed for all institutions, social organizations, industries, states and countries to carry out their internal and external relations.³⁷ When we conceive of the good of order and its institutions as an ongoing process, mass media communication entails policy-making, planning, and the execution of the plans. Mass media communication becomes a *cultural value*, both at an everyday level of meanings and values of spontaneous living informing a given way of life (as in undifferentiated consciousness of common sense) and as a superstructure of reflexively articulated cultural values (as in differentiated consciousness).³⁸ Through mass media cross-cultural communication of the cultural values we could arrive at a world-cultural humanity.³⁹ Mass media communication entails a *personal value* when it

³⁴ Gonsalves, *Exercises in Media Education*, 189.

³⁵ Boscom-India, 'Shepherds' for an Information Age", ed. Peter Gonsalves (Bombay: Tej-Prasarini, 2000)101.

³⁶ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 31.

³⁷ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 31-32.

³⁸ Lonergan, *A Second Collection*, 102-103.

helps the individual discover one's self-transcendence as originating values in one's milieu.⁴⁰ Here communication decentralizes the self towards cooperation due to its spontaneous intersubjective tendency, but simultaneously fosters originality and fresh styles. It stresses the individual appropriation of messages and their re-composition with new expressions. Through it the individual experiences, understands, judges, deliberates, evaluates, chooses and acts so freely and responsibly to live and communicate a meaningful existence.⁴¹ Finally mass media communication can acquire the character of *religious value* when endowed with the sanctifying grace of God. Individual beings involved in communication process will not only promote justice but self-sacrificing love. Such a dynamic communication of operative and cooperative grace "will have a redemptive role in human society inasmuch as such love can undo the mischief of decline and restore the cumulative process of progress."⁴²

³⁹ Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History*, 372.

⁴⁰ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 32.

⁴¹ Lonergan, *A Second Collection*, 79.

⁴² Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 55.

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

Its Challenge to Christian Philosophizing

Scaria Varanath

1. Religion and Religions

What is Religion? Religion is the belief or conviction that there is one Absolute Reality behind all this multiplicity. It refers to the transcendental dimension in human consciousness. This one Absolute Reality is conceived in personal or transpersonal terms. For most Religions this One Reality is a Personal God. For Jainism and Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism (Atheistic religions) this One Reality is transpersonal (impersonal, supra-personal?). What brings the theistic and the a-atheistic religions together is the experience and perception of the transcendental dimension. This transcendental dimension is expressed by referring to the Absolute as Truth, Love, Mystery of life, Ultimate Concern, Eternal Law, etc. Followers of different religions refer to the Absolute by the historically and culturally bound names such as Father, Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Allah, Yahweh, Ahura Mazda, etc. The word 'religion' or 'religious experience' will have different connotations for adherents of different faiths. For the Jew it will mean something slightly different from that of the Christian; for the Muslim something different from that of the Hindu; for the Buddhist something different from that of the Sikh. And for the secular man it will be something different again from that of all the others.

According to Swami Vivekananda, religion is an attempt to transcend the limitations of the senses and the limitations of the power of reasoning. Religion is therefore trans-empirical and trans-rational. Religion is the awakening of spirituality in man. The word 'spirituality' comprehends everything that transcends the sensuous and the intellectual. Man is aware of the inadequacy of sense and reason to understand some of the 'mysteries' of life. He is conscious of his limitations and imperfections. He has to lean onto some super-natural reality. The struggle to get beyond the limitations of the senses and reason in pursuit of the Infinite brings satisfaction, peace and joy, and enables him to rise above the ordinary evils and ills of the world.

It is necessary to distinguish between *true religion* and what may be called *institutional religions*. Usually people identify religion with institutions. Sects and institutions set a lot of limits to religion. True religion, like true love, must be universal. Does such a universal religion exist? According to Swami Vivekananda, *such a religion is already there*. Human beings are lost so much in the external conflicts of religion that they hardly notice its presence. Swami Vivekananda says, a simple insight into the natures of different religions will show that they are not actually contradictory but complementary to each other. The truth of religion is so comprehensive that different religions focus their attention on one or other aspects. When religions begin to defend their chosen aspects so vehemently, ignoring other aspects, they become sectarian and narrow-minded. In reality we must view every religion as taking up an aspect of religion and developing it, and consequently adding to the rich variety of the religious experience of mankind. There may be contradictory points of view of the

same reality or truth, which must be seen as different ways of grasping or picturing reality just as photographs of the same object can be taken from different angles. All the same, they are basically views of the same reality, and hence complementary to each other.¹

The elements of universal religion would consist in recognizing that there may be various and different ways of approach to the religious object. It gives perfect liberty to the individual in this regard. But at the same time, the spirit of universal religion demands that every approach must be large-hearted enough to have a respect for the other ones. The one *watch-word* for universal religion, according to Vivekananda, is *acceptance*. Acceptance is not just tolerance;...it is positive acceptance... He says he can enter and offer his prayers anywhere, in a temple or a church or a mosque or any other place. The believer in the universal religion has to be broad-minded and open-hearted, he would be prepared to learn from the scriptures of all religions, and keep his heart open for what may come in the future.²

According to Rabindranath Tagore, religion is the realization of one's kinship with everything and cultivation of a universal feeling of love. It preaches freedom, spontaneity and naturalness. It is the spontaneous expression of the essential and inner aspect of man, his deep abiding creative force. The aim of true religion is to realize the relationship of perfect love between the Supreme Soul and the souls of all created beings; this love "holds duality on one side and non-duality on the other, union as well as separation and bondage along with freedom."³

Mahatma Gandhi says, "Let me explain what I mean by religion. It is not the Hindu religion...but the religion which transcends Hinduism, which changes one's very nature, which binds one indissolubly to the truth within and which ever purifies. It is the permanent element in human nature which counts no cost too great in order to find full expression and which leaves the soul utterly restless until it has found itself, known its maker and appreciated the true correspondence between the Maker and itself"⁴

His attitude towards historical religions can be summed up in his own words: "After long study and experience, I have come to the conclusion that (1) all religions are true, (2) all religions have some error in them, (3) all religions are almost as dear to me as my own Hinduism, inasmuch as all human beings should be as dear to one as one's own close relatives. My own veneration for other faiths is the same as that for my own faith, therefore no thought of conversion is possible. The aim of fellowship should be to help a Hindu to become a better Hindu, a Mussalman to become a better Mussalman, and a Christian a better Christian. Our prayer for others must be **not** 'God, give him the light thou hast given me', **but** 'Give him all the light and truth he needs for his development'. Pray merely that your friends may become better men, whatever their form of religion."⁵

Prof. Ninian Smart speaks of at least six different dimensions which are present in all the institutional religions. These six dimensions are: the ritual, mythological, doctrinal, ethical, sociological and experiential. Sacrifices, ritual ablutions, etc. form the ritual dimension. They keep the people engaged religiously. Mythologies are stories and legends for communicating certain fundamental religious truths. Doctrines are attempts at systematic

¹ Basant Kumar Lal, *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1999, Cf. pp 40-44

² Ibid, p. 45

³ Ibid Cf. pp. 71-74

⁴ Young India, quoted in B.K. Lal, op. cit., p.126

⁵ D.M. Datta, *The Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 49, quoted in B.K. Lal, pp.129-130.

formulation of religious and moral truths. Ethics are practical guidelines, rules and regulations for individuals and communities. Sociological dimension refers to the social structures. The experiential dimension refers to the personal and mystical dimension.⁶ These six dimensions help us to know what to look for when we try to identify what is called 'religion'. The experiential dimension distinguishes religion from a secular ideology. Erich Sharpe explains what a religion is in terms of the 'four functional modes' of religion: the **existential** which includes faith and religious experience, the **intellectual** which includes formal statements of faith, the **institutional** which includes organizations and structures containing and transmitting faith and belief, and **ethical** which deals with conduct.⁷

2. Experience of Religious Pluralism Today

Today people are beginning to admit the reality of religious pluralism. No religion can exist in isolation, secure in its own isolated religious campus. There is so much knowledge about other religions available to the common man today. Translations of all the Scriptures of other religions and almost all the sacred texts are available in the world. More and more people have more and more opportunities to learn about religions other than their own. Many Western Christians are growing in awareness that "*they who know one, know none.*" Even in Christian theology courses, students sense that to know only their own religion is not really to know it. Students want religious questions not only within the framework of Christian ideas. Religious pluralism has undoubtedly entered into the consciousness of the younger generation. They are introduced to other religious systems and ideas and other religious persons. One's neighbors today might be anyone: Buddhists or Jews, Hindus or Muslims. Because we are coming so close to each other, we are learning each other's languages, both literally and figuratively. To have a friend or neighbor who has found meaning according to a religious path that apparently is quite different from Christianity not only impresses but disturbs the Christian. The 'one' Christian religion is feeling the impact of the 'many' others.⁸

Today people of all faiths, and in particular Christians, are bound to reflect on certain questions in the light of their experience of religious pluralism: Why are there so many different religions? If God is one, should there not be one religion? Are the religions all equally true, and equally false? Do they all share in something common? How should they relate themselves to others? Are the many religions really one? How should *my* religion be related to the others? Can I learn from other religions? Can I learn more from them than I can from my own? Why do I belong to one religion rather than another?⁹

No one today can run away from these questions. Christians are, perhaps, the most troubled in facing these questions because they have always felt that theirs was the only true religion, and that the 'many' other religions were false and destined to be corrected and eventually to become the 'one' Christian religion. That situation has changed. There are other living religions standing alongside Christianity. Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims are claiming that their message, like that of Christianity, bears a 'universal relevance'. They feel theirs might be more meaningful than others. The perception of religious pluralism makes us realize that there is ***no one and only way***. Today we are wary of any person or movement that presents itself as *the one and only, or the final word*. The *one-way road* is most likely the

⁶ Peter Bishop & Michael Darton (eds), *The Encyclopedia of World Faiths*, Macdonald & Co, 1987 cf. pp.8-12

⁷ Ibid, cf. p13

⁸ Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name?*, Orbis Books, New York, cf. pp 3-4

⁹ Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name?* Orbis Books, New York, Cf. p1

road to destruction. Perhaps this is the abiding meaning of the story of the Tower of Babel. The Lord God warned against the havoc inherent in all efforts for a monolithic, one-way vision of reality. The Pentecost event is all about welcoming differences and diversity.¹⁰

The world and everything in it is evolutionary or in process. We are not in a state of being but in a state (process) of becoming. Nothing in the world is pre-fabricated, merely to be assembled according to a predetermined plan. Rather, we are caught up in a process of constant change, movement, and exploration into newness. This way of thinking is different from the vision that guided the mind and imagination of Western civilization for a very long period of time. Creation came forth from the hand of God as a finished product, stable, and hierarchically ordered. One was not to tamper with this order. Humans must keep their place. Social classes were also to keep their places. God willed serfs to be serfs and lords to be lords.¹¹

A confluence of many events and discoveries changed this vision of an unchangeable world. The French Revolution and industrial revolution set people thinking that the social order might not be as unalterable and divinely established as they had thought. Then came Darwin's discovery of biological evolution. Creation is not a one-time event but a continuous process, still unfinished and undetermined. Then came the discoveries of the "new physics". Reality is no longer seen as a well-ordered machine but a buzz of activity, of constant process. The new physics enabled the philosophers to gain a new insight into the way things are. If everything is a *becoming* rather than a *being*, the *becoming* takes place through *interrelating*. If we can be only if we become, *we can become only if we reach out and relate*. Nothing can be an island unto itself. "We are our relationships."¹²

The need for a world community compels the religions to revive their inner visions of love and common fellowship. Whatever their divisions and aggressions of the past, world religions share something today that calls on them to bind themselves together. Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and the others are all faced today, for the first time, by a joint challenge: to collaborate in building a common world.

Hence the various other religions are to be seen, not as adversaries, but as *potential partners*. According to John A.T. Robinson, "truth is two-eyed". Western Christianity, with its emphasis on the personhood of God, the historicity of faith, the importance of the material world, has been peering into the mystery of God with only one eye. For a long time the colonial powers considered the plurality of religions and cultures in the world as a bump on the road to be flattened out in the interest of Christianity and Western culture. "Colonialism is not just a matter of economic exploitation. It is the organized repression of the cultural life of a people to make them accept other values as superior." Here is the colonial illusion: that one religion or one culture or one ideology can make exclusive claims on its behalf, thus condemning other peoples, cultures and religions to an inferior status to be humiliated, dominated, exploited and conquered, not just physically but spiritually as well.¹³

3. Religious Pluralism and Its Challenge to Christian Philosophizing

¹⁰ Ibid, cf. pp 4-6

¹¹ Ibid, cf. p7

¹² Ibid, cf. p.7

¹³ S.J. Samartha, One Christ – Many Religions, cf. p. 3

According to Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923), the philosopher-theologian known as ‘the father of historical relativism’, although the Absolute is present to and manifest in all of history, no historical manifestation of the Absolute can be absolute. That would contradict the nature of the Absolute (which is always more than the finite) and the nature of the historical (which is always limited and changing). This means that all religions, as bearers of the divine, are also relative, limited. Although each religion is a manifestation of the Absolute, there can be no absolute religion. No religion can affirm that it stands above this all-embracing relativity; no religion can claim to be the full and final realization of the divine presence. We must admit the radical relativity of all historical forms and all assertions of truth. The Christian religion is in every moment of its history a purely historical phenomenon, subject to all the limitations to which any individual historical phenomenon is exposed.¹⁴

Can Christians integrate what they feel about historical relativity with their religious beliefs? Christians are gradually realizing that they can. Have not Christian mystics in general and theologians in their better moments insisted that God is “absolute Mystery,” ever beyond the grasp of the human mind, never able to be captured once and for all in any doctrine, whether biblical or papal? And have not Christians been admonished by the Bible and most recently by the Second Vatican Council that they should look upon themselves as a “pilgrim people” on a journey of faith, and therefore always on their guard against trying to build a lasting city with final truths amid the flux and finitude of history? In a sense, are not Christians required to be the most extreme of historical relativists?¹⁵

Arnold Toynbee (1889-1975) makes a distinction between the essential counsels and truths, and the nonessential practices and propositions in religions. When we look at religions we find that behind the nonessentials of each religion, we will find the inner core, the essential experience and insight of all of them, is essentially the same. The nonessentials are holy places, rituals, tabus, social conventions, myths, dogmas, schools of theology. In other words, **Creed**, (symbols, doctrines, theology), **Code** (ethical systems) and **Cult** (ritual, liturgy) by which religions try to give expression to their experience of and efforts to be in harmony with the spiritual presence.

Toynbee says that only if all religions abandon their own self-centeredness can they join hands to save the world from self-destruction. He admitted that there is a strain of egoism and pride within every religion. All religions tend to do this. However, the main offenders were the three Western religions: Judaism, Islam and Christianity. Of the three, it seemed to him, Christianity had the worst record of intolerance and arrogance. He admitted that this “exclusive mindedness” is congenital to Christianity, inherited from its parent religion, Judaism, and that it has become intrinsic to Christian beliefs. Yet he was also convinced that it belongs to the nonessentials of Christianity, and so it can be discarded without maiming the essence of the gospel.

The essence of Christianity consists in the experience of and belief in God whose name is love, who therefore “is not self-centered, but just the opposite: “self-sacrificing”. Therefore Christians not only can, but must sacrifice themselves and give up their self-centered claims of superiority and exclusiveness. He also feels that this arrogant spirit was precisely the reason why Christianity was rejected by the Japanese and the Chinese in the 17th century, and by so many intellectual leaders of the West during these last centuries.¹⁶

¹⁴ Views of Ernst Troeltsch, cf. Paul F. Knitter, pp. 26-27

¹⁵ Ibid p 34

Why does the religious truths have to be “one and only” or “the best” in order to be true? We can be fully committed to our own religion and at the same time be fully open to the truth of other religions. Does “truly” require “only”? A person who is committed to Jesus will experience Jesus as the true and effective vehicle of the Divine Presence in his or her life. And for him Jesus is **truly** the Son of God, the Saviour, the Mediator, the Word of God, etc. Christians need not know Jesus as the ‘**only**’ Saviour in order to be committed to him. That there are others is not an impediment to faithful following. **Discipleship requires “truly”; it does not necessarily require “solely”.**¹⁷

Toynbee pictured the various world religions as “so many world wide diasporas, none of which will be in a majority at any point, because all will be intermingled with each other everywhere”. The different cultural and spiritual heritages will become, increasingly, “the common possession of all mankind.” “I think one can foresee a time when the heritages of Islam and Buddhism will also have become part of the Christian society’s background”. Because we will be neighbors to each other culturally, we will also be so spiritually. And no neighbor will be better than another. All will learn from and change with each other.

In this new cultural context persons will be more ready to change religions. And personal adherence to one religion rather than to another would not be determined by the intrinsic superiority of that religion over all others. Rather, it would be a matter of psychological need and preference. He contended that Hinduism and Buddhism, with their propensity toward a more impersonal deity within all reality, were *introverted* religions. Judaism, Christianity, Islam, worshipping a more transcendent, personal God, would be qualified as *extroverted* religions. Human beings do differ in personality structure and the way they encounter and experience the world around them. Naturally, then, there will be an abiding need for different religions for different ways of experiencing and being in harmony with the universal spiritual presence.¹⁸

According to Wilfred Cantwell Smith, professor of comparative history of religion at Harvard and specialist in Islamic studies, Christianity’s traditional claims for uniqueness and finality ‘be quietly stored away on the shelves of history. Yes, claims of exclusivity have been made in the past, and perhaps for understandable reasons. Today, however, if we take seriously a universalist faith and the need for a new unity among religions, a certain “theological surrender” will be required of Christians; they will have to be willing to let go of their traditional beliefs that their religion or even their Christ is superior to and normative for all others. Christians will have to work out a theology that is more **theocentric** than **Christocentric**; a theology that is not limited only to what God has done in Christ but is more open to what God is doing universally in all religions.’¹⁹

In our contemporary world of many religions, encountering each other as never before, can Christianity continue to be the same Christianity it has been for the past nineteen centuries? Can Christians continue to understand and present their religion as bearing the fullness and the normative expression of God’s revelation? More specifically, can they continue to proclaim Jesus of Nazareth as the only Savior and incarnation of God in human history?²⁰ “All religions, including Christianity, have an ‘interim’ character.... At depth the

¹⁶ Ibid pp 37-41

¹⁷ Paul Knitter, *Jesus and the other Names*, cf. p. 72.

¹⁸ No Other Name?, cf. p 43-44

¹⁹ Ibid pp 46-47

essential feature of all religious life is its pilgrim nature.... Finality should not be claimed to the oases on the way.”²¹

S.J. Samartha warns against a “christomonism” that has infected Christian doctrine and so absolutizes Jesus that it turns him into “a kind of cult figure over against other religious figures.” Christians must never forget that “in the incarnation God relativizes himself. Should the Christians then try to absolutize in doctrine one whom God has relativised in history? Instead of a ‘christomonistic’ approach to other religions, Samartha advocates a theocentric approach, which, he holds, will be more faithful to the original message of Jesus himself: “although the witness of the New Testament writers is christocentric, Jesus Christ himself is theocentric.” The focus and core-content of Jesus’ original message was the “kingdom of God”. Jesus’ mission and person were profoundly kingdom-centered, which means God-centered. “Thy kingdom come; thy will be done” was the content of his prayer and his work.

With such a theocentric model for understanding and encountering other religions Christians will still be able to hold to their personal commitment to Christ and to their belief in his universal meaning. They will still be able to tell other religions that *for them* “nowhere else is the victory over suffering and death manifested so decisively as in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.” But such announcement will be an enthusiastic *witness* to their own revealer, *not* a denigrating judgement about other revealers. To recognize that our neighbours too have their ‘missions’, revelations, norms, saviours, does not necessarily jeopardize what Christians have experienced in Jesus Christ.²²

All the “one and only” adjectives used to describe Jesus belong “not to the language of philosophy, science, or dogmatics, but rather to the language of confession and testimony”. In talking about Jesus, the New Testament authors use the language not of analytic philosophers but of enthusiastic believers, not of scientists but of lovers. It is “religious language” – that is, “love language, caressing language”. In describing Jesus as “the only”, Christians were not trying to elaborate a metaphysical principle but a personal relationship and a commitment that defined what it meant to belong to this community. Their lives had been touched and transformed by this Jesus; they felt themselves, despite his death, in a living, enlivening relationship with him; they were devoted to him; they were in love with him. And they spoke the language of lovers – “you are my one and only”.

This was not just a personal, individualistic relationship; it was a relationship they wanted to share, for they felt that others too could come to have the same experience of Jesus and to use the same love language. Yet, if we take such love or confessional statements and transform them into *purely* doctrinal or theological assertions, and use these confessions for the negative task of excluding others rather than for the positive purpose of proclaiming the saving power of Jesus, we are failing in our mission and pastoral outreach to all peoples.

When the early Christians gave Jesus such lofty titles as Word of God, Wisdom of God or Son of God, they were not out primarily to present the world with a philosophical or dogmatic definition; rather they were declaring themselves and inviting all others to be disciples of this Jesus, to follow him in loving God and neighbours and working for what

²⁰ Ibid, p 73

²¹ bid, p. 158

²² Ibid, p. 158

Jesus called the Reign of God. The purpose of professing was to follow. These declarations about Jesus were *action* language or *performative* language. Therefore, we must look for what Sobrino calls the “praxic equivalency” behind and within all the soaring language about Jesus’ divinity and uniqueness. When the first disciples held up Jesus as saviour and mediator, they were attempting to put into language *their resolve to follow him and to carry on his way of living and loving*. Calling Jesus the “only Son of God” was not meant mainly as an ontological, unchangeable definition of his nature, but rather, as a declaration of a way of life based on Jesus. *Following* is the praxic form of accepting the transcendence of God; and following *Jesus* is the praxic form of accepting the transcendence of Jesus.²³ If the primary purpose of the New Testament’s “one and only” language was performative, a *call to action*, then Christians are to be faithful to all this exclusive-sounding language **by following Jesus** and continuing his career in their own lives, and **not by excluding others**.

Let us look at the titles given to Jesus, such as Son of God, Saviour, Word of God, which seem to put him in a category separate from and *superior* to all other religious founders and leaders, as well as adjectives and adverbs applied to Jesus and his message that seem to *exclude* all others, such as: “No one knows the Father, only the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Mt 11,24); “There is one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist” (1Cor 8,6); “He is the only-begotten Son (Jn 1,14); “There is one Mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2, 5); “There is no other Name by which we can be saved” (Acts 4:12).

These titles and adjectives are not to be seen as doctrinal or orthodox statements, but as confessions of faith, which grew out of and were meant to nourish the practice of faith in devotion and discipleship.²⁴ If we read some of the classic exclusivist New Testament texts as *confessional* rather than philosophical language, they sound very much different; and they take on an even more demanding personal challenge. In Acts 4:12 after having cured the lame man in the name of Jesus, the apostles cried out, “there is no other name by which we can be saved,” not to rule out the possibility of other saviours, but to proclaim that *this Lord Jesus was still alive and that it was he, not they, who was working such wonders in the community*. The text, therefore, is abused when used as a starting point for evaluating other religions. The primary intent of all such texts will be to urge all hearers to take this Jesus seriously, as authoritative.²⁵

If Christians could re-clarify and re-possess the original and enduring intent of Christological language, that is, if “one and only” could mean “I am fully committed to you” rather than “no one else is worthy of commitment” – then many Christians would feel more honest about their faith, and doors would be opened more widely to dialogue with other believers equally committed to their saviours.²⁶ The experience of faith necessarily includes the conviction that Jesus *is* God’s revelation and grace. It does not necessarily include the conviction that he *alone* is this revelation and grace. One can be totally committed to Jesus and at the same time genuinely open to the possibility of other revealers and saviours. The divine mystery is not experienced directly without some form of mediation. Human beings need *particular* revealers or saviours, symbols and sacraments.

²³ Paul Knitter, *Jesus and Other Names*, cf. p. 68

²⁴ Paul Knitter, *Jesus and other Names*, p67

²⁵ Paul Knitter, *No Other Name?* , p. 185

²⁶ Paul Knitter, *No Other Name*, p. 186

Richard Niebuhr proposes that Christians approach others “by stating in simple, confessional form what has happened to us in our community, how we came to believe, how we reason about things and what we see from our point of view”. With such confessional Christology and approach to other faiths, Christians can hold to their personal, total commitment to the universal relevance of Jesus. In fact, it seems that only such a confessional stance will enable them to persuade others that what God has done in Jesus is meaningful for all human beings. We are persuaded by those who speak with deep conviction of what their saviour has done for them. We are not persuaded by those who tell us, with deep conviction, that “my saviour is bigger than yours.”²⁷

A confessional approach, then, will be both certain and open-ended; it will enable Christians to take a firm position; but it will also require them to be open to and possibly to learn from other positions. It will allow them to affirm the *uniqueness* and the universal significance of what God has done in Jesus; but at the same time it will require them to recognize and be challenged by the *uniqueness* and universal significance of what the divine mystery may have revealed through others. In boldly proclaiming that God has indeed been defined in Jesus, Christians will also humbly admit that God has not been *confined* to Jesus.²⁸

One may say, without Christ life is ‘unfulfilled’; one might even say that Jesus the Christ is “necessary” for all people of all faiths to have a more complete understanding of the human condition. This does not mean, that such persons, without Christ, are imperfect, or inferior to Christians, or lost without Christ. Will this approach undermine the church’s mission? Christian theology admits that the church is not to be identified with God’s kingdom. The kingdom, God’s revealing-saving presence in the world, is much broader than the church and also operates through means other than the church. The primary mission of the church, therefore, is not the “salvation business” (*making persons Christian so that they can be saved*), but the task of serving and promoting the kingdom of justice and love, by being sign and sacrament, wherever that kingdom may be forming.²⁹

4. Indian Approach to Religious Pluralism

From the Vedic times (about 1500 BC) the Indian approach to religious pluralism has been that Reality is One and It is known and spoken of in many ways by the Seers. (*ekam sad vipra bahudha vadanti*, Rgveda I.164.46). Again, ‘Purusha is all this, all that was, and all that shall be’, (RV X.90), ‘The real essence of the gods is one’ (RV III.55), ‘We make sacrifices to the ultimate Lord of the universe, who runs through every particle of this universe, the whole existence, and who is blissful and indescribable’ (RV X.121.1), ‘That One breathed calmly, self-sustained; naught else beyond it lay’ (RV X.129). ‘The Indescribable is the ground of all names and forms, the support of all the creation’ (*Atharvaveda* XI.9.1), ‘All the gods form the body of this World-Soul’ (*Nirukta* VII.4.9), ‘He is immanent in all this creation and yet He transcends it’ (RV X.90.3).³⁰

Different religions are different expressions of the One, Ultimate Reality. There is no superior or inferior religion. God is one and He manifests himself in a variety of names and forms. People worship the Absolute under any one or more of these manifestations that

²⁷ Ibid, cf. P. 203 (Cf. R. Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation*).

²⁸ Ibid, p. 203.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 222.

³⁰ Cf. C.D. Sharma, *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, Motilal Banarsidass, 1976, pp.16-17.

appeal them. Each religion has a name and identity, rituals and worship patterns, belief systems and world-views of its own. Each religion is unique. People in India have been living for thousands of years in a multi-religious situation. The philosophical vision of the Vedas and the Vedanta has been the foundation for a spirit of tolerance, acceptance and respect. No other country in the world has been a Home for all the World Religions as India has been.

S.J. Samartha says that just after India's political independence in 1947, despite fresh memories of how the country was divided on religious grounds, in the Constituent Assembly, working on a Constitution for the Republic of India, although there was a suggestion to delete the words "to propagate" from the Article on "Fundamental Rights": "to profess, practice and propagate" one's religion (Article 25:1); well known Hindu leaders argued for retaining the words "to propagate" as a recognition of a fundamental right of the minority communities. What a broad-mindedness, spirit of tolerance and accommodation we see in the founding fathers towards Christians and Muslims! "In no other country, therefore, does the claim for the "uniqueness" of one particular religious tradition or the assertion of the "normativeness" of one particular faith over others sound so rude, out of place, and theologically arrogant as in India."³¹

The Hindu *Pandits* advance three arguments against the claim of "uniqueness", "finality", "once-for-all-ness" and Christian superiority:

- (1) The plurality of religions is "intrinsic and purposeful" because of *dharma*. The basic difference in humankind make it natural and inevitable that there should be plurality, not singularity, in religion. In other words, plurality is rooted in the diversity of human nature itself.
- (2) There is the principle of *adhipara* (translated as aptitude, competence, eligibility) which makes plurality necessary. Birth is not accidental; it is the result of *karma*.
- (3) This *adhipara-bheda* (differences in aptitude) is not a matter of choice but is a "given" element, even the will of God, and it allows persons to choose different *margas* (paths or ways). God defines one's *adhipara* by the attraction (*ruci*) one feels toward a certain *marga*.³² Hence, religious tolerance and freedom in matters of religion.

According to Mahatma Gandhi, since human beings are imperfect we can see Truth only in fragments and act according to our limited lights. The reality is known only to God. Hence, the humans have the duty of being humble and tolerant. He is against any type of exclusivism and superiority. One must entertain the same respect for the religious faiths of others as one accords to one's own. When such tolerance becomes a law of life, conflicts between different faiths become impossible, and so does all effort to convert other people to one's faith. Gandhiji hoped for a time when people belonging to different faiths will have the same regard for other faiths that they have for their own. It was his dream to see India standing for perfect toleration of all religions. All must become better people by contact with one another. "I do not expect the India of my dream to develop one religion, i.e., to be wholly Hindu, or wholly Christian or wholly Mussalman; but I want it to be wholly tolerant, with its religions working side by side with one another."³³

The Hindu (Vedic / Vedantic) view of religious pluralism could be summarized thus:

³¹ S.J. Samartha, *One Christ – Many Religions*, p. 94.

³² Ibid, pp. 92-93

³³ M.K. Gandhi, *All Religions are True*, pp.233-234.

1. The One Absolute Reality is *nirguna Brahman* (beyond words and concepts, beyond *nama-rupa*, beyond knowledge and experience). Response to this Reality is *silence*. Brahman is Silence!
2. The highest metaphysical categories through which the One Absolute Reality is thought of are *sat-cit-ananda*. (Saccidananda Brahman is *saguna Brahman*). Response to this Reality is *mystical realization of the oneness of Atman and Brahman*.
3. When the One Absolute Reality is conceived as a *Personal God*, it is thought of as Father, Mother, Lord, Master, Creator, Preserver, Destroyer, All-knowing, All-powerful, etc. All religions can address the Ultimate Reality with these Personal attributes and yet know no division. Response to this Personal God is *love*, and loving surrender.
4. When the One Absolute Reality is given *sectarian personal names*, “individuation” takes place in the Ultimate Reality, or rather, **division takes place in Human Consciousness regarding the One Absolute Reality**. (Eg. Yahweh (Jew), Allah (Muslim), Shiva, Vishnu, (Hindu), etc.). This individuation gives rise to Religious Pluralism, each religion with its own ritual, myth, doctrine, ethics, social structures, and personal/mystical experiences. Response to this Reality could be *faithfulness and worship, tolerance and co-existence, respect and love for all*.
5. The One Absolute Reality takes upon itself limitations so as to make itself available to human beings: *avatars, incarnations, manifestations*. Human beings build up Images, Statues, Idols, Sacred Places, Sacred Objects, Temples, Mosques, Churches, etc. The Personal God takes on more and more anthropomorphic character. Response to these Incarnations is in terms of worship and rituals, defensive and apologetic, emergence of sub-sects, ritualism, clericalism, etc.
6. When worshippers of the One God tries to establish their superiority (i.e. when one religion tries to impose its theology, worship, image of God, etc. over others), *intolerance and conflicts* happen between Religions aiming at extermination of other gods and religions.

In what is given above, (1) and (2) are the realm of the Mystics and Saints; (3) and (4) are the realm of the Prophets; (5) and (6) are the realm of the Priests. In and through dialogue and collaboration religions must help each other to discover the Mystery and the Depth of the Absolute, and the most fitting persons are the mystics and saints.

5. Fellowship of Religions: the Spirit of the Future

Any attempt to reject Religious Pluralism, i.e., refusing to accept our neighbours of other faiths who live by their own creed, code and cult, is a serious form of injustice. Tom Driver points out, “The history of Christianity is, by and large, one of not listening to followers of other spiritual roads. On the contrary it has largely been a history of combating, to death if necessary, those who worship “other gods”...the crusading mentality among Western Christians is far from dead.”³⁴

³⁴ Quoted by S.J. Samartha, *One Christ – Many Religions*, cf. p.33-34

Religious Pluralism is the fact that different religions respond to the Mystery of the Ultimate Reality in different ways. Plurality belongs to the very structure of reality. How can so great a Mystery be experienced in only one way and expressed through only one set of symbols? Religious plurality, therefore, is the homage which the finite mind can pay to the inexhaustibility of the infinite. It acknowledges that the Mystery of God (Truth or *Dharma*) is too profound to be exhausted in any particular apprehensions of it. The relative may define Truth but it cannot confine Truth to its own definition.

Human responses to the mystery of the Infinite are always diverse. A sense of Mystery provides a point of unity to all plurality. In a pluralistic world the different responses of different religions to the Mystery of the Infinite need to be acknowledged as valid. To break down the walls of separation between these different responses, a new vocabulary is needed to facilitate communication between people of different faiths, an 'all embracing philosophy and theology of pluralism within which alone the fact and right of religious pluralism can be situated, and their otherness and inter-relatedness fully understood and expressed'.³⁵

Pluralism has several values in the contemporary world:

- 1) It provides spiritual and cultural resources for the survival of different people in their search for freedom, self-respect and human dignity. When nations and peoples are politically dominated, economically exploited and militarily intimidated what else do they have for the survival of their spirit except their religions and cultures which can never be taken away from them?
- 2) A plurality of religions, cultures, ethnic groups and languages can be a guarantee against fascism because it will resist the imposition of any "one and only" religion or ideology on all people.
- 3) Pluralism introduces an element of choice by providing alternative visions of reality and ways of life.
- 4) Plurality provides multiple spiritual resources to tackle basic problems which have become global today. The availability of many resources to tackle these problems should not be looked upon with suspicion but accepted with gratefulness. People in mono-religious situations are becoming a little more pluralist.³⁶

There are also other developments that have led to new perceptions of religious pluralism. "Salvation History" which has been, and still is, the bedrock of exclusive claims in a religiously plural world, is being seriously questioned. Do we need to accept the history of Israel as the norm for all history? Shouldn't the Asian and African people look for the theological significance of their own histories? Asian theologians are questioning the relevance of "Salvation History" to Asian life. Asian Christians are heirs to a double heritage – that of the Bible and of other scriptures. To enter this multi-scriptural situation with the claim that the Bible is "the only written witness to God's deeds in history" is to cut off all conversation with neighbours of other faiths. When other faith traditions have provided meaning and purpose for millions of people in other cultures for more than two or three thousand years, to claim that the Judeo-Christian-Western tradition has the *only* answer to all problems in all places and for all persons in the world is presumptuous. Does the *validity* of Christian experience of salvation in Jesus Christ give Christians the right to *exclusive* claims?

³⁵ S.J. Samartha, *One Chrst – Many Religions*, p5.

³⁶ *Ibid*, pp 8-9

If salvation comes *from God* then the possibilities should be left open to recognize the validity of other experiences of salvation. Exclusiveness puts fences around the Mystery.³⁷

Some think that the present encounter of Christianity with other religions may be the beginning of a “third reformation”. Others think that the present Christian dialogue with people of other faiths may lead to “a new Church, not totally new, but genuinely new.”³⁸ If the great religious traditions of humanity are indeed different responses to the Mystery of God then the distinctiveness of each response should be stated in such a way that a mutually critical and enriching relationship between different responses becomes naturally possible. Exclusive claims isolate the community of faith from neighbours of other faiths. But when the distinctiveness of a particular faith is stated in a manner that avoids open or hidden exclusiveness, then meaningful relationships between different communities become possible. This has been happening throughout the history of different religions in the multi-religious life of India.

India might well be the only place where persons of other faiths, without crossing over the visible boundaries that separate them from Christians, have related themselves to Jesus Christ through art, thus breaking down the walls of exclusiveness. These artists, standing outside the confines of institutional Christianity, make evident that it is not the dogmas and doctrines about Christ or the institutions of the Church that have touched the heart and mind of India, but the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, his death and resurrection, the illumination he has brought into the Mystery of God, and the transforming power he has introduced into human life.

Visitors to India are often struck by the responses that followers of other faiths have made to Jesus Christ through the religious dimensions of art-literature, poetry and drama in the different languages of India as well as paintings, movies, and television. Jesus Christ seems to move beyond the structures of the church, with its dogmas and doctrines about this person, in order to establish new relationships with adherents of other faiths. There seems to be an “*unbaptised koinonia*” outside the gates which the church is most reluctant to recognize or even talk about.³⁹

Time has come to accept the plurality of religions and cultures with courage and hope rather than with hesitation, doubt and fear. Plurality is the inescapable fact of history. David Bosch remarks, “The Christian faith will have to compete in the market place of religions as never before. And it will have to do this in total humility, at the same time repenting of the arrogance and intolerance that characterized much of its evangelism in the past.”⁴⁰

Mission and *Conversion* are legitimate terms and goals in all religious life. Without conversion there would have been no Buddhism or Jainism or Sikhism in India. Without conversion there would have been no Christianity emerging out of Judaism in the first century. Without mission there would have been no Buddhists in Tibet, Thailand, China, Japan, Sri Lanka or Muslims in Indonesia and the Philippines. Why then are words like *mission* and *conversion* received with such dread in Asia and Africa even to this day?

³⁷ Ibid, cf. p 6, p 75

³⁸ Ibid, pp10-11

³⁹ S.J. Samartha, *One Christ – many Religions*, cf. pp 102-103

⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 168

One of the main reasons is that Islam and later, Christianity came to India mixed up with military conquest, political domination and economic exploitation, and in the case of Western Christianity, with racial arrogance as well. Secondly, they came with claims of exclusiveness, seeking to overcome and displace other religions and cultures in the world, forgetting the fact that these have provided spiritual sustenance, theological direction and ethical guidance for millions of people for a few thousand years! They brought in entirely new beliefs, doctrines and ways of life. Thirdly, the relentless stream of negative judgements passed on the cherished beliefs and practices of people who had their own scriptures, hermeneutics, philosophies and theologies, their own culture, art, social structures and civilization has left deep wounds on the soul of India. This was strikingly different from the earlier mission and conversion of Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. Fourthly, *conversion*, instead of being a vertical movement towards God, has become a horizontal movement of groups of people from one community to another, very often backed by economic affluence, organizational strength and technological power. It also seriously disturbs the political life of the country by influencing the voting patterns of people. And so there is nothing to be surprised when the very words, 'mission' and 'conversion' provoke so much anxiety, suspicion and fear in the minds of the majority community.⁴¹

⁴¹ Ibid, cf. pp. 168-170

DEMOCRATIC PLURALISM OR PLURALISTIC DEMOCRACY

George Thadathil

‘[W]e have to learn to speak truth to power. We have to make truth powerful. And we have to make the powerful truthful.’¹

“Baba used to say that a situation where all the men in a society are equal with each other is destructive of progress. We men are not like ants to float in a lump or drown. No, we are not certainly ants and so this is not our way to live and die. Surely we cannot expect to rise to a certain height all at a time. It is therefore essential that a few of us should strive hard to reach a height that, so long, was considered unattainable. If one succeeds, another would follow, then another and so on.”²

“Long nurtured on the myth of our tolerance and inclusiveness as a society and nation, we as a people have never seriously grappled with the issues of diversity, of pluralism and of identities – be they linguistic, caste or religious. In our hurry to catch up with the rest of the world, to modernize and industrialize, we have found it convenient to get by with clichés and slogans of secularism, unity in diversity, communal harmony and national integration without seriously examining the meanings and interpretations of these terms and what they mean in the daily life and actions of our heterogeneous, plural but unequal citizenry who actually make up the reality of today’s Bharat, that is not India.”³

A Word on the Title

Pluralism can be a democratic experience. The varied ways of containing diversity within a region, within a culture, within a language, one could say, are all expressions of this democratic experience of pluralism. Making room for differences calls for an acknowledgement and acceptance of the other and his/her rights. This acknowledgement and acceptance in essence of differences is what we usually mean by pluralism. Of course it does not mean that ‘all visions of the good can flourish in a democracy.’ At the same time, probably many feel that ‘democracy is the only political system that can deliver some level of justice to all citizens.’ Our reflections could well go along these lines highlighting the difficulties arising from a liberal vs. communitarian view of pluralism. The reflections could also be on the various understandings of democracy that are available as Neera Chandoke points out:

“Whereas democracy has been used to defend the right of property in the name of freedom, it has been equally used to critique the institution of private property

¹ Jeremy Cronin, South Africa Communist Party leader quoted by MKSS Collective, *Seminar 551*, July 2005, p.14.

² Umakanta Sharma, *In the Forest the songs and shackles*, Guwahati, Spectrum publishers, P. 304 (the words of Dugga one of the characters in the novel.)

³ Lalita Ramdas, “Thoughts on 1984 A Fragile Democracy” in *EPW*, XL, (September 17, 2005) 38, 4108-9.

from the standpoint of equality. Or, democracy has been conceptualized as majority rule, as well as a protection against majority rule. Democracy has been interpreted as elitist or as pluralist democracy, participative, institutional or substantive democracy, or as egalitarian democracy. The way we interpret it, therefore, depends on the nature of the conceptual web in which we place democracy and the way we justify it.”⁴

The title seems to assume that greater the democracy in society, greater the space for plural expressions, and, wider the society in terms of plural manifestations of culture, religion, language preferences etc, better suited is the democratic mode of governance. An assessment of Indian polity from both a political background as well as religio-cultural and sociological perspective bespeaks the need for greater substantive democracy in India. This linkage is what the paper intends to address by specifically referring to a couple of issues.

A Glimpse into Where We Are as a Democracy

The last two decades have witnessed several significant changes in the Indian political system: the decline and a possible return of Congress hegemony, the rise and fall of the Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the ascendance of dalit/bahujan parties and leaders, the inevitability of coalition politics, the growing clout acquired by regional political forces, ‘a decisive reorientation of the political economy towards liberalization, privatization and globalization, the emergence of non-party groups/movements questioning the regnant paradigm of growth and governance, as also the ideological and social ramifications of these processes.’ All these together go to substantiate the ‘resilience of Indian democracy in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds’ like pervasive corruption, persisting poverty and inequality in society, the octopus like hold of casteism reinventing itself and the like.⁵

On the other hand, while the procedural democracy has been preserved the country has failed miserably in the substantive democracy domain by not deepening the democratic processes. The state as guarantor of the democracy speaks the language of procedural democracy, the means to arrive at the demands through the processes inbuilt into the system. The resistances to the prevailing mode of democracy arising out of dissatisfactions at the periphery, among forgotten or neglected ethnic groups, speaks the language of substantive democracy. We are almost as if at the cross roads of preserving democracy and strengthening it or allowing it to destabilize and wither away. It is at this juncture that there is increasing hope regarding civil society coming up with breakthrough solutions to the dilemmas of the present. It is this hope that gives meaning to attempts like this seminar. There is as Javeed Alam notes “the contrast between a rise

⁴ Neera Chandhoke, *Beyond Secularism-the rights of religious minorities*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, p.123, quoted in Nalini Rajan, *Democracy and Limits of Minority Rights*, Delhi, Sage Publications, 2002, p.64.

⁵ Mangesh Kulkarni, “Dilemmas of Democratic Politics in India” in *EPW XL* (July 23-29, 2005) 30, 3259. (It is a review of Rajendra Vora and Suhas Palshikar (eds.), *Indian Democracy: Meanings and Practices*, Delhi, Sage, 2004. Hereafter Kulkarni, Democratic Politics.)

in the level of trust citizens place in the democratic system and a fall in the perceived efficacy of parties and leaders.”⁶

The appreciation for democracy is built around the aspirations for pursuing equality and freedom which are best preserved by the democratic ambience. Democracy is the best bet for pluralism and pluralism is the best preparatory ground for democracy. This is amply visible if we look at the dialectics that is operating in the country between state and society. The state depends on procedural democracy, by compulsion, to contain the aspirations of the people. The aspirations of marginalized groups in society attempt to expand the state structures as to claim greater equality and freedom, the ingredients of democracy. ‘The trajectory of Indian democracy reveals on the one hand attempts to strengthen the inherited hierarchies and large-scale use of coercion by the ruling classes to bolster their supremacy.’ (Manoranjan Mohanty, 2004) On the other hand, the developments in democratic experiment that interests the participant as well as the external observer is the manner in which *swaraj* (self determination) has produced new ‘social movements seeking a more participatory and decentralized democratic dispensation. At the centre of the discourse lies an expanded notion of rights claimed by the subaltern strata – Dalits, bahujans, adivasis, ethnic/regional communities, and women – in their search for empowerment.’⁷

In terms of the future of this trend what needs to be highlighted is that they together can provide a new direction to the democratic experience of India, and such attempts need wholehearted support and involved strategies. What one witnesses therefore is a journey from ‘a hierarchical to an egalitarian order. This calls for preserving the parameters of self interest as well as the interest of others, of fairness to individuals and respect to communities.’ (Rajeev Bhargava). This dynamics is seen in the way the discourse on secularism has taken off in the past decades, in the manner the dalit politics has come up and is resting on a standstill, the high road trodden by the saffron brigade and its taming, the reallocations with contemporary realities yet to be worked out in the communist version of progress paving the way for loss of credibility as also in the party politics of the dominant groups, and in the social movements representing the specter of the marginalized – peasants, Dalits, bahujans, adivasis, women and people adversely affected by development projects. In all this the shift of democratic politics to the arena of civil society is well documented and some issues emerging therein can be now focused upon.

Democratization: a Plural Spectrum

I would like to delve in this presentation into the problematic of democratic pluralism and pluralistic democracy by yoking together two notions, one apparently from the political science stream of thought and the other from a religio-cultural understanding of our belief structure as Indian (Christian)s. The two issues I want to raise are: one, the aspirations for autonomy in a region like Darjeeling, and the other, the problem of religious conversion, as to whether, in a democratic polity, it leads to nurturing or erasure

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

of plurality in society. I guess, probably a reflection on these issues besides clarifying with some precision and contextual reference the notions of democracy and pluralism, will also enable us understand where we are and where we ought to be or could be as ‘a people of India’. This reflective process is an enterprise of understanding ‘the now’ of a people’s existential situation and thus makes this undertaking simultaneously political and philosophical.

A distinction between democracy and democratization is useful to begin with. One is static view and the other dynamic of what goes on in a nation-state or polity. The process of integrating a nation’s diverse parts into a single political community confronting difficult problems at its different phases through free and regular electoral contests is partly what we mean by democratization. A country or modern nation state is trying to pursue, we could say, broadly speaking, four different goals at the same time and they are, ‘territorial consolidation, regional stabilization, economic development and democratization.’⁸ Observers of Indian polity like Atul Kohli find it difficult to imagine that India’s multicultural diversity could be organized as an enduring single state in any way other than a federal democratic polity. In this sense he feels it was ‘helpful for India that early in its modern history, British colonialism established a relatively centralized state and with that frame, introduced proto democratic institutions and practices.’⁹

Javeed Alam, on the other hand, qualifies that ‘democracy’ in India is a weapon of the weak because in understanding what democracy has done to India one comes up with what India has done to democracy. In other words, there are two conflicting sides to be mutually held close: the role of ‘electoral democracy as consolidation of bourgeois rule’ and that of ‘electoral democracy as the mass assertion over the elites.’¹⁰

In all, many scholars would converge on the assessment that the practice of democracy in India in the past half century has altered the way groups of people in India look upon themselves and these alterations are visible in the following: ‘one, changes in caste and caste identity...two, caste groups or communities forming the basis of power...three, the rise of a new middle class.. four, the regional consciousness.’¹¹ This phenomenon is occurring alongside a contrary situation as observed by Rajni Kothari that “The democratic process – not just in India, but worldwide – is being impinged upon by two contradictory forces: a) democratic assertion of the subaltern classes, and b) the forces of globalization reducing available democratic spaces.”¹²

⁸ Maya Chadda, *Building Democracy in South Asia: India, Nepal, Pakistan*, New Delhi, Vistaar Publications, 2000, p.18-19.

⁹ Atul Kohli, *The Success of India’s Democracy*, Cambridge, 2002, P.18.

¹⁰ Suhas Palshikar, “Democracy as Weapon of the Weak: What India has done to Democracy” in *EPW*, XI (July 9, 2005) 28, 3018. (A review of Javeed Alam, *Who wants Democracy? Tracts for Time series*, New Delhi, Orient Longman, 2004.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 3020-21.

¹² Rajni Kothari, *Rethinking Democracy*, Orient Longman, 2005, p.148-9. “A fundamental shortcoming of Indian democracy is its inauthenticity and unrepresentativeness. Despite the clamour of celebration that attends every election ritual, and the tribute paid to the vibrancy of and resilience of Indian democracy, there is a cause for concern in that intermediaries are crucial to this democracy, not just as brokers of votes, but also to represent the needs of the vulnerable.” Cfr. Niraja Gopal Jayal, *Democracy and the State*, Oxford University Press, 2001, p.255.

In this above description what we observe is that the twin values of democracy and pluralism mutually bolster a modern liberal society. However, the road to modernity and liberalism, in India has not been evenly achieved. In other words, while there is an elite, intellectual and otherwise, and a section of the middle class that would like to buy this version of modernity and liberalism, there is equally another section, probably a minority among the mentioned group and vastly among the middle and lower middle class and the rural sector that would like to hold on to the tradition and reinvent, if at all, a modernity that carries the values of the tradition forward more than blind adherence to liberalism, just because it is convenient or works for the 'better halves' of Indian society.

Democracy and Pluralism: A Close Up

India being the largest democracy in the world, to carry further our reflection on the relationship between pluralism and democracy with reference to the whole country would be too generic. However, the reflection on the implications of this relationship with special reference to the hill tracts where we are or the north east in particular cannot but have some value for the rest of the nation as well. The hill tracts of the northeast including the Darjeeling hills are in a process of realizing what it means to be democratic in governance as well as in civil society. It is a matter of learning from the transition the traditional society has undergone with the arrival of modernity, and the changes that have been effected (or needs to be effected) in bringing about authentic democracy. Let me quote what one study on the role of Khasi Students Union says in this regard:

“[T]he emergence of students and youth organizations as powerful pressure groups in the state point to the community's transition to modernity. However, the development of liberal democracy presupposes the existence of plurality of institutions and organizations, each playing its role in a specified field. One organization taking up all issues starting from school admissions to allotment of public contracts; from reservation policy to monitoring of trade licences to the outsiders, and from the problem for pollution to the threat of 'foreigners' in the state, while all other organizations and groups passively endorsing the lead taken by it and the people either out of fear or indifference choosing to remain mere onlookers, cannot be considered an ideal democratic situation.”¹³

In Darjeeling, presently, there is visible a parallel to the above description in as much as the crying need for differing voices being heard and plural expectations of the future as a people having to be considered in the form of an opposition as yet to emerge. I have argued elsewhere that the demand for an autonomous council or its present search for new ways of strengthening its demands for self representation and governance has a basis in the societies deepening of democratic practices and in this the civil society institutions have played a significant role.¹⁴ Democracy is inherently ordained to promote

¹³ H. Srikanth, “Prospects of Liberal Democracy in Meghalaya A Study of Civil Society's Response to KSU-Led Agitation” in *EPW*, XL (September 3, 2005) 36, 3987-3993.

¹⁴ George Thadathil, ‘Democratization through Civil Society Institutions in Darjeeling: A Case Study’ (forthcoming in the Proceedings of the UGC sponsored National Seminar on ‘The History and Development of Hill Stations in India’ held at St Joseph's College, Darjeeling 2-3 September 2005.)

plural aspirations. Beginning with the liberation from foreign dominance and reorganization of states on linguistic patterns onward to the demands for bifurcation of existing states catering to the local aspirations of sizeable ethnic communities within its frames, the surfacing of the plural image of Indian democracy is a natural development. In this trend itself one is to see the authenticity of Indian democracy fructifying. However, certain narrowing down of the scope of what a liberal democracy intends to preserve, under the pressure of having to make demands and get the demands through, needs to be arrested.¹⁵

The struggle towards inclusion of Nepali language in the eighth schedule of the Indian constitution (attained in 1992) and the autonomous status for the Darjeeling district hill tracts in the West Bengal state as the epicenter of all India Nepali assertion were the high points of democratic aspirations of an ethnic minority seeking representation and self governance. I have argued elsewhere how these demands for autonomy evince two fold primary aspirations for equality and identity.¹⁶

Despite any national level leader or even the liability of constantly being associated with the ‘Nepali as foreigner’ the emergence of the Gorkhali party and its control over the council for nearly two decades are indicative of ethnic nationalism within Indian democracy seeking and arriving at relative recognition. However, as hinted earlier its future lies in further deepening of democracy through the promotion of a viable opposition.

The democratization process began in the 60s and 70s in search of a pan Indian Nepali language based identity with its focal centre in Darjeeling, in the late 90s, began to reveal a weakness of the same democratic process in terms of multiple identities emerging within the hard earned cohesiveness as a speech community. This trend toward pluralization is a result of the socio-economic aspirations is what Samar Sinha has recently argued. One could also see certain pragmatic political maneuvers in these formations as they help contain the demand for a separate state.¹⁷

The post Mandal phenomenon of intra community groups and sub units of tribal sects seeking OBC recognition by asserting difference from the pan-Nepali identity is a contemporary phenomenon wherein the value of pluralism or plural trends seems to counter an earlier democratic process. The unified stand of the people of hill tracts made

¹⁵ I am referring here, to the tendency to hold onto power, come what may, once the electoral victory and secure power-positions are attained. I also refer to the spirit of accommodation, of containing the other as part of pluralism, in the way Taylor puts it: “the earth has been given to the human species in common. A given space doesn’t just unqualifiedly belong to the people born in it, so it isn’t simply theirs to give. In return for entry, one is not morally bound to accept just any condition they impose.” Of course, it is to be achieved without the hegemonic agenda of re-colonization. Cfr Charles Taylor, *Democratic Exclusion (And Its Remedies?)* in R Bhargava et al (eds.), *Multiculturalism, Liberalism and Democracy*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1999, p.155.

¹⁶ Cfr. G. Thadathil, *Communities and identity Consciousness*, Chennai, Madras University Publication, 2004, pp. 187-90.

¹⁷ Cfr.Samar Sinha “Nepali Speech Community and its internal Dynamics” (Research Scholar at JNU, Delhi. Being quoted from a draft paper.)

the assertion legitimate and their demands heard to some extent. The pluralization of this unity into sub units and communities while promoting socio-economic aspirations goes counter to what the hitherto democratic demand with its basis in a multi-linguistic- multi-cultural polity had achieved. A Gorkhasthan or Gorkhaland won't be a possibility if a multitude of communities begins to assert their identities and highlight their linguistic differences. This is one case where we find democracy and pluralism in contrapuntal terms. Reconciliation of these twofold aspirations in society is where the road to the future lies.

In a pluralist democracy, democracy becomes the door to plurality – be it political, religious, social or cultural. The curtailing of pluralism becomes then an undemocratic act. The containment of autonomy aspirations when exerted through political maneuvers - explicit and implicit – it is antidemocratic as well as anti pluralist move. On the contrary the effort to identify these processes and voice a critique of the same then becomes a democratic stand.

Individual's Freedom vs. Community's Right

In carrying forward the democratization process and the resultant discourse it is crucial to seek further clarity and space for the rights of the individual(s) over and above that of the community. 'Can the right to a way of life be claimed on behalf of a community when the exercise of the same is denied to the individual(s)'¹⁸ This right of the individual is exemplified in the right to exit, to seek withdrawal from community beliefs, to seek alternative beliefs that are self fulfilling and conducive to forge intentional ties with like minded holders of opinions or simply to protest. If a community's right to a way of life cannot be questioned on democratic grounds then perhaps it ought to be asked to justify and defend what it enjoins on the individuals as obligatory.¹⁹

Charles Taylor argues that from the fact of democracies working well 'when people know each other, trust each other and feel a sense of commitment towards each other' arises what he calls the temptation to exclude, the other, the migrant, the foreigner. It is born out of the collective identity that democracy nurtures and which in turn sometimes nurtures and other times questions democracy. The condition of legitimacy for a democracy calls for 'the members to know one another, listen to one another and understand one another' in order to jointly deliberate.²⁰

The legitimacy of democracy comes from a belief system that allows the individual and the minority to submit to the majority rather than looking for a coup or returning to monarchy. Taylor argues that the guarantee of individual freedom that democracy offers has a republican model and a naturalist model. In the latter which not

¹⁸ Javeed Alam, Public Sphere and Democratic Governance in Contemporary India, in R Bhargava et al (eds.), *Multiculturalism, Liberalism and Democracy*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1999, p.344.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 345.

²⁰ Charles Taylor, Democratic Exclusion (And Its Remedies?) in R Bhargava et al (eds.), *Multiculturalism, Liberalism and Democracy*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 144-5.

unlikely also holds the former there is a precondition of belongingness that allows or caters to the individuals' submission to the collective. In this sense Taylor feels that nationalisms are born out of democratic aspirations and democracies in turn ought to cater to sub-nationalist aspirations. However, MSS Pandian commenting on the life-time achievements of EV Ramaswamy asserts that the ways in which the elitist beneficiaries of the legitimized 'nation' thwart the emerging 'mini-nations' is a history yet to be written.²¹

There is a parallel dynamic operative between legitimized nation and legitimacy seeking mini-nations or ethnic-community-nations and between the latter and the individual or subgroups within. The former in either case represents community right and the duty to preserve unity and cohesiveness. While the latter represents in either case the right to exit, the duty to work towards self-enhancement or collective uplift socio-economically. Implied in it is the right of the individual/group to be different and assert the difference or seek ways to exit and thereby exercise freedom.

Freedom, Democracy and Pluralism

The dynamics between individual freedom and collective right played out on the battle scenes of colonized nations, the federal states within post colonial nations trying to contain ethnic and linguistic minorities and regional aspirations for assertion can be closely watched as containing different problems or nuances if we observe at close quarters the debate around the issue of conversion.

Right to differ is at the core of pluralism. Why and how the difference is differently perceived can be seen in the way conversion debate has grown in the country. The conversion issue, whether it should be part of religious freedom, was first debated on 1 May 1947 in the constituent assembly.²² The discussion about religious conversion has two-fold significance in the context of the discourse on pluralism and democracy. First, it highlights that the arena of religion is not immune to nor to be excluded from democratic discourse. It also in the same vein highlights that pluralism in the Indian context (and increasingly an issue the world over)²³ is most visibly manifest in the realm of religion. The accommodation of religious differences and the implication of conversion therefore deserve a close scrutiny. Second, conversion is an act of choice, an act of freedom and in that sense best exemplifies a form of self assertion and inner transformation. It therefore brings to close quarter's freedom understood as a public act and freedom understood as a private act. It brings together public and private and opens up new discursive space in the context of our pluralism-democracy dialogue.

²¹ MSS Pandian, 'Nation' from Its Margins: Notes on EV Ramaswamy's 'Impossible' Nation in R Bhargava et al (eds.), *Multiculturalism, Liberalism and Democracy*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 286-307.

²² Sumit Sarkar, Indian Democracy: the historical inheritance, in Atul Kohli (ed.), *The Success of India's Democracy*, Delhi, Foundation Books, 2002, p.41.

²³ Cfr. Jon Sobrino and Felix Wilfred (eds), *Christianity in Crisis? Concilium*, 2005/3, London, SCM Press, especially pp. 13-58.

The anti-conversionists see conversion as going against the principle of plurality in society. The conversionists on the other hand argue it as an exemplification of the inherent right to freedom an individual enjoys in a democracy. In India these two camps have by far represented the Hindu and the Christian/Muslim. The latter argument along with the secularist support got enshrined in the constitution as article 25 stating that ‘all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practice and *propagate* religion.’ It was the resentment to this clause of ‘propagation’ (heatedly debated in the constituent assembly) that brought the Madhya Pradesh state government in 1954 to bring the legislations of restrictions on conversion which was followed by Orissa and recently Tamil Nadu Governments.

The anti-conversion camp sees in the conversion propaganda of the Christians a promotion of the globalizing neo-colonial, imperialist strategy of the Christian West. The secular Christian pro-conversion camp sees in the resistance of the Hindu agencies like RSS-VHP a concerted hidden plan to prevent the emergence of the subaltern classes in India which might, they fear, upset their apple cart of upper caste dominance in Indian society. The pro-conversion lobby sees it as a fundamental right – the freedom to pursue religious truth – a universal value to be defended at all costs. The anti-conversionists see in it ‘an act of violence which violates religious tradition and disrupts families, communities and society in general.’²⁴

Underlying this opposition are differing views of religion and what is the good life. For the Christian the ‘good life’ is in the future, to be attained, worked for and striven after.²⁵ For the Hindu, the good life is a pre-given an ordained position in society, not to be challenged or trampled upon. Therefore for one freedom consists in attaining to the truth and for the other, freedom consists in preserving the patrimony, tradition already given. In the argumentative encounter between the Christian missionaries and the Hindu Brahmins going back to the 18 century it is to be noted that while the former defined truth in contrast to falsity and revelation, the latter saw truth as a matter of tradition and its antiquity. The unity and uniqueness of truth preached by the Christian is seen as one of the ways of appropriating truth and diversity in the manner of Gods dealing with (wo)man is accepted by the Hindu. To quote an argumentative Brahmin of the 17 century: “as you hope for Salvation through Christ; so we hope for Salvation through *Wischtnu*; and to save you one way, and us another, is one of the Pastimes and Diversions of Almighty God.”²⁶

²⁴ Sarah Claerhout and Jakob De Roover, “The Question of Conversion in India” in *EPW* XL (July 9, 2005) 28, 3045.

²⁵ This is not a simplistic caricaturing, rather, a philosophical reading of a theological position of a movement in faith from the awareness of bondedness in ‘sinfulness’ to liberation in the fullness of ‘salvation’.

²⁶ Bartholomeus Ziegenbalg, *Thirty Four Conferences between the Danish Missionaries and the malabar Brahmins ...in the East Indies, Concerning the truth of the Christian Religion*, Trans by Philipps, London (1719) quoted in Sarah Claerhout and Jakob De Roover, “The Question of Conversion in India” in *EPW* XL (July 9, 2005) 28, Sarah Claerhout and Jakob De Roover, “The Question of Conversion in India” in *EPW* XL (July 9, 2005) 28, 3052.

For the Christian while the truth content of religion consisted in doctrines and dogmas unique to itself received in revelation, for the Hindu as Radhakrishnan says, ‘intellect is subordinated to intuition, dogma to experience, outward expression to inward realization’. There are, therefore, manifold paths to this experience and realization that form the core of religion. The advocacy of non-interference, as a result in coaxing one to follow one path or the other, also comes from the assumption that ‘religion is the tradition of a community and one of the various valid paths’. It is as expressed in the words of Radhakrishnan, an “illogical idea” to hold that there be “one single religion for all mankind, one set of dogmas, one cult,” and it can be nothing but “the product of unreason and intolerance”. Similarly, in 1946, a conference of heads of Hindu institutions issued a memorandum to the constituent assembly stating that “[s]ocial peace and political stability can best be secured by allowing cultural and religious groups to live their own life, unhampered by external interference and aggression.”²⁷ From this angle of seeing religion as a tradition of a community, any proselytizing tactic turns out to be ‘violence.’

The argument we have developed thus far, in keeping with the analysis of the issue by Jakob De Roover and Sarah Claerhout, is akin to what Michael Sandel achieved analyzing the interventions of the court in matters of freedom in the States. He makes a distinction between *freedom of conscience* which is a given, a duty, and *freedom of choice* which is a right. In the face of religious faith, belief is not a matter of choice but a given, but religion as a mode of practice offers a choice and that choice is a right.²⁸

The Value of Person in Proportion to the Degree of Freedom²⁹

The issue of belief as a matter of choice is not merely a religious issue has been poignantly shown by both John Henry Newman and, a century later, by Bhimrao Ambedkar. There is a striking parallel between these two men. They used conversion as ‘a form of political and cultural criticism.’ For both of them, conversion ‘was a clear political statement of dissent against the identities constructed by the state.’ Through the act of conversion they were attempting to develop an ‘alternative epistemological and ethical foundation for a national community:’ a foundation, which would respect individual’s and community’s freedom and thus create space for plural practices of religion and culture. “Newman’s conversion to Catholicism and Ambedkar’s to Buddhism sought to reclaim cultural identities located at an original point (pre reformation Catholicism and Buddhism which triumphed over casteism).”³⁰ In such a discursive space they sought to land an enlightened nationhood. Conversion was a tool in their hands to create an alternative strategy to establishing equality between the old and the new, the upper and lower, the centre and the periphery.

²⁷ Sebastian Kim, *In Search of Identity: Debates on Religious Conversions in India*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 42, quoted in *op.cit.*, 3054.

²⁸ Michael J Sandel, “Religious Liberty, Freedom of Choice or Freedom of Conscience,” in Rajeev Bhargava, *Secularism and Its Critics*, Oxford University Press, 1999, pp.85-92.

²⁹ In this connection, it would be good to pursue the philosophical argument developed by Patrick Byrne of Boston taking off from Bernard Lonergan. Cfr. Divyadaan 2005/2

³⁰ Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity and Belief*, Oxford University Press, pp.213-14

It has parallels to the newly evolved secular democratic space of the civil society in contrast to the traditional communitarian space with its own constraints on human freedoms. Civil society emerged as an alternative space to traditional communities and their stringencies: a space for freedom, for individuality, for alternative orientations of 'good'. Democracy is true to itself when plural expressions of civil liberties are managed by emerging newer sections of society. Reducing inequality in society and bringing in equality is an inherent agenda and sustaining that is the practice of pluralism. As Neera Chandhoke rightly says, "civil society is the site of a constant and unremitting struggle between unequally endowed groups to widen the area of democracy, and thus expand the area of human freedom and equality."³¹

Finally in the name of valuing pluralism can we afford not to privilege certain *values* and allow the chaotic, discriminating, unequal situation to flourish? Here one has to, in my view, privilege the value of democracy – fraternity, equality, liberty – over that of ethical, empirical or descriptive pluralism, however attractive it be and not allow normative pluralism to take hold (that which prevents the very choice of one set of values over the other). Interventions are required to steer clear of pitfalls and such clearing of the way is the role of democratic, political philosopher.

What we have been arguing by way of finding the right type of relation between democracy and pluralism, both theoretically and with a basis in contextualized reflection, is that the former is the best bet for the latter and that as societies are increasingly becoming multicultural – by language, religion and region – the pluralism we subscribe to need not be normative as to disfigure identities in the name of promoting all types of identities. It is in other words saying 'respect me, and accord me rights, just in virtue of me being a citizen, not in virtue of my character, outlook, or the ends I espouse, not to speak of my gender, race, sexual orientation, religious belief, etc.'³²

Democracy could be viewed as 'a value that should imbue and permeate all spheres of social life and social relations,' and in this way all other 'social and political values, such as rights, justice, liberty and equality,' also come to provide 'a natural moral and philosophical affinity' in constantly rejuvenating a plural society like that of India.³³

Between democracy and pluralism we can see a happy marriage taking place in Indian society. One is undoubtedly a Western concept and a loan word representing a project of social engineering well initiated into the socio-cultural arena of Indian subcontinent. While the latter, the word 'pluralism', none will object, is part of the inherent indigeneity of Indian subcontinent, providing to the world a rich canvas of heterogeneities in every epoch of its cultural history.

³¹ Neera Chandhoke, *The Conceits of civil society*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, p.249.

³² Charles Taylor, *op.cit.*, p. 160.

³³ Niraja Gopal Jayal, *Democracy and the State: Welfare, Secularism and Development in Contemporary India*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2001, p.252.

LEARNING TO LIVE IN A PLURALISTIC SOCIETY

Archbishop Thomas Menamparampil

Due to global commerce, mass migration of people, and the expanding reach of the communications media, exposure to pluralism (cultural, ethnic, religious) has become a reality in almost every part of the world. We are compelled to interact continuously with people having other visions of life, other views of the human person, and other perceptions of the world. Our very identity and culture seem under siege. We may feel threatened and make of ourselves cultural fundamentalists, or, on the contrary, we may learn to appreciate diversity and draw profit from the multiple pluralisms that confront us today.

The travel account of Marco Polo (1254-1324), the Venetian explorer and merchant, describing the cultures of the diverse communities that he visited, was received with astonishment and disbelief in Europe. When further reports verified much of the account, interest was awakened in the Western world about the peoples of other continents and civilizations. Daring persons like Christopher Columbus were urged on to their ventures. Today the amazing diversity existing among human societies appears less of a surprise for us. Due to the globalisation of the economy, mass migration of communities, intense traveling habits of people, expansion of communications network, not only are we increasingly aware of human diversity, but we constantly interact with people of immensely various ethnic identities and cultures. Time has come for us not only to learn to cope with differences, but even to draw profit from the resources that cultural and human differences offer us.

The minimum we can do is to tolerate differences. The Greeks not only tolerated differences, but tapped the resource of diversity. And they made impressive advances in every field. Athenian democracy lasted only 140 years. Though it excluded women and slaves, it remained an inspiration for the Western world in its search for freedom. The Athenians developed the art of rhetoric and introduced the practice of public discussions. Buddhism likewise encouraged debates on religious teachings. Both had origin in their tribal ancestry.

The immense progress that the Greeks made was due to the fact they knew how to draw profit from the general distribution of talent in their vastly varied society. Martin West writes, "Early Greek philosophy was not a single vessel which a succession of pilots briefly commanded and tried to steer towards an agreed destination, one taking one way, the next altering course in the lights of its own perceptions. It was more like a flotilla of small craft whose navigators did not start from the same point or at the same time, nor all aim for the same goal; some went in groups, some were influenced by the movements of others, some travelled out of sight of each other" (Freeman 11).

Europe that had gone through the shared experience of belonging to the Roman Empire and being under Christian spiritual guidance for a long period of time had attained a measure of homogenisation, like imperial China. But ever since Treaty of Westphalia (1648) sovereign states decided to go their own way, asserting their national and cultural differences with other nations. Curiously, at the same time, they set about suppressing cultural minorities within their own territories (1). Even as these nations moved apart and clashed, Enlightenment thinkers proposed the idea of the 'Universal Man', explored his nature, defined his rights, probed his destiny. Ideologues of the Right and Left propagated theories that were considered valid for this Universal Man, quite independently of civilizational and cultural differences in the world. Thus, politically moving apart, in the world of thought the Western world came closer to each other, bound together by the concepts provided by their Christian ancestry, Renaissance, Reformation, Enlightenment, and Scientific and Technological revolution.

But their political and economic interests did not coincide. It was only when the colliding goals of ambitious nations led them into two great World Wars and eventual disaster that some new thinking was found welcome. Far-sighted leaders began gradually accepting the idea of a united Europe, beginning with the proposal of the French statesman Jean Monnet. Even though Europe has gone a long way towards integration since those days, European diversity asserts itself again and again in Britain, France and other countries. Moreover, migrations are continuously changing the demographic patterns of Europe and the rest of the world.

Someone has asked how countries like Belgium with 500 brands of beer, France and Spain with equal number of wines, and France and Holland with as many brands of cheese could think alike! Indeed, it is difficult. The Romans had said, "*Quot capita tot sententiae*"—as many opinions as there are persons. The Jain tale of 6 blind men of Hindustan arguing over what an elephant really looked like shows how people have always perceived things quite differently. And, thank God! Jesus himself said, "He who is not against me is with me". He allowed people the space to be different. Dr. Richard Nisbett, a professor of psychology at the University of Michigan, concluded a prolonged study in 2000 that Asians tended to be more 'holistic' than Westerners, showing attention to the context, tolerant of contradiction, less dependent on logic; he found the Westerners more 'analytic', avoiding contradiction, focusing on objects removed from their context, and more reliant on logic (Mahbubani 8). The Bhagavadgita presents a debate between two contrary moral positions. Taking together the above instances, we notice *pluralism in tastes, thoughts, worldviews, religious loyalties, psychological outlooks, moral views.....*

Over three percent of the population of the world is already living in another country. Over 60% of the migrants are living in the developed world (Santerini 51). Cultural pluralism is a compelling reality to which we cannot close an eye.

People Are Different

"The ways of the Orientals are not our ways, nor their thoughts our thoughts" (Lord Curzon 1892) With the weakening of universalizing ideologies like Communism, there is the new phenomenon of ethnic self-assertions throughout the world. "When all of a sudden clashes took place on a big scale at the dissolution of the Soviet Empire, when the Letts, Lithuanians, Estonians and Ukrainians claimed their own separate identities, when Slovenia broke away from Yugoslavia and Bosnia went up in flames, when the Azerbaijan tensions with Armenia increased, when the Slovaks parted ways from the Czechs, when inter-ethnic brutalities in Rwanda hit the headlines, when the claims of the Basques, Welsh, Catalans and French Canadians grew louder, the world began to take note of the force of ethnicity and culture" (Menampampil 14-5).

It is amazing that even though so many years have passed since the fall of the Berlin wall, there remains a perceptible cultural divide between East and West Germans. Cultures separate people more sharply than political boundaries. For, it is a division from within, not mere separation of people by rules imposed from outside. The hold of cultures on people is stronger than one imagines. It would be interesting to speculate as some anthropologists have done, why for example, when Europe accepted Christianity, it took three different forms: Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox, corresponding to the three major ethnic divisions of the continent, Latin, Germanic and Slav. Unplanned, unreflected, yet curiously true. It might be interesting to search as to why most of the heresies in early Christianity arose at the periphery of the Roman Empire, and why those who definitively broke away belonged to groups that were ethnically distinct from the dominant Christian societies, e.g. Syrians from Byzantines. Islamic heresies, like medieval Christian heresies, had social and political roots (Braudel 76).

There is increasing attention being given today to cultural differences and to reflection on their implications. Differences are noticeable in every area of human life. Let us take just one example. We generally use the Gregorian calendar. But we know that societies keep 40 or more

calendars worldwide. Communities hold on to different traditions, festivals, spiritualities, rituals, symbols, belief-systems, and philosophical perspectives; they are used to different styles of relationships with other human beings, living species, environment and cosmos. Curzon wrote in 1892, “The ways of the Orientals are not our ways, nor their thoughts our thoughts. Often when we think of them backward and stupid, they think of us meddlesome and absurd. Our system may be good for us, but it is neither equally nor altogether good for them.” A perceptive statement more than a century ago!

Contrary to what people think, globalisation does not wipe out this natural tendency to hold on to our distinct identity and culture. The more our economy globalises, the more importance do we give to our language, culture and cuisine (John Naisbitt). We know, for example, that the MacDonald’s will not drive our idli, dosai, chapati or rosgulas out of the market; mania for jeans will not threaten our sari, salwar kameez or kurta. It is because business enterprises recognise this evident fact that food items and clothes are multiplying in world-markets to cater to ethnic tastes. Our cultural identities will remain, no matter how much we come in contact with communities that are technologically more advanced.

That is why it is increasingly being recognized that a cross-cultural acquaintance with the social institutions, worldviews, and communication styles of other people are important for persons engaged in business, education, science, medicine or religious work. A recent research conducted by the University of Michigan concluded that the North Americans, the Chinese, and the Japanese look at the same things in different ways. To us in India this does not come as a surprise; we know that a Punjabi, a Bengali, an Andhrite, a Nishi from Arunachal Pradesh a Yadav from Bihar would look at things quite differently.

There are different versions of the same religion in different parts of the world: for example Buddhism in Tibet differs from Buddhism in Thailand and Japan; Christianity in Scotland, Carribean, Romania, SW and NE India; Islam in West Africa, Bosnia, Hyderabad and Indonesia. In the US, Afro-American Christianity, Italian, Hispanic, Irish, Lutheran, Episcopalian, Methodist, Congregational, Mennonite, Baptist, Mormons; Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Pentecostal; churches holding a mystic and other-worldly understanding of Christianity, and those holding a world-transforming and prophetic understanding of Christianity....all different among themselves (Lott 157).

We in India belong to a country with over 4000 distinct communities. We are being urged forward, pushed around or held back by over 42 political parties that derive strength from regional, caste, ethnic, and cultural loyalties. We swear by western notions of democracy, nationalism, and justice, but interpret them according to our own cultural traditions, e.g. combining democracy with feudal elements of hero-worship, patronage and sycophancy. Many other countries outside the Western world do something similar.

Mass migration of communities has only aggravated the situation of cultural tensions. A recent estimate showed the US as having 35 million immigrants, Russia 13.3 million; followed by Germany, Ukraine, France and India in that order. Pluralism is an inescapable reality today. But handling it is not easy. Countries that speak of multi-culturalism like Great Britain are finding it hard to live out that ideal. The problem is not always with the receiving countries. Immigrants to developed countries, e.g. Algerians and Moroccans in France, Turks in Germany, Pakistanis in Britain, despite their exposure to modern education, can come to adopt more radically fundamentalist attitudes than their ethnic brethren in their own countries of origin. What prods them on is the measure of unfairness they “think they experience” in the land where they have chosen to settle. “Plurality is both treasure and tribulation” (May 3).

Prejudices Thrive

“....depreciation of foreigners not only prevails among us and (the Indians), but is common to all nations towards each other” (Alberuni)

Every nation and ethnic group had a negative name for those who did not belong to their community. The Greeks called them ‘barbaroi’, the Romans, ‘barbari’, the Jews ‘gentiles’, the Hindus ‘mlecchas’, the Muslims ‘infidels’, the Christians ‘pagans’, the Mizos ‘vais’, the Manipuris ‘mayangs’, the Khasis ‘dkhars’. The list is endless. ‘The other’ is considered uncivilized, impure, inhuman, unholy, or wicked. Brahminic records have ugly names for lower caste communities: dasyus, asuras, rakshasas, kiratas (for Mongoloid tribes); and the lower castes responded in the same way. For the Communists the ‘oppressors’ form an evil race by themselves. The American presidents called the Soviet Union the ‘Evil Empire’, for George Bush the Al-Qaida forms an ‘Axis of Evil’, some are ‘rogue states’. When we hastily classify others as ‘Fundamentalists’ or ‘Terrorists’, without fully studying their background, we make the same mistake. ‘The Other’ has a right to be heard, understood and respected. They are human persons, human societies.

Stereotyping persons who belong to another community is a common mistake. For the Hindus the Muslims are aliens, unreliable neighbours, quarrelsome fellow-travellers. For the Muslims Hindus are hypocrites, dishonest dissemblers, clannish and exploitative people. Christians too have strong prejudices: Catholics against the Protestants, and vice versa; against Jews, Gypsies, Blacks, Muslims, Hindus and others. Alberuni (born in Iran in 973) wrote, “...in all manners and usages, (the Indians) differ from us to such a degree as to frighten their children with us, with our dress, and our ways and customs, and as to declare us to be devil’s breed, and our doings as the very opposite of all that is good and proper. By the bye, we must confess, in order to be just, that a similar depreciation of foreigners not only prevails among us and (the Indians), but is common to all nations towards each other” (Alberuni 246).

Babur (1495-1530) wrote about India, “Although Hindustan is a country full of natural charm, its inhabitants are ungracious, and dealings with them yield no pleasure, no response and no lasting relationship. Without ability, intelligence or cordiality, they know nothing of generosity or manly feeling. In their ideas as in their work they lack method, staying-power, order and principle. They have neither good horses nor tasty meat: they have no grapes, no melons, and no succulent fruit. There is no ice here, and no fresh water. In the markets one can obtain neither sophisticated food nor even good bread. Baths, candles, torches, chandeliers, schools—none of these is known...Country-dwellers and poor people mostly go naked. The only garment they wear is what they call a langota.....” (as quoted by Braudel 165).

Negative description of other people can hurt. Mahatma Gandhi called Katherine Mayo’s ‘Mother India’ a drain inspector’s report (Sen 150). On the other hand, what looks like an insensitive remark can become an occasion for intelligent self-criticism, e.g. when Rajiv Gandhi called Kolkata a dying city, or Queen Elizabeth commented on the untidiness of New Delhi. But usually negative comments from outsiders are seldom taken well, even when well-intentioned. Swami Vivekananda reacted strongly to the criticism of early missionaries of Indian beliefs and practices. But such criticism set in motion a series of reforms like those introduced by Raja Ram Mohan Roy. However, in general, criticism of other cultures is not helpful. We shall shortly see how it can lead to actual conflict.

While we may complain about Hindu reaction to Christian criticisms of their traditions, it is interesting to note that the Confucian reaction to Indian Buddhist missionary effort in China was not very different. Han Yu wrote in 819, “..the Buddha was of barbarian origin. His language differed from Chinese speech; his clothes were of a different cut; his mouth did not pronounce the prescribed words of the Former Kings; his body was not clad in garments prescribed by the Former Kings. He did not recognize the relationship between prince and subject, nor the sentiments of father and son His (Emperor Wu of the Liang’s) dynasty likewise came to an untimely end. In serving the Buddha he was seeking good fortune, but the disaster that overtook him was only the greater. Viewed in the light of this, it is obvious that the Buddha is not worth serving” (as quoted in Sen 170). Hindutva leaders have similar things to say about religions of foreign origin.

Often it happens that it is the strange and the bizarre, not the great and the beautiful in others, that draws our attention. Amartya Sen complains that the Western interest in India, even when it was sympathetic, was largely confined to the exotic. As, centuries ago, Alexander was eager to listen to the gymnosophists in India, Westerners crowded around Maharishi Yogi or Shri Rajneesh to hear their sermons in our times (Sen 151).

Prejudices Live on in Collective Memory

*“Memory is not what happened, but what people felt what happened”
(Eric John Ernest Hobsbawm).*

History is full of instances of mutual dislikes and exclusion. In medieval Europe, Jews were confined to ghettos. During the colonial period, there were zones for coloured people in Western towns. In America and Australia, indigenous communities were enclosed in reservations. Gypsies were kept marginalized. The ‘Moriscos’ were deported from Spain to Morocco in 1609 (Wheatcroft 34). South Africa believed in keeping the black people apart. Upper caste Indians kept the lower caste people outside the towns.

We are sensitive to Christian-hate. Of late, Muslim-hate has become widespread. But it has a history. Prejudiced people in Christian Europe referred to them as children of Ismael, anti-Christ, children of Cain (Wheatcroft 5). When the news of the victory of the Catholic forces against the Muslims at Lepanto (1571) reached Europe, even Protestant Germany and England rejoiced. If that indicated Christian solidarity, Islamic solidarity was equally impressive. When Saladin called for a Jihad against Richard II, response came as far away as India (Akbar 266). Prejudices kept growing on both sides. Words like ‘street Arab’ and ‘mad mullah’ that have gone into daily vocabulary witness to the collective prejudice of many communities against Muslims.

In India, Bal Keshav Thackeray, who admired Hitler and spewed venom against all non-Maharashtrians, got the pitches dug up against Pakistani Cricketers, because they were Muslims, and had the paintings of the famous painter M.F.Hussain destroyed. The demolition of the Babri Masjid is fresh in our minds. However, anger can be in many directions. Islamic anger too was violent against ‘Buddhist idolatry’ when the Taliban destroyed the Bamiyan Valley Buddhas in Afghanistan. The story of the twin towers need not be retold.

Historic memories linger on and find their way into textbooks. Mongolians complain that Genghis Khan who is their national hero, and who upheld a code of law that granted religious freedom to all communities, equal rights to all citizens including women, and banned slave trade, has been negatively presented in world history. Most textbooks describe him as a tyrant who killed 40 million people in Asia and Europe. The B.J.P. Government wanted to re-write Indian history showing the minorities in bad light. Pakistani textbooks describe Jews as tight-fisted money-lenders, Christians as vengeful conquerors, Hindus as a devious and cowardly people. In China, more than 20,000 people gathered in Shanghai to protest against Japanese textbooks whitewashing their atrocities of 1935-45. In response, the Japanese foreign minister Nobutaka Machimura criticized Chinese history education. Shiv Sena protested against James Lane’s book ‘Shivaji: Hindu Kingdom in Islamic India’.

History comes to life again from time to time. “History repeats itself, it has to, because nobody listens” (Steve Turner). Slobadan Milosevic of Serbia was waging a holy war inspired by his people’s unhealed memory. The Orthodox Serbian army had been defeated by the Ottoman Turks in Kosovo in 1389. Milosevic had the body of the Serbian king Lazar who had been killed by the Muslims dug up from its 700-year old grave, his exhumed remains carried in a coffin round the land to be buried and resurrected in each place, manufacturing hatred out of a diabolical use of

history. Due to the anger arising out of this, more than a 100,000 ethnic minorities were killed. As the Serbs hated the Muslims, they loathed the Croats, who had cooperated with the invading German army during World War II in committing atrocities against the Serbs. The Croatian Tito's Communist regime had kept the Serbs marginalized. A time came when the pent up anger of the Serbs exploded. In the same way, the Babri Masjid was destroyed for the alleged violence of Babur against a Hindu temple centuries earlier. The Sioux Indians have a saying, "Everything we do affects the next seven generations"(2). We know from history that it affects hundreds of generations.

For the Muslims, the rapid advance of early Islam is a matter of great pride. It entered India (Sind) in the same year (711) that it entered Spain (Akbar 146). As it moved south, the kingdom of Vijayanagar put one million soldiers against the Muslim cavalry, but Islam won the day (Braudel 161). As its pride thrives on its historic achievements in the past, its anger feeds on the memory of the battles it lost: the storming of Jerusalem in 1099, the capture of Constantinople in 1453; the surrender of Granada in 1492, the battle of Lepanto in 1517 (Wheatcroft xxx). The destruction of the Twin Towers in 2001 has something to do with the accumulated anger built around these earlier events. And this anger grows more intense every day. Yeats once said, "The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity." The history of our times is just that.

We Can Learn from Others

"I remember, therefore I am" (Milan Kundera)

We live by our historic memories. If they are positive, we develop a positive attitude to the future. Milan Kundera once said, "I remember, therefore I am". Our collective existence is greatly conditioned by our historic perceptions. Our collective self-esteem has been built up by the positive strokes we have received down the centuries. Visitors to India have left flattering accounts of what they saw here. We have a similar obligation to others. Historians with a positive outlook do a great service. Though Herodotus and Ktesias were (5th cent B.C) not totally free from prejudices, they have left us an interesting account of people who differed from their society. Appolonius of Tyana was considered an early Indian expert in the West (Sen 328).

Nalanda University drew thousands of foreign students to India, people were happy to come and learn here. Megathenes (4th cent) described with keen interest the social situation in the India of Chandragupta Maurya. Fa-Hien (399-414) and Hsuen-Tsang (7th cent) wrote with admiration about what they saw in the land of Buddha. Alberuni wrote in glowing terms about Indian mathematics and science. Marco Polo praised Indians probably beyond their deserts. He said, "They (Indians) would not tell a lie for anything in the world and do not utter a word that is not true" (Latham 250-1). William Jones, the Schlegel brothers, Schelling, Herder, Max Müller, Schopenhauer and others felt that the West had something to learn from the East. They attempted to build bridges across civilizations(3). We in turn need to learn from others.

The writings of Fr.Krick, MEP, (+1854) on the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh are considered extremely useful accounts by anthropologists because he wrote with sympathy and interest. Ideas respect no borders. "Words have wings", said Homer (Iliad I.1.201). Good things and bad spread alike. French revolutionary ideas crossed borders to neighbouring countries and shook the whole of Europe. Russian revolutionary thought shook the world. Protestantism is fast spreading into Latin America. Pentecostals have successfully made their way into Russia and other impossible places. Christian groups are breaking new ground in China in spite of persecutions. Today with the expansion of the use of the e-mail and the internet, information and ideas move faster. So many ideas are floating today, and there are so many movements that are propagating themselves: related to justice issues, liberation, development, nation-building, anti-globalization, poverty-relief, peace

initiative, environment, feminine causes, youth needs, indigenous medicines, vegetarianism. The primal vision of tribal communities, their skills and their practices are a special attraction.

Civilizations on the valleys of the Nile, Tigris-Euphrates, Indus and Yellow River have been continuously borrowing from each other. Innovations like printing presses and paper currency were first introduced in China, but they found their way to the West. If the West had felt satisfied with itself and had refused to learn from the East during an earlier period of history, it would have stagnated. If, today, the East remains closed in upon itself, it will fall behind. Every society learns from the experience of others, and tries to make its way forward. It was the practice of Aristotle to study carefully everything that was said on a topic before him, criticize ideas he found inadequate, and explore further (Freeman 18). Wise people build on what has already been achieved by others. One society's progress is not a threat to another. It should not be. "It is time for us to adopt prosperity-neighbour policies", said the Malaysian leader Mahathir in 1994 (Naibitt 132).

Having undergone the painful experience of foreign domination, we Indians may have developed a negative attitude to other nations, particularly to the stronger ones, e.g. the Western Powers. However, we notice a change of late. India that used to cry to hoarse about a foreign hand and CIA interference gave 71% approval to America in a recent survey. It was only 54% three years earlier. There is growing mutual admiration between the East and the West. The East admires the technological advance that the West has achieved, and the West recognises that the East has something to offer in the spiritual realm and in other areas. American business has been admiring Japanese style of team-work, the Chinese emphasis on quality, and Indian skills in Information Technology. Every civilization has something to offer to the others. Benedict XVI said soon after he took over as Pope, "I will spare no effort and commitment to continue the promising dialogue with civilizations".

Differences Wrongly Handled Can Lead to Conflict

The Mahabharata War is said to have lasted only 18 days. But it wiped out entire races.

Differences can offer occasions for mutual borrowing and mutual learning. But people have not always profited by such occasions. Religious differences partitioned India into two, kept Ireland divided, made Timor secede. Cultural differences divided East and West Pakistan into Pakistan and Bangladesh. Ideological differences broke Korea into North and South Korea. Ethnic differences separated Yugoslavia into a number of different states, broke the Soviet Union in pieces, Assam into different political units. Linguistic differences divided many states of India that were together in earlier times, threaten to break Quebec from Canada. Colour differences kept the Whites and Blacks apart in South Africa.

There are any number of religious conflicts around the world: Indonesia (Muslims and Christians), Philippines (Christians and Muslims), Kashmir (Muslims and Hindus), Gujarat (Hindus and Muslims), Sri Lanka (Buddhists and Hindus), Belfast (Catholics and Protestants), Chechnya (Christians and Muslims). There are strong feelings between Sunnis and Shias. Likewise, there are cases of ethnic conflicts in different places: Israel (Israelis and Arabs), Rwanda (Hutus and Tutsis), Balkans (Serbs and Croats), Iraq (Arabs and Kurds), Tibet (Tibetans and Han Chinese), Cambodia (Khmers and Vietnamese), Indonesia (Indonesians and Chinese), Manipur (Nagas and Kukis), Haflong (Dimasas and Hmars), Diphu (Karbis and Dimasas). In Russian Ossetia there have been reports of slaughter of children. Among the Ingush people in Chechnya also over 20,000 children are reported killed (Lott 20-21). There are ethnicity related tensions in many other parts of the world even when they stop short of violence: Belgium (Flemish and Walloons), U.K. (English, Welsh, Scots), Spain (Spaniards, Catalans, Basques), Italy (Italians and Tyrolese). The unresolved ethno-racial conflicts related to Khalistan movement led to the Kanishka tragedy. Tens of thousands

of Chinese have been killed in Indonesia (Naisbitt 32). Such conflicts can lead to disastrous consequences. The Mahabharata war is said to have lasted only 18 days. But it wiped out entire races.

Other instances of colour-culture-ethnicity-religion related tensions: the French ban on headscarves by Muslim women (Sen 20), Turks harassed in Germany, Algerians in France, Pakistanis in England, Blacks in the US. It is true, many of these countries profess multiculturalism. But the ideal has not always been reflected in their national life. England swears by multiculturalism, but there are frequent instances of violence against people of alien origin. The limit was reached when Lord Tebbit said that one could not be considered settled in England unless one supported the English Cricket team in test matches! (Sen 35). In any case, people have to learn to live together in that country. Even before Asians and Africans crowded into England, English society was a composite society into which the Angles, Saxons, Jutes, Vikings, Romans and Normans had merged. At the same time, we cannot deny that new settlers have their own obligations too. V.S.Naipaul once said, "I think if a man picks himself and comes to a new country, he must meet it half way."

Since demographic changes mean power-shift, they can lead to inter-community problems. Bal Thackeray showed from the telephone directory that the Maharashtrians were nowhere in Mumbai. He breathed fire against aliens. Christian-Muslim tensions have arisen in certain areas due to demographic changes in favour of the Muslims: Lebanon, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Philippines. In spite of the fact that Indonesian Islam is more relaxed in its relationships with other communities, there were problems with Christians in Aceh.

The Weak Fight Back

The era of wars are not over. Over 50,000 warheads have been produced since Hiroshima (Alvin Toffler)

Tensions mount when communities feel threatened. Smaller communities are jealous of their identity and their cultural heritage. Anything that seems to threaten their treasured values invites resistance. Open mockery of Jewish customs used to lead to revolts in the Roman Empire (Freeman 76). China has 55 recognized minority communities. Many of them are up in arms against the domination of the Han Chinese, who form 90% of the population: Hui Muslims in Henan Province, numbering about 10 million people, Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang, Tibetans, and other minorities in Yunnan province. There are similar rebellions of religious minorities in Uzbekistan, Chechens in Russia, of ethnic minorities in Georgia. The Kurds who form 20% of the population of Iraq refuse to be absorbed into the majority Arab community. Though India is known for its skill in handling diversity, an internal security document indicated that 45% of India is terror prone, e.g. from Naxalites, communal extremists, ethnic minorities.

There are about 400 groups that have a separate identity of their own who are indigenous to North-East India. Many are seeking a separate homeland of their own: greater political autonomy, statehood, or independent sovereign status. Subash Ghisingh has been claiming the provisions of the 6th schedule for Darjeeling area and the recognition of the Nepali language. The Communist Government in Kolkata is totally helpless before this ethnic problem. Their economy-based ideology does not equip them to analyse and address ethnicity-related issues.

Every community is proud of its identity and its distinct culture. They see red when their culture is threatened. The People's Revolutionary Army in Manipur announced a ban on Hindi movies. They said these films had a negative influence on indigenous values. The ULFA banned Hindi films in Assam for the same reason, and exploded bombs in cinema-houses. Cable operators

in Bhutan boycotted the telecast of some Indian films which, they said, posed a threat to the Kingdom's culture. Mahathir Mohammed of Malaysia too was unhappy about the Indian films for its negative influence. Often minorities express their dissent in the form of a peaceful protest, e.g., when Manipuri women called for a boycott of "India-made" goods. But other times anger explodes into extreme violence. And the Government comes heavily on the dissenters. One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter. Suppression of dissent can take the form of officially sanctioned terrorism. Kashmir and the North-East have seen much of that. "There have been many crimes committed in the name of duty and obedience—many more than in the name of dissent," said C.P. Snow.

It is true that ambitious politicians fan the flame of discontent based on ethnic and cultural differences in order to retain their leadership over the masses. We can see that such leaders are, in fact, men of limited vision, little acquainted with world affairs. But with their demagoguery and skilful handling of cultural symbolisms, they cast a spell on the masses and hold the party over which they preside to ransom. They become cult-figures. They are the descendents of erstwhile dictators who held their nations in slavery, playing on the emotions of national pride, ideological enthusiasm, cultural loyalty, anti-Westernism, ethnic hatred, or Islamic fundamentalism. Even as they seem to reach their unrealistic goals, they collapse. They are like Napoleon who was defeated at Waterloo three years after his furthest advance to the East; or like Hitler who destroyed himself and his people when he seemed nearest to his goal of world conquest. History repeats itself; it can again. The era of wars is not over. Over 50,000 warheads have been produced since Hiroshima (Toffler 333).

Fanatical Secularism Provokes Fundamentalism

*Imposing secular solutions on religion-inspired communities is both
'moral arrogance and political folly' (T.N.Madan)*

When powerful nations today want to impose their worldviews and values on societies that have another experience of history and live by another culture, even the weakest communities rebel (4). Robert Kaplan wrote in the 'Atlantic Monthly' (December 1997) that the eagerness to "export democracy" has not been useful: it is not right to put a gun to the head of someone and say, accept democracy, 'Behave as if you had experienced Western Enlightenment....Behave as if 95% of your population were literate. Behave as if you had no bloody ethnic and regional disputes' (as quoted by Mahbubani 12). The weaker nations hit back with bomb-explosions, like they did in Madrid and London. They smuggle drugs into threatening nations and try to ruin their youth; they earn foreign exchange by such sales, buy arms, and fight back. Tony Blair said, "The arms the Taliban are buying today are paid for with the lives of young British people buying their drugs in British streets" (Robinson 179).

The secularist's exclusion of religion from the public sphere, research, studies, politics, economics, is the main cause of the alienation of believers in the postmodern world. While the secularist condemns ardent believers as exclusivists, he clearly shows himself to be exclusive of other beliefs; he becomes dogmatic about his own secular vision of reality. Indian intellectuals are unconsciously moving in this direction. When the potency of religion for common good is ignored, it turns out to be a denial to humanity of something beneficial, especially when moral considerations are excluded from political judgements (Lott 153). Imposing secular solutions upon religion-inspired communities like Muslims or Hindus is both "moral arrogance and political folly" as T.N. Madan says, and it drives believers into fundamentalism.

Hard secularism imprisons one in sterile homogeneity, seeks to impose a monolithic culture, allows no room for diversity of tastes or views. Their proposal is as harsh as the homogenizing Hindutva philosophy. Experience shows that neither liberal capitalism nor state capitalism in their secularised forms has had any respect for environment, culture or human diversity. "The commercial monoculture of the West has killed classical music, art, literature and philosophy" (Frawley 98). It is gradually being realised that the secular philosophies that propagated the belief in

the perfectibility of the human person, unlimited progress and world domination, were too masculine, too deceptive and self-defeating. The capitalist culture, dominant today, that seems to acclaim the freedom of the individual, has enslaved him/her to the interests of business corporations; he/she is a victim to the business-controlled media, enticing commercial advertisements, to a dull, passionless, secular faith. The rapidly expanding and enslaving power of the globalized materialistic culture is the main cause of various forms of fundamentalisms arising in Asia today.

India Celebrates Diversity

“In our heterogeneity and in our openness lies our pride, not our disgrace” (Shashi Taroor)

India is the land of immense diversity. Her “pluralism emerges from its geography, is reflected in its history and is confirmed by its ethnography. Indian culture is therefore by definition a culture of multiplicities, a culture of differences” (Taroor 17). It may be said that India not only tolerates differences, but protects, fosters and celebrates diversity. Visitors are amazed at the number of communities (more 4000 distinct communities) that live in India. And this diversity extends to religions, languages, cultural practices, dresses, cuisine, levels of economic development. What is most ancient and most modern are to be found in India side by side. Every thought or philosophy that emerges anywhere in the world wins some adherents in India. The Indian society is daily faced not only with multiple realities, but multiple interpretations of these multiple realities.

Someone has said that all Indians belong to one or other of the minority communities. Even if he is a Hindu, he belongs to a caste that forms a minority community within the Hindu fold. Multiplicity is visible from every point of view. Moreover, Indian secularism does not mean an absence of religion, but a profusion of religions. And yet inter-religious and inter-cultural amity has been found possible. Pluralism prospers. Constantine’s goal was to ensure peaceful co-existence between Christians and non-Christians (Freeman 157). Asoka and Akbar tried to promote mutual respect among religious groups and succeeded to a great extent. Edict XII of Asoka said, “For he who does reverence to his own sect while disparaging the sects of others wholly from attachment to his own sect, in reality inflicts, by such conduct, the severest injury on his own sect”.

Variety is a blessing. Americans say “*E pluribus unum*” (one out of many). Indians could say, “*E pluribus plures*” (many more out of many): an amazing variety of ethnic groups, castes, faiths, tastes, traditions, ideologies and parties; for some maddeningly chaotic, inefficient, and unpurposeful; for others excitingly various, colourful; a veritable feast of viewpoints. Shashi Taroor says, if America is a melting pot, India is a thali with clearly distinct dishes that provides a satisfying repast (Taroor 107). India can be called a ‘federation of cultures’ (Sen 355). And yet there is a happy harmony.

Whatever is told of India, the opposite is also true. It is said that India oppresses women. It is an undeniable fact. But there were more women involved in India’s freedom struggle than in the Russian or Chinese Revolution. Sarojini Naidu was elected president of the Indian National Congress in 1925, fifty years before Margaret Thatcher was elected leader of a major political party in Britain in 1975 (Sen 6-7). And this did not happen by mere chance. It corresponds to an ancient tradition according to which women took an active part in public debates. In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishads we read of Gargi discussing with Yajnavalkya and other venerable Brahmins on deep issues of philosophy. The daring of the Rani of Jhansi belies the belief that Indian women are necessarily shy and timid.

Amartya Sen takes enormous pains in his recent ‘The Argumentative Indian’ to establish that it was the long tradition of public argument, interactive reasoning, and toleration of intellectual

heterodoxy, that has made democracy take root in India with ease (Sen 12). Contrary to the usual belief that the ancient Indian was an unquestioning believer, he points out that the world's first agnostic was in India, the one who wondered, "Who knows....Whence this creation has arisen....the one who looks down on it in the highest heaven, only he knows—or perhaps he does not know" (Rig Veda 10:129). This is a 3500 years old doubt! Sen believes that the Indians always had a questioning mind.

Buddhist councils were aimed at settling disputes between the different points of view of loquacious Indians. Asoka laid rules for debates prescribing that the opponents be "duly honoured in every way on all occasions" (Sen xiii). Akbar invited for public dialogue Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Parsees, Jains, Jews, and atheists (Sen 18). Tagore and Gandhi admired each other but differed on their understanding of nationalism, patriotism, importance of cultural exchange, the role of rationality and of science, and the nature of economic and social development (Sen 92). Tagore was most unwilling to accept the idea of the 'spinning wheel' that Gandhi introduced with missionary zeal.

Amartya Sen insists that the image of India being steeped in religion has been built up by Orientalists. There are enough atheistic writings in India, e.g. of the Charvakas to disprove this contention, who said "there is no heaven, no final liberation, nor any soul in another world....it is only a means of livelihood that Brahmins have established here, all the ceremonies of the dead—there is no other fruit anywhere" (Review of Different Systems of Hindu Philosophy, Madhava Acharya, New Delhi, Cosmo Publications, 1976, pg.10). In Ramayana, Javali tells Rama, "Follow what is within your experience and do not trouble yourself with what lies beyond the province of human experience" (Ramayana: from the original Valmiki, Calcutta, Rupa, 1989, pf 174-5). Sounds like the argument of a modern secularist!

Hajime Nakamura thinks that defining Asian civilization as merely antithetical to the Western, is a new form of Euro-centrism. And it is often self-imposed: e.g. considering the West as active, rational, secular; and the East as passive, intuitive, offering resistance to change (Nakamura 16-17).

In order to prove that Indians were not mere otherworldly spiritualists, Sen reminds us of Kautilya's Arthashastra and Vatsyana's Kamasutra. A vast variety of thoughts found their origin in India. Such diversity is hardly to be found anywhere, whether in the East or in the West. "In our heterogeneity and in our openness lies our pride, not our disgrace" (Sen 138).

The Hindutva Drive for Homogeneity Un-Indian

"We cannot surpass contemporary civilization merely by boasting about our civilization" (Ataturk)

If we look at the present Hindutva movement as a mode of self-assertion of the Hindu civilization long overdue, it is to be appreciated. "Development will not occur without the re-assertion of identity: that this is what we are, this is what has made us, this is what we are proud of, this is what we want to be" (Taroor 29). Indeed, there is ample room for legitimate pride in India's past: e.g. the mathematics of Aryabhata (5th cent), Varahamihira (6th), Brahmagupta (7th). Arabs and Iranians generously acknowledged the Indian contribution to mathematics and astronomy (Sen 28). Aryabhata's work, completed in 499 A.D, argued for the diurnal motion of the earth and the force of gravity during rotation (Sen 78). Indian decimal system, reaching Europe through the Arabs, caused a scientific revolution there (Sen 144). The first ever printed book in China in 868 was an Indian book, 'Diamond Sutra'. With so many things to be proud of, Indians need not adopt the unscientific Hindutva way of re-writing history based on fables and legends, or making untruthful claims for Vedic mathematics, or introducing astrology into the university curriculum. Vivekananda was highly critical of astrology.

The Hindutva drive for an imposed homogeneous culture is totally un-Indian. It is not in our tradition. We do not say that everything was always peaceful between the Hindus and Buddhists, Vaishnavites and Saivites, or other groups. Even the Jain kings could be violent (Lott 140). There were tussles between communities all through Indian history. But that is not the whole story. Buddhists, Jains, agnostics, atheists, and all sorts of heterodox groups flourished in India side by side. Nor is it true that Hinduism was the most important religion during much of our history. We should not forget that the Buddhism was the dominant religion of India for a thousand years. The Chinese for the first millennium referred to India as the 'Buddhist Kingdom' (Sen xii). Hindu culture in its broad diversity can give a shared sense of common identity to Indians, because there is infinite variety in the Hindu society itself. In fact, there is no room for fundamentalism in Hinduism, if the word is used with its original meaning: Hinduism has no fundamentals of belief, practice or worship. In Hinduism there is no possibility of apostasy or heresy (Taroor 104).

As we said earlier, Hindutva intolerance of minorities is not in our tradition. Religious freedom is deeply rooted in the Indian heritage. Asoka's edict called for respect for all religious leaders: Brahmanas and Sramanas. Akbar decreed that "no man should be interfered with on account of religion, anyone is to be allowed to go over to a religion that pleases him" (Smith 257). Amartya Sen finds great satisfaction in reminding us that Akbar was holding inter-religious dialogue in India while Giordano Bruno was being burnt at the stake in Rome for heresy in the Campo dei Fiori (Sen 76). In India there was mutual respect and keen interest in each other's religion, e.g. though Aurangzeb was a bigot, his elder brother Dara Shikoh had learned Sanskrit and studied Hindu philosophy extensively, and had translated Hindu Scriptures into Persian (Sen 66).

We do not deny the Brahminic imposition of barriers and exclusions on different communities after Brahminism asserted itself over Buddhism. Foreign travels were forbidden to caste Hindus, and immigrants were forced to accommodate to the rigidities of the caste-system. Due to Muslim and British domination, this inward-looking attitude strengthened itself further during the last millennium. It was this form of Hinduism that the Orientalists studied whose only source of information were Brahmin scholars and the interpretation of sacred texts and traditions they provided.

Just as Renaissance and Enlightenment awakened the Western society during the previous centuries, exposure to the West brought a new awakening to Indian intellectuals. Some, like the Arya Samaj, stood for caution. Others like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Vivekananda, Gandhi, Tagore and Nehru insisted on a return to the ancient Indian tradition of openness to all that is good. India has benefited to the extent that she has been open.

It is puerile to foster the fear that outside influences, like the Western one today, will weaken the Indian civilizational identity. The ancient Indian society continuously interacted with the civilizations of Mesopotamia, Egypt, SE Asia and China. Talent flowed to the Indian subcontinent from every side. Panini (4th cent.), the great Sanskrit grammarian, for example, was an Afghan (Sen 84). Tagore did not think that Indian civilization was so fragile as to break down before Western impact. He wrote, "Therefore it hurts me deeply when the cry of rejection rings loud against the West in my country with the clamour that Western education can only injure us" (Sen 119). He thought it was a parochial approach. It is not by boasting about our past that we come to be able to catch up with the present. Atatürk, the Turkish reformer, had said in an earlier age, "We cannot surpass contemporary civilization merely by boasting about our civilization". That is just what the VHP is trying to do. In fact, it is a sign of inferiority complex.

The Dialogue of Civilizations

“Whatever we understand and enjoy in human products instantly becomes ours, whatever may be their origin” (Tagore)

In this pluralistic world, time has come for every person and every society in the world to welcome good ideas coming from elsewhere. The ancient Indian had said, “Let noble thoughts come to us from every side” (Rigveda I-89-i). Mahatma Gandhi echoed the same sentiment when he said, “Let the winds from all over sweep into my room”. But he immediately added that he would refuse to be swept off his feet. While we welcome new trends of thought, we should not lose our identity or fail our heritage. The BJP protesters against the American preacher Benny Hinn in Bangalore and Communist demonstrators against foreign investment banning the sale of Coca Cola in university campuses, may be yielding to a form of xenophobia which manifests a lack of confidence in our proud heritage. Tagore once said, “Whatever we understand and enjoy in human products instantly becomes ours, whatever may be their origin”. Indians have always thought so. We have always thought new ideas interesting. “There is not a thought that is being thought in the West or East that is not active in some Indian mind,” said E.P. Thompson.

Cultural interaction even in a world of inequalities, lead to creative innovations. It is not a question, therefore, of the upper caste elite alone providing all the answers. Even the dalits and the tribals have something to teach. In fact, they reflect a more indigenous point of view in the Indian context (5). Abraham Ayrookuzhiel, a pro-dalit writer, suggests that we make the ‘religion-cultural dimension’ of the human experience as the starting point for dalit self-reflection, and that we do not excessively depend on the imported tools of social analysis that bases itself on the economy (Lott 338). Dalit people have been cautious about the hegemonising tendencies in the prevalent Indian Christian theologies produced by high caste communities. Authentic interpretation of the dalit and tribal experience of Christianity too has something valuable to contribute (Lott 348).

In the same way, it is not the Western scientific and philosophic search alone that will give all the wisdom. Asia and Africa also have something to offer. The ‘Great Books of the West’ alone are incomplete. Wisdom of the Asian people, the experience of African societies, the histories and imaginative tales of different nations and civilizations are needed for a complete human self-understanding. And the time is coming for such interactions. “If my intuition is proven right, we will begin to see, for the first time in five hundred years, a two-way flow in the passage of ideas between the East and the West early this century. The world will be a richer place when Western minds stop assuming that Western civilization represents the only civilization” (Mahbubani 9).

Max Weber was sure that the Western rational thought would ultimately triumph all over the world. He felt certain that religion would gradually lose its force. It is enough for us to be present at a Kumbha Mela event, or visit Tirupati or Varanasi to come to the opposite conclusion. Mono-civilizational predictions have no future. Sociological and psychological conclusions arrived at in the context of one civilization should be subjected to the scrutiny of other civilizations before they can be applied. Westerners find it hard to understand why their economic theories do not always seem to apply in Japan. A culture or a civilization can be understood only within its own context.

But this understanding improves through mutual interaction of civilizations, mutual appreciation, criticism and diverse interpretations. Openness enriches. Both an emic (an insider’s view) and an etic (outsider’s view) view are important. It occasionally happens that we see ourselves better with the eyes of someone else. In the process of interaction we selectively learn from the other. Satyajit Ray used to speak of “critical openness to new ideas.” Everything new need not be welcome. However, diversity offers beauty and wisdom. Amir Khusrau’s (14th cent) prose and poetry drew from Hindu, Muslim and Sufi traditions. From the West today we may learn dignity of labour, efficiency, punctuality, order, discipline, sense of justice and equality,

participation, striving for excellence, rather than fashion freaks, music buffs, drugs, irresponsible sex, senseless consumerism.

Western modernity need not be the ideal towards which all the world moves. The Japanese have decided to be modern in a different way. That is why we speak of 'multiple modernities': Western, Japanese, Chinese, Islamic and other societies continuously learning from each other what is missing in one's own tradition. That is how we move on to becoming fully human. Such an effort should not lead to a relativization of values, underestimation of one's heritage, lack of commitment to the truth to the point of nihilism in thought. Rather, it should be the continuation of the education process. Paul Ricoeur's recent suggestions to European Union contained meaningful words like 'multiple readings of tradition', 'exchange of memories', 'forgiveness'. These concepts are extremely useful for situations of encounter of civilizations that were in collision..... now in dialogue. Carl Gustav Jung used to say, "We need more understanding of human nature, because the only real danger that exists is man himself". We need to explore 'multiple interpretations of human nature', 'multiple understanding of the human situation', 'healing of collective memories', and 'forgiveness'. "When you freely meet the other, the demon in the other disappears. You begin discovering yourself in the other".

In these efforts, two kinds of conclusions are not helpful: a) Sociological, philosophical or theological conclusions that arise from the sense of guilt of the West for its colonial past, or those that reflect the its present attitude of dominance, b) those conclusions that arise from the unhealed memories of people in the ex-colonies, i.e. of those who suffer excessively from post-colonial complexes and live on grievances. Their conclusions are not likely to correspond to precise reality. There is bound to be a blind spot somewhere. They can only be partially objective. Such conclusions need to be sifted and re-interpreted before they can be found useful for actual life. Objectivity can spring only from serene reflection, with an enormous amount of confidence in one's own heritage, and respect for 'the other', with no guilt feelings on the one hand, nor grievances or anger on the other.

The wrong way of responding to pluralism is to reach arbitrary conclusions like: all are right, everything is OK, truth is relative, there is no possibility of attaining the truth. Thus Dietrich Bonhoeffer's prediction comes true, "Since there is no confidence in truth, the place of truth is usurped by sophistic propaganda. Since there is no confidence in justice, whatever is useful is declared to be just" (Bonhoeffer 107-8).

Religious Pluralism

"Religions have much to gain from conversation with each other"
(Gillis)

Harvard's Wilfred Cantwell Smith has argued that to be fully religious today means being inter-religious. He feels that there is a 'global continuum' of religious histories, incorporating others' vision of realities (Lott 171). However, the respect due to other religions does not oblige us to hold that all religions are the same. In fact there are as many differences between the central teachings of different religions as there are similarities. For every believer, his own religion is unique. It is most legitimate to believe so (6). It is for the secular student of comparative religion that all religions are just the same, for a firm believer they are not so. Our profound respect for other religious persuasions does not prevent us from challenging what we find dehumanising or inauthentic in any tradition, e.g. sati, caste-unfairness, exploitation, gender inequality, debasing relationships, superstition. It is an extension of challenging what is inauthentic in our own.

But there is a way of exercising this prophetic mission. The most effective one is not self-righteous denunciation of the other, whether 'the other' is a person of another religion, ideology, worldview, or class. We exercise our prophetic ministry best when we get people to think, when we help them like a friend and a fellow-traveller (not as though dealing with a foe or acting as a self-appointed judge) to take note of an evil present in their society, and join hands together with them in trying to uproot that evil, or, similarly, launch a remedial action together with them. That is what a genuine missionary would try to do. It may be more of an Asian way of doing things. Mahatma Gandhi reveals to us by his example the power of sturdy but respectful 'intellectual dissent'. Only gradually did the British begin to understand the potency of an 'intellectual dissent' in a brahminic society. The non-cooperation and civil disobedience movements that the Indian National Congress launched were more powerful than the American War of Independence, with no loss of lives. Mao was intelligent enough to understand that the resistance of the harmless god-king (Dalai Lama) was mightier than that of armed Tibetan insurgents.

Some anthropologists have suggested that the aggressiveness to be found in modern prophetism among Christian social activists is an expression of the 'Semitic' instinct in the community of Christian believers. We need not indulge in such forms of anti-Semitism. But if we wish to search for the most fruitful way of exercising our prophetic ministry today, we may find from experience that it consists in moving to the core concerns of our religious faith and living out with absolute sincerity our deepest convictions according to the most authentic values of our own religious tradition. It is in this context that interactions with other traditions, e.g. cooperation for common good, dialogue, borrowing of valuable elements, and sharing with all zeal what we consider most precious in our heritage and 'the other' considers the most acceptable, become useful. There is something wanting in the way each religion is lived out. Mutual interaction will suggest possibilities of mutual enrichment. "Religions have much to gain from conversation with each other....For our own enrichment and growth, as well as for the promotion of others and all of humanity, we need each other. Religions must strive for mutual understanding and cooperation" (Gillis 173).

Growing in Esteem for Each Other

*Those who believe in the clash of civilizations will wonder why Muslim
Bangladesh chose Hindu Tagore's 'Amar Sonar Bangla' as their
National anthem (Amartya Sen)*

The motto of India is 'Satyam Eva Jayate'. But we know from experience that the search for truth calls for intense effort. When we are truly interested, we study a topic from every point of view, even from the point of the opponent. Irenaeus was eager to know what the adversary thought. John Paul II, as a young man, was eager to know what the opponent taught. He read Marx with interest. The Bhagavadgita encourages intense effort, even when the results seem out of reach; it shows the path of intellectual discussion even in the field of action.

Other points of view are fast emerging in the world than we were used to. Voices that we had never heard before are beginning to speak up. The voiceless are acquiring voice. There is an interesting instance not long ago. Margaret Mitchell's best-selling 'Gone with the Wind' had romanticised the White plantations in the South of the United States. Alice Randall wanted to write a sequel to the story from the perspective of the enslaved Blacks who made the planters' prosperity possible. The manuscript had for its name 'The Wind done gone'. The publication was halted only at the final stage by the Federal Court. But it was good for the White Americans to know that there was another way of looking at the Black-White encounter. Nevertheless, hate ought to be conquered. Churchill wrote to Nehru after India had won Independence, "You, sir, have conquered two great human infirmities; you have conquered fear and you have conquered hate". May be India

has done that. That was why it was possible for Manmohan to compliment the British during his recent visit to Oxford. Compromise too is possible. Mahatma Gandhi used to speak of the ‘beauty of compromise’. That is what made Ariel Sharon to decide to pull out 8000 Israelis from Gaza strip.

There have been proposals to re-write the Ramayana from Sita’s or Ravana’s point of view, Indian history from the purely the Hindu or Buddhist or Muslim point of view. If the story of World War II were to be written from the German or Japanese point of view, it would differ a great deal from Churchill’s account. Everyone has a right to be heard. Everyone is free to speak up in all fairness. We are all free to listen with “critical openness”. We can change our understanding and our attitudes too. Genuine conversions can take place. There have been some impressive conversions of late: that of Michael Gorbachev from Soviet totalitarianism to Perestroika, of Deng Xiaoping from Communism to Chinese form of capitalism, of Manmohan Singh from planned economy to free enterprise, of Buddhadev Bhattacharjee from Marxism to search for private capital, of L.K.Advani from an anti-Muslim stance to admiration for Jinnah, of India from being anti-American (CIA, foreign hand) to pro-American. “Conversion”, then, need not be a disaster, as the Hindutva leaders argue. That is one way in which we exercise our mind and make our options.

In one of the early chapters of our national history there is the account of a conversion that changed the direction of our civilization. It took place after the Kalinga war which had carried away a 100,000 lives, when Asoka opted for the teaching of the mendicant from Kapilavastu. The carpenter’s son, Jesus of Nazareth may also have a useful message for this civilization.

Prince Shotoku of Japan introduced a liberal constitution in 604 A.D. He said, “nor let us be resentful when others differ from us. For all men have hearts, and each heart has its own leanings. Their right is our wrong, and our right is their wrong” (Moore 144). We need to discuss, debate and learn. Heraclitus considered only that city harmonious where there was constant activity and debate. Kalidasa’s Meghadut (5th cent) moved across the subcontinent admiring the beauty and variety of human customs and behaviour. Variety is not a threat, but an enrichment. Those who believe in the clash of civilizations will wonder why Muslim Bangladesh chose Hindu Tagore’s ‘Amar Sonar Bangla’ as their national anthem (Sen 90). Tagore said his family was the product of the confluence of Hindu, Muslim and British cultures.

There is need of an internal openness as an external openness. Sometimes we remain closed to ideas that arise from within our own tradition. For example, there are instances in which Hindu artists’ paintings were attacked by Hindu mobs, Sikh playwrights were threatened by Sikh violence, Muslim novelists and film-makers were menaced by Islamic fanatics. There must be internal attention to each other as well. Criticism from within can lead to self-correction. So a Catholic must listen to a Catholic, a Christian to a Christian, an Indian to another Indian, a democrat to a democrat, as we listen to multiple voices of cultures, civilizations, philosophies, ideologies, and new perspectives.

In April 2005 some 100 Asian and African leaders met at Jakarta and signed a ‘Strategic Partnership’, intending to promote a dialogue of civilizations, peace, respect for religion, culture, languages, racial diversities and gender equality. In the 1950’s Lester Pearson, the Canadian Foreign Minister looked forward to “an age when different civilizations will have to learn to live side by side in peaceful interchange, studying each other’s history and ideals, mutually enriching each others’ lives”

The Search for Abiding Truth

“What should I do with that, by which I do not become immortal?”

(Upanishads)

Humanity is in search of that truth that is complete and permanent. Aristotle wrote, “The investigation of the truth is in one way hard, in another way easy. An indication of this is found in

the fact that no one is able to attain the truth adequately, while, on the other hand, no one fails entirely, but everyone says something true about the nature of things, and while individually they contribute little or nothing to the truth, by the union of all a considerable amount is amassed” (Aristotle 30-34).

There have always been an amazing number for truth-seekers this side of the Himalayas. For them, partial answers and transitory achievements did not matter much. They looked on the glamorous and the pompous as trifling things. Alexander asked a group of Jain philosophers why they were paying so little attention to him. This was the reply that he received, “King Alexander, every man can possess only so much of the earth’s surface as this we are standing on. You are but human like the rest of us, save that you are always busy and up to no good, traveling so many miles from your home, a nuisance to yourself and to others! You will soon be dead, and then you will own just as much of the earth as will suffice to bury you” (As quoted by Sen 15)

There is a harassing question that tormented the restless minds of millions of truth-seekers in the ancient land of Bharatavarsha. Yajnavalkya’s learned wife phrases the question in this manner, “What should I do with that, by which I do not become immortal?” She was referring to wealth. Amartya Sen says it was this question that set him thinking of not relying only on the GNP and GDP in judging development. He pointed out that there was also the human development to be taken care of. It was for this emphasis that he won the Nobel Prize. That ‘human’ dimension is concerned with what is immortal. It is concerned with the truth that abides.

The Indian mind is forever searching. Its thirst for truth is insatiable. Our advance in the Knowledge Industry is merely an external expression of this undying eagerness. May our search move on and on, until it attains Eternal Truth. For, “When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the Truth”.(Jn 16:13).

Endnotes

(1) A 19th century English man described a nation as a group of people united in a common lie as to their origin and common hostility to outsiders”—Hassner 250.

(2) V.S.Sukthankar said, “The Mahabharata is the context of our collective unconscious. ...We must therefore grasp this book with both hands and face it squarely. Then we shall recognise that it is our past which has prolonged itself into the present. We are it.....Mahabharata is referred to when compromises are made, shady deals struck, promises dishonoured, battles fought, disasters lamented” (Shashi Taroor 19).

(3) Herodotus said the Persian emperor Xerxes was defeated in Greece in 480, because he tried to build a bridge across the Hellespont in defiance of natural order (Freeman 22)! However, what we need today are people who can build bridges across, civilizations, cultures, ideologies, political interests and religious persuasions.

(4) The US that is speaking of “level playing fields” imposes 3000 tariffs and quotas from sweaters, sneakers, ice cream, and orange juice. So does the European Union (Toffler 268).

(5) According to a study conducted by the University of Utah, the lower caste Indians are more Asian than those of higher castes. Michael Bamstad argues that the upper caste Indian male is closer to Europeans than the lower castes. The genetic distance is closest between Europeans and Brahmins (0.1), followed by Kshatriyas (0.12), and Vaishyas (0.16).

(6) Chester Gillis in his “Pluralism: A New Paradigm for Theology” (Peeters Press, Louvain) says, “No matter what formulation inclusivism takes, and there are many, it always concludes with Christ as the universal and only saviour, coopting all independent forms of salvation. This, in my judgement, constitutes a form of imperialism, because it imposes Christ as saviour on all persons regardless of their own beliefs about salvation or their own religious tradition” (Gillis 21). A statement like this calls for some reflection. Certainly if one follows up one’s conviction that Christ is the only saviour of humankind by getting the belief imposed by coercion or deception on others who do not share the same belief, we can see the point of the author. But if it is presented as a proposal which may be voluntarily accepted or rejected, one does see where the dimension of imperialism is found. My firm conviction that democracy is the best form

of government does not make it an imperialistic notion. But if I were to get it imposed on people through military intervention, the matter would be different. Instances of getting concepts of democracy and human rights thrust down the throats of sovereign nations are not wanting. But that is another matter.

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AFTER-WORD

Pluralism has come to stay. After having seen the various pluralistic positions, the question that arises now is no more one of ‘whether’—*whether* there can be pluralism in thinking and acting—but one of ‘how’—*how* we should live with pluralism. Pluralism means neither the mere presence of disparate things, thoughts and actions, nor the acceptance of ‘anything-goes-attitude’. Plurality goes with genuine unity—a unity where plurality is accepted and respected. Only where there is plurality can there be genuine unity—a garden of unity and plurality: a *unity* of mutual complementarity and a *plurality* of individual uniqueness. When each of the plural forms sees the other as complementing and enriching one another, there exists a unity of symphony—varieties of sounds make a beautiful piece of music. Such an interaction with one another is a ‘play’—a play *with* one another, rather than *against* one another. The culture of ‘unity in plurality’ is different from the culture of globalization, that does not tolerate any difference or plurality; it levels down every different to the level of the powerful model. In such a situation there is only uniformity. What we are looking forward to is not a uniformity of sameness, but a garden of unity and plurality, identity and difference.

Pluralism calls for an attitudinal change—a change from the presumption of ‘exclusiveness’ and ‘self-sufficiency’ of one’s own. No thought is so ‘rich’ that it does not need to be complemented, and no thought is so ‘poor’ that it has nothing to complement with. In other words, one needs a philosophical *humility* with regard to one’s own, and *openness* to other perspectives and thoughts—openness to pluralism. Standing rooted in one’s own *identity*, one has to be open to the *alterity*, to the different, to the plural possibilities. Our effort in this book has been nothing but to create a *stir* in the presumptive attitude of ‘exclusivism’, and thus to make an awareness of the need to open out to other ways of thought and action—openness to pluralism. If this book has, at least in some measure, contributed towards this, it has achieved its desired goal.

ACPI STATEMENT 2005

PLURALISM

We, the members of the ACPI gathered for our annual meeting at Salesian College, Sonada, Darjeeling, 18-22 October 2005, for the purpose of a collective and in-depth reflection on the thematic: “Pluralism: A Challenge to Philosophizing in Today’s India,” have come to the following deliberations:

1. We are inspired to eschew an approach towards reality, which is based on an exclusivist, absolutist and totalitarian mentality – an approach which is based on the presuppositions of a monolithic and unipolar understanding of truth and meaning. This approach, besides being epistemologically naïve, smacks of a spirit of arrogance and of socio-political hegemony, namely, an overt or covert desire to exercise control over the ‘other.’

At the other extreme, we seek to avoid an approach towards understanding reality, which is fundamentally subjectivist and/or relativist—an approach which is based on the presuppositions of the radical incommensurability between different meaning systems. This approach, we find, to be epistemologically deficient, leading to a fragmentation of the human community, and a non-commitment to the processes of transformation of our world with other individuals and communities.

2. In place of these extreme approaches towards the understanding of our complex reality, we choose to adopt a position of critical pluralism that is mediatory, rooted in our respective socio-political and religious contexts.

By adopting this approach, we affirm a desire to seek for the truth along with others who may have different perspectives or conceptions of truth. While we do not abandon what is at the core of our meaning systems, dialogue with others would serve to correct, enlarge and deepen each other’s perspectives and convictions.

3. We commit ourselves to address the following challenges arising from such a pluralistic and dialogical approach. The challenge to:

- a. Overcome stereotypical prejudices based on religion, gender, caste, class, language, region and ethnicity.
- b. Expose and help overcome exploitative power relations which perpetuate such prejudices.
- c. Create opportunities for dialogue between believers of different traditions so as to build a better nation and a better world.
- d. Promote mutual collaboration on personal, institutional and structural levels.
- e. Build bridges of understanding and consensus among communities, and overcome misunderstanding and acrimony.
- f. Discover alternatives to the many forms of instrumental rationality which govern our relations with individuals, communities and nature.

- g. Educate ourselves and others to celebrate diversity through mutual respect, based on a better understanding of persons and communities.
- h. Reinterpret history and tradition in a liberative rather than an oppressive manner.

Salesian College, Sonada
21 October 2005

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