

Inauguration of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study Vision of the Founding Fathers*

The idea of gifting the premises of the Rashtrapati Niwas, the former Viceregal Lodge, at Shimla, to the Indian Institute of Advanced Study was conceived by Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, when he was the President of India, in dialogue with Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. Subsequently, on the 6th of October, 1964, the IIAS Society was registered under the Registration of Societies Act of 1860. Dr Zakir Hussain, Vice-President of India, was its first President and M.C. Chagla, Union Minister of Education, its first Vice-President. Professor Niharranjan Ray was chosen to be the first Director of the Institute. The primary objective of the Institute according to its Memorandum of Association was "to provide an atmosphere suitable for academic research" in the humanities and in social and natural sciences.

As Chagla pointed out in his "Introductory Address" at the inaugural function:

This is a unique institution... in the first instance because in a place which was the symbol of imperialism and of viceregal splendour, we are now going to have a symbol of scholarship and research.

There would be "no curricula, no courses of studies, no faculties, no examinations, and ...no degrees."

We want to create here an atmosphere of real research and scholarship where people can come, discourse with each other and carry on the work of expanding the horizons of knowledge.

Addressing President Radhakrishnan, Chagla said towards the end of his "Introductory Address":

Now, Sir, in this Institute we are going to put special stress on humanities

*Compiled mostly from the records of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study. See *Transactions I, IIAS, Shimla, 1966.*

and I am sure that it will appeal to your heart. We, as a nation, want to become modern and scientifically minded. But in this pursuit, we must pause from time to time and if I might put it this way—hold out our hands to the stars. A country which is purely scientific minded is not on the road to progress, but on the road, may be to destruction. Science is a dangerous thing unless it is inspired by philosophy and the liberal arts, and we do not want the balance to swing entirely on the side of science and technology. As the Vice-President said, we have great ideals in this country, ideals of philosophy, of arts and aesthetics, and we must preserve those ideals.

President Radhakrishnan's "Inaugural Address" endorsed the decision to put special stress on the humanities and provided guidelines:

You are calling yourselves an Institute of Advanced Study. Pursuit of truth is not an easy task. We try to seek knowledge and not information, first principles and not particular details. We must find out whether what we are observing, what has come down to us as truth on the sanction of authority, is really truth or requires some kind of adjustment or modification. We should not be the prisoners of the status-quo. Living spirit will always express itself in modified form, whatever has been transmitted to it from the past. We have a tendency to deify error, a tendency to be confronted by illusions which suit our fancies. We should examine those things to find out whether really what we live by, is truth or counterfeit truth. That is the first question which we have to observe.

Both Dr. Zakir Husain and Mr. Chagla pointed out to you that in these days of rising expectations as they say, we attach ourselves more and more to science and technology. We want to raise the living standards of our common people. We can do that only by the application of science and technology. And by human effort, we try to improve the general conditions of our people. Military defence also now requires further development. All these things turn our attention to science and technology for practical considerations. Therefore we are tending towards science and technology. But then there is a sense of inadequacy; there is a sense of lack of a compelling need, a direction, to our life. We ask ourselves if we can be content with mere science and technology or whether we should lay stress on another aspect of our studies, namely the Humanities. I do not say that science and technology or machines, etc., are really dangerous. Of course that sense was there. Blake once said, 'Art comes from the tree of life, science from the tree of death.' That is how he put it, in a very misleading way. Many thinkers also say, 'it is time for us to cry a halt to scientific inventions, give a moratorium to them and try to adjust ourselves to the creations which we have.' There has been a steady progress so far as our practical life is concerned. The bullock-cart gave place to the bicycle, the bicycle to the automobile. But that has not resulted in the dehumanization of man, because man's consciousness itself responded

to these technical creations in an adequate way. But when these technical creations become spectacular, overwhelming, there is a danger that it may give rise to some kind of lack of equilibrium. It is that which we should avoid. Science and technology—there are people who indulge in them, the greatest brains of the world to-day are devoted to the production of nuclear weapons, trying to devise instruments of mass torture and extermination of culture. But that has nothing to do with the machines or the weapons which we are using. It has everything to do with the kind of man. The tragedy to-day lies in the fact that man knows what is right, but is defeated by circumstances and is unable to bring it about. That is the essence of human tragedy to-day. We have developed all these weapons. We have developed enormous instruments for the elevation of the human spirit, for the improvement of culture. But why are we not using them for those purposes? The mistake is in the inadequacy of human nature. That is why, I think, the stress on Humanities which you are laying, will correct this onesidedness of our culture, this deficiency in our equipment, and enable us to expand our consciousness, to transcend, to make us understand clearly what is it we are attempting to do. So the stress on Humanities which you are having is very necessary and very essential.

It would be pertinent here to quote from Bronowski's "Preface to the Revised Edition" (1965) of *Science and Human Values*.

In only one respect would I want to enlarge what I have said in this book about science and human values, if I were starting afresh today....In the essays as I have written them I have deliberately confined myself to establishing one central proposition: that the practice of science compels the practitioner to form for himself a fundamental set of universal values. I have not suggested that this set embraces all the human values; I was sure when I wrote that it did not; but at the time I did not want to blur the argument by discussing the whole spectrum of values. Now that the crux of my argument has been accepted, I would, were I beginning again, give some space also to a discussion of those values which are not generated by the practice of science—the values of tenderness, of kindness, of human intimacy and love. These form a different domain from the sharp and, as it were, Old Testament virtues which science produces, but of course they do not negate the values of science. I shall hope to write about the relation between the two sets of values at another time, and to show how we need to link them in our behaviour. (p. xiii)

India today has many distinguished IITS and IIMS for the teaching of technology and management but its universities which used to be the centres of liberal education, which provided the vision and shaped the values which nourished society are shriveling up and dying. From

the preuniversity stage of education too humanities are being edged out. Even the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, the one institution established with largeness of vision and dedicated to the study of literature, history, philosophy, the arts, religion, pure science and the social sciences, has had to suffer many vicissitudes: years of neglect, threat of banishment from its premises, even of liquidation; subjugation to an inadequate vision that had little sympathy with any method other than the 'scientific'.

The founding fathers of the IIAS were visionaries who questioned and explored, and established an Institute which they hoped would push their search deeper. The very first function they organized, commencing in the afternoon of the day the Institute was inaugurated, was a fortnight long international seminar on "Religion and Society".

Chagla's "Welcome Address" succinctly stated the problem of modern societies and advocated the secular attitude:

The problem of modern society is how to bring together people of different religions, a problem which medieval society did not have to face.... If I might so put it, India is the great laboratory in which we are experimenting how people of different religions can live together peacefully, harmoniously and yet constitute one society. India is giving a lesson to the world on what a secular society can be.

Now the one great problem which civilization faces today is the problem of multi-racial and multi-communal society. Take Africa, take even United States. Is it possible for people of diverse faiths and diverse religions to work together, to live together as citizens and produce a good society? In India, people believe that religion is not the basis of citizenship and, therefore, under our Constitution, we have given the same rights to every citizen. I think the greatness and glory of India lies in this, that today in the midst of diversity, we have sought and found unity. India is the one country where we have men of different faiths living together. They are all citizens of the country, they are all loyal to the country, to the flag and to the Constitution, and at the same time, they have been given perfect freedom to practise their religion. Therefore, the question is: Is this an experiment which can succeed? Can this experiment be transported to other countries, which are facing the same problem? In my opinion, if religion has to have any future, that is the only way it can flourish. If religion has a divisive quality, then I think in the long run religion will fail. In our own country we have found that religion has led to partition. In the name of religion, Pakistan is waging war against us today. The truly religious man will say that it is counterfeit religion, that it is not true religion. But the problem is how are we going to discover the distinction between the true and false religion. There is no mint where you

can take the coin of religion and have it tested. Therefore, it must be left largely to the individual to decide the way he will tread to reach his own maker or as I said, to solve the inscrutable mystery of existence. Once you accept the proposition that any particular religion is the only true religion, then you are emphasizing the divisive factor of religion and not the unifying factor. The true approach to religion, if religion has to survive and if religion has to have a future, is that these are all different ways leading ultimately to the same goal. Some may tread one way, some may tread another way. Some may not tread any of these ways. This is a purely individual affair. And therefore you have to distinguish between religion as something personal, intimate and individualistic and its impact on society and to the extent that religion has an impact on society, it is the concern of millions of people, tens of millions and hundreds of millions, because how our society will develop and evolve in future will depend to a large extent on the way religion is practised. If religion is practised in the proper way, if it unites and combines, if it brings people together, then religion has a future and religion can play a big part in the State and Society. If religion divides one citizen from another, one human being from another, treating human beings as different persons because they practise different religions, then to my mind, religion has no future.

The experiment in secular living of which Chagla called India "the great laboratory" is not yet over. Today there are greater threats to that experiment endangering human societies. Added to the problem of disintegrating forces emerging in different parts of the world are problems dogging value free societies in other parts. Why is the idea of secularism that spread over Europe after the Treaty of Westphalia not succeeding with people for whom religion is a very potent force, not rationally understood perhaps, and therefore, capable of being hijacked by interested groups to serve ulterior ends? How can the wrong face of religion be rendered ineffective?

Religion moves people emotionally and the symbols, texts, icons of a religion provide a shared common ground for manipulating a people's emotions collectively. These symbols, texts, icons, however, perhaps also point to something beyond them, something far deeper which is the core, the ground, the source, the energy of all religions. By ignoring the core/ground/source of religions, the problem that secularism set out to rectify cannot be rectified. If secularism merely says: "Yes, yes. Quite right. Religion is all very nice. But it is your private affair. Go and practise it at home. Not in public where we have far more important things to do like promoting trade, setting up multi-nationals, making bombs for defence, sending man to Mars, than to think of the meaning of life," if secularism cannot go beyond that, it

cannot convince a serious man of religion, or even the common man who in his heart feels the need for religion, that religion is being taken at all seriously, that a fundamental human urge for meaning is not being ignored. It feels as though daddy has come out to cajole noisy children so that his more serious business is not disturbed.

The negative force of religion can be fought in the hearts of people only by travelling deeper in the mind of all religions and perceiving there the ground, the source, the silent fountain of creativity and love that can profoundly integrate mankind and provide a universal vision of meaning. If secularism cannot provide a universal vision, if it ignores 'the religion without a name' which is the source of all religions and which could be its source too, if it ignores the religious mind which exists in every man independent of whatever religion he may or may not belong to, it cannot provide the deeper sustenance that man needs as much as bread, and therefore, it has no future. Education that will concern itself with values has to turn its face towards universals and cannot ignore the question, where does mankind go to find a universal without labels. Was Chagla right? Is there really no mint where one can take the coin of religion and have it tested? May be we need to explore that a little?

To that end we publish in this issue the "Chairman's Address" delivered by Dr. Zakir Husain while inaugurating the first IAS seminar on "Religion and Society". Many other articles in this issue also engage in a search for universals in a world fragmented by a clash of ideologies.