

## The Assam Movement: The Myth and the Reality

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### The Assam Movement: Class, Ideology and Identity

by Monirul Hussain

Manak Publications Pvt Ltd., Delhi, 1993

it is easy to mobilise them against any or all of these migrant groups. This is more so because after independence in 1947, the expectations of these people rose high but the ruling class of the state while taking all possible steps to enhance its own position, did nothing to meet the minimum aspirations of the common people. Whenever the masses get restive, the ruling class raises the bogey that outsiders are consuming the resources of the state. The Centre, on the other hand, with the tacit support from its ally at the state level, has been pursuing an economic policy towards the state since independence that somewhat resembles colonial exploitation. Needless to say, that the masses of the state have valid reasons to be disenchanted with the Centre. As long as the ruling classes of the Centre and the state work in unison, the exploitative dimension of the Central policy does not get explicitly highlighted and propagated. But when the ruling class of the state feels threatened or wants to bargain anew for some concessions, the Centre is bracketed with outsiders and targeted as the root cause of the plight of the people.

c) The heartland of the Asamiya-speaking people and the state of Assam are not the same. Originally the five districts of the post-independence Assam, i.e. Kamrupa, Nowgong, Darrang, Shibsagar and Lakhimpur formed the Asamiya-speaking zone. During the post-independence decades, Goalpara district has been inducted into this zone. The Asamiya is, in no way, faced with any identity crisis in this zone. In spite of the massive growth of population in Assam, the number of the Asamiya population is also increasing very significantly at a higher rate than that of others. For instance, in 1911 the Asamiyas were only 49% of the total population of the Brahmaputra Valley, but in 1971 they rose to 71.76%. In Goalpara, the district bordering West Bengal, the growth rate of the Asamiya is phenomenal. There the Asamiya-speakers were 18.3% in 1931 but in 1971 they were 63.6%. The Bengali-speakers were 21% of the population of the state in 1931 but in 1971 they came down to 11%. In Goalpara, the Bengali-speakers decreased from 54% in 1931 to 14% in 1971. In the case of the Muslims, the situation is no different. In 1931, the decennial growth rate of the Muslims in the state was

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The Assam movement (1979-1985) was blessed with wide media coverage during its stormy tenure of six years. Thanks to the patronage it received from some influential quarters at the national level. Most of the coverages were spot reports that did not help even a keen observer to develop a real insight into the complexities involved in the movement. Of course, a number of nationally reputed columnists ventured through media columns to share their convictions and perceptions of the movement with their readers and some of them subsequently even came out with publications of varied bulks that sold well in the market. Unfortunately, the majority of those authors were in fact commissioned, directly or indirectly, by interested lobbies and hence their engagement was to establish, promote or propagate a thesis received at the second hand. Truth was the primary victim in such writings. Some scholars had also conducted researches on the Assam movement and published their findings in book forms; they, too, failed to break the limitation set forth by their journalist predecessors. Two of the most pretentious productions amongst these are *The History of the Assamese Movement* (Calcutta, 1990) by Dilip Kumar Chattopadhyaya and *The Difficult Years* (Delhi, 1981) by T.S. Murthy. Chattopadhyaya had collected his data in a hurried, haphazard and piecemeal manner that inevitably prompted him to arrive at conclusions so distorted and disintegrated that they can well be compared to jigsaw puzzles of an unsolvable variety. Murthy did not do justice to his assignment as a recipient of the prestigious Jawaharlal Nehru Fellowship since he made his task quite simple by compiling all available newspaper clippings and virtually did nothing more. So, in his book reporters did all the talking on his behalf. About other works in English the less said the better. Surely Monirul Hussain's book is a refreshing exception in this otherwise gloomy scenario.

In a sense, Hussain is best suited to investigate the multi-dimensional facets of the Assam Movement. As an Assamese youth he shared its aspirations, as a Muslim he suffered the agonies and anxieties the minorities were subjected to during the days of the emotionally surcharged movement and as an inmate of the campus of Gauhati University, the

epicentre of the AASU activities, he saw for himself how from a humble beginning the movement was built up in different phases through meticulous planning and well-calculated moves to convert it ultimately into a mass upsurge of an unprecedented magnitude. On the other hand, this kind of involvement and proximity can also act as a deterrent; it blurs one's vision and objectivity. It goes to the credit of the author that he does not permit his personal experience to dominate his dispassionate assessment. He has undoubtedly learnt from his experience. But whenever he evaluates, he does it on the basis of data and hard facts.

Hussain's major arguments revolve round the fundamental premise that the Assam movement had its origin in the inherent lacunae that is rooted in the entire process of historical development of the Asamiya nationality. Hussain deliberately uses the term 'Asamiya' meaning the people who speak Asamiya thereby distinguishing it from other non-Asamiya speaking people of Assam who are also known as the Assamese. The semi-tribal, semi-feudal past of the pre-British Brahmaputra Valley left a hang-over which this imperfectly-formed nationality is yet to overcome. The complexities of the Assam movement cannot be gauged properly if one does not look beneath the surface to discern the interplay of currents between different layers and components within the Asamiya society. The author goes deep into those phenomena to understand the intriguing realities that moulded the objectives, ideals, rationale and mechanism of the Assam movement.

Deriving his arguments from this basic premise he draws some major conclusions that deserve elaborate mention. These are:

a) The Asamiya middle class comprising the caste Hindus is the ruling class of Assam. The semi-tribal, semi-feudal past of the Asamiya renders its middle class unsure of its position and foundation — it suffers from a perpetual sense of insecurity.

However, during the post-independence decades it has established its social, political and cultural hegemony over the society of Assam through means fair or foul. Its hegemony is retained mainly through the use of the state power

which it controls with the help and support from the ruling class at the national level. Whenever this class anticipates any potential or imaginary threat to its entrenched position of authority, it becomes nervous and hysterical. In such exigencies, it incites the masses in the name of language, culture, identity or economic deprivation and organises mass movements with the implicit objective of making a fresh bargain with the ruling class at the national level and thereby perpetuating and strengthening its grip over state power.

b) The Asamiya masses, particularly the non-caste downtrodden component of it, have been a deprived lot throughout the course of history. The colonial rule opened up new opportunities that were of no benefit to them; most of these opportunities went to the advantage of different categories of migrants. Though there were definite historical reasons for such deprivations, the Asamiya common men have been nurturing genuine grievance against the migrants since the colonial days. So

**All his arguments and observations are developed with meticulous care on the basis of hard facts and sound logic. His data base is unimpeachable. In short, the author undertakes the task of demolishing a myth and does a good job of it.**

Professor Kaul's work on Jones is the outcome of a scholarly engagement sustained through long years of teaching and close reading of literary texts. The author's fascination with the pathos of a Jones seeking to comprehend the complex inheritance of thought and life which Europe had just begun to reorder and recast, began with a suggestion from his tutor Bennett. He is emphatic that he does not seek the kind of enquiry pursued by Jones scholars like Mukherjee and Kejriwal. Instead, he would like to focus on 'Jones's literary achievement as a translator'.

Jones was the first to translate Kalidas' *Shakuntalam* into a European language. And the translation deeply touched the Romantic imagination in Europe. He also undertook to collate and render the codes of Manu in English. Jones' range as a translator is truly forbidding. Before he came to know of the existence of Sanskrit, Jones had translated Arabic poetry before the birth of Islam and the grand mystical poets of Islamic Persia. The cardinal

## INTERPRETING ORIENTAL CULTURE

Suresh Sharma\*

### Studies in William Jones—An Interpreter of Oriental Culture

by R.K. Kaul

Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, 1995,  
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question that the author seeks to explore concerns the possible literary reading of Jones' rendering of forms of thought and expression of which Europe at that time knew almost nothing. That impels Kaul to begin with an examination of precisely the kind of question which lies at the very heart of writings on Jones: the historic-epistemic placement of Jones' writings. It is a question that

Kaul does not articulate quite in those words. Instead, he chooses to ground it implicitly in a refutation of Edward Said.

**Reading Kaul's work is an instructive experience. True, the simulated faith in the innocence and nobility of the victim induces debilitating cognitive closures.**

Said places Jones firmly in a neat line of crusaders determined against all odds to 'rope off, to domesticate the Orient, and thereby turn it into a province of European learning'. One could well ask as to why anyone should take Said's

pronouncements on Jones seriously. His concern and knowledge of the Sanskrit component of 'Orientalism' is fleeting and marginal. The compelling power of Said's pronouncement, the author argues, derives from a substantial acceptance in contemporary discourse of the way he demarcates the placement of almost all 'Orientalist' scholarship.

For Said, European knowledge of the Orient is 'synonymous with European domination'. The much flaunted study of the 'classics' was meant to deepen the basis of European hegemony. By invoking certain ancient texts as the referent for understanding the past as much as the present, the world beyond Europe could be posited as an undifferentiated realm incapable of effecting change on its own. Hence the belief that the 'difference' between the West and others was of an 'absolute' kind.

Kaul's refutation of Said has a bold sweep. He is acutely sensitive to the irony implicit in Said's argument.

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45% but in 1971 it was 31%. The Hindu growth rate of the state during the same period is 37.21%. The four districts of Kamrupa, Goalpara, Nowgong and Darrang are alleged to be harbouring the maximum number of Bangladeshi Muslims — but actually the Muslim growth rate showed a decline between 1961-71 in these districts. So the slogan which the Assam movement leadership took so forcefully to the people — 'the foreigners/Bangladeshis/Muslims have endangered the identity of the Asamiyas/Hindus in Assam' — is not based on facts. There lies a 'serious gap between the ideology of the Assam movement and the empirical reality'.

d) The outcome of the assembly poll of 1978 alarmed the Asamiya ruling class. In this election, in a house of 126 members the left parties secured 23 seats and thereby won a bargaining position in a fluid political situation. The number of Muslim MLAs belonging to different parties also rose to 29. Both the figures marked the high-point of success for the respective categories. The Asamiya middle class, for the first time since independence, felt its position seriously threatened — the emerging new forces being in no way

its allies. So there was a severe backlash from the ruling class that culminated in the Assam movement.

e) At the initial stage the slogan 'Bahiragata Hatao' ('oust all outsiders' meaning all non-Assamese) was used to incite the masses. But the ideologues of the ruling class soon realised that the slogan would have an adverse reaction at the national level. So the term 'foreigner' was coined in its stead though on the operational plane the distinction between 'the foreigner' and 'the outsider' was never maintained. The substitution was made not to bring about any qualitative change in the ideology of the movement but to hoodwink the national conscience. In other words, the same commodity was promoted under two brand names to suit the tastes of two categories of consumers of two different markets, domestic and national. Hussain says, 'In order to protect and enhance its class interest... the Asamiya ruling class led the Assam movement very tactfully'.

f) This avowed Gandhian movement had a violent overtone and 'the leadership of the movement also did not try to contain violence from the beginning itself'. The estimated death toll of the Nellie massacre was between 1200 to 3000. There were other mini-pogroms in Moklamowa, Silapathar, Gohpur and other places

in which more than a thousand people belonging to different minority groups were killed. Between 1979-84 the agitationists executed 471 bomb blasts killing 101 persons.

Needless to say, these findings of Hussain go against the popular notions propagated and created through the media and bulk of extant literature. In this country fictions propagated for popular consumption tend to become a fact of political epistemology in due course of time. Hussain is aware of this; hence he takes extreme precaution to avoid subjective assessment. All his arguments and observations are developed with meticulous care on the basis of hard facts and sound logic. His data base is unimpeachable. In short, the author undertakes the task of demolishing a myth and does a good job of it.

This intensive study of the Assam movement is comprehensive but for the lack of one dimension. The movement generated responses of a varied kind at the national level. Different political forces perceived and approached the movement from their own standpoint. The author broadly mentions a large Indian ruling class, but as we all know this class is not a homogenous entity. Its components were never unanimous as to the mechanism to be deployed for containing the Assam movement.

A chapter with a detailed analysis identifying the reasons for these diverse responses that the movement generated at the national level would have helped in developing a better understanding of the situation. For instance, the author traces, quite elaborately, the BJP's connection with the movement, but it remains a mystery as to what prompted the BJP to abandon its pronounced sympathy for Bengali Hindu refugees and to woo the AASU. The erstwhile socialists of the then Janata Party went out of their way to sponsor the movement though the movement was instrumental in the fall of Janata ministry led by socialist Golap Borbora. Why? Still more intriguing was the direct and active support rendered to the movement by the activists of the Gandhi Peace Foundation in spite of the movement's direct connivance with violence and secessionism. The author says: 'the big Indian Bourgeoisie and the little Asamiya Bourgeoisie together had given birth to psychological and structural conditions in Assam for the emergence of such a massive movement'. The full import of this remark remains elusive in the absence of such an analysis.

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N.K. Devaraja's book is at once a return as well as a departure. It returns to the primal problems of philosophy, as he himself had stated them in *The Philosophy of Culture*. In his first philosophical work, he had laid down two fundamental theses as the regulative principles of his way of philosophizing: (1) the connection between knowledge and interests and (2) the freedom of preferential choice. In that text these principles were used to suggest a certain theory of creativity, based on which he developed his idea of creative humanism. But in the present text the same principles are put to a new use, to formulate an adequate philosophical response to the crisis of relativism in the humanistic disciplines. Since the principles of interest boundedness of knowledge and preferential order serve as the dynamic principles of

## Meditations on Dissent and Disagreement: Devaraja on Creative Humanism

R. Sundara Rajan\*

### THE LIMITS OF DISAGREEMENT: AN ESSAY ON REASONING IN HUMANISTIC DISCIPLINES

N.K. Devaraja

Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, 1993, pp.x + 221, Rs.200/-

Devaraja's analysis, I would like to comment briefly on them before turning to the encounters with hermeneutic and valuational conflicts.

It is striking that there is a convergence, spontaneous and independent, between Devaraja and Jurgen Habermas on the first principle of knowledge and human interests. Like

Habermas, Devaraja also argues that the basic categories of a mode of thought are based on certain vital interests, and he sees this connection between knowledge and human interests as the point at which normative issues arise within epistemology. To have shown how there is a moral dimension to the issues of rationality is perhaps the single most

important contribution of the present work. But precisely since it is so crucial, one wishes that Devaraja had followed up the problem more systematically and thoroughly. It is also clear that the thesis of constitutive categories being expressions of vital interests is at once to accept Kant and to modify him; in fact, such a project may be called the humanization of transcendental philosophy.

Devaraja accepts quite unambiguously the basic Kantian principle of the constitution of our experience by categorical frameworks (pp.200-205). But he immediately qualifies his acceptance of Kant's transcendentalism in three important ways: The pluralization of categorical or conceptual frameworks. Devaraja argues that there are different orders

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Almost all of European thought is designated precisely in the kind of undifferentiated terms which he so sternly castigates in 'Orientalism'. Nineteenth century provides the definitive fulcrum. Much that is true in Said's argument concerning the pervasiveness in the 19th century of the passion to recast and domesticate the world, is unthinkingly projected as the entirety of Europe's past.

European interest in the ancient Orient was part of a far more troubled and complex search to recover contact with its pre-Christian Graeco-Roman past. William Jones exemplifies, alongwith Burke and Samuel Johnson, the vital presence of this intellectual strand in 18th century England. Jones believed aesthetic sensitivity provided a truly universal ground for cognition and judgement. His faith was: 'Whatever is beautiful in itself must be so in all countries and at all times'.

In translating Arabic and Persian poetry Jones sought a deeper 'insight into the history of the human mind', and also to furnish a range of new images to juvenate the English poetic imagination stifled by the 'insipid babble of darts and cupids'. In Arabic folk tradition the *Moalakat* (Seven Odes) are remembered as poems 'suspended on the temple at Mecca'. To Jones they signified the poetic power of 'unpolished' pastoral innocence. The preference for the *Moalakat* also marked a line of exclusion. Epic poems were excluded. Could it be Jones felt that not just the

story, but the reach of even its metaphors was confined to those who shared a collective memory?

Translating the *Moalakat* entailed difficulties of an unusual kind. The unabashed celebration of revenge and cruelty on the battlefield was difficult to reconcile with the Romantic belief in the 'pastoral innocence' of Arab poetry. The frequent and obsessive comparison by Arab poets of the beloved with their favourite camel or horse stretched 'ecological sentiment' beyond the limits of comprehension. With all that to contend with, Jones' achievement inspires respect. Jones' translations, unlike those of Arberry, remain close to the original and have the 'virtues of cadenced prose'.

Jones' engagement with Persian poetry was clearly of a different order. He greatly admired the sheer immensity and range of Firdausi's (920-1020) poetical achievement. Jones was certain that Firdausi's sixty thousand couplets composed over 35 years, breathed the 'spirit of our Dryden and the sweetness of Pope'. He was 'almost equally enthusiastic' about Sadi, Hafiz and Nizami. But of all the Persian poets he thought Hafiz alone was 'worthy to sup with the gods'. He was deeply fascinated by the grandeur of restraint in Hafiz's poetry and was convinced that Sufi mysticism shared common ground with the Vedantist.

Jones' encounter with Sanskrit began only after he landed in India (1783). But it was an encounter that touched him to his innermost depth. He thought of Sanskrit as the 'celestial tongue'. He never directly renounced his faith in Christianity; but his

encounter with Sanskrit seemed to have affected in a definitive sense his religious faith. Kaul takes sharp note of the paradox of Jones, an ardent admirer of the 'reticence and self-restraint of Persian poetry' accepting the 'excesses' of Sanskrit poetry so 'uncritically'. Consider the implications of this paradox alongwith the fact that perhaps no other translation invited the kind of serious literary-philosophical attention as Jones' rendering of the *Shakuntalam*.

One can easily see the tremendous fascination for the vibrant play of Man and Nature in *Shakuntalam*. But the inherent difficulty of rendering it into a European language was forbidding enough. Surely, the fluid movement from animal to human life and from human to animal life as the stern play of accumulated *karma* of previous lives, would have been exceedingly difficult to cope with for Christian readers. In fact one could speak of this difficulty as the underside of the fascination. It stemmed from the privileged separation, so definitive in the self-sense of modern Europe, of Man from Nature.

Kaul's study concludes with an affirmation of the possibility of detached critical judgement. His comments on the use of categories anchored in the Greek literary tradition for reading Sanskrit literature are instructive and meticulous. But he sees even less promise in Sanskrit poetics as a basis for critical appraisal. He has nothing to say as to how and from whence could one pursue a critical understanding of Sanskrit works? He is most severe in his appraisal of Jones

as a translator of Sanskrit literature. According to Kaul, while translating from Sanskrit Jones was 'content with the role of an apologist'.

Reading Kaul's work is an instructive experience. True, the simulated faith in the innocence and nobility of the victim induces debilitating cognitive closures. But the blindness induced by valorisation of what has come to prevail is no less blinding. It is a line that the author on occasion tends to walk towards. For instance, he characterises Kasim's expedition to Sindh as an act of mere 'conquest', and Columbus' journey to America as a voyage of 'discovery'. Even more disconcerting is the privileged placement assigned to Jones as a 'responsible administrator' as against Said, a 'mere scholar'.

Kaul writes as a firm believer in the modern rationalist possibility. At the same time he is touched and fascinated by the Romantic empathy for civilisation subdued by Europe in the last two centuries. But he never allows that sentiment to glorify the victims. His refutation of Said's valorisation of victimhood is marked by courage and insight. Kaul's study brings to attention two very significant considerations:

1. However flawed the motivation, serious intellectual engagement perhaps can never sustain without nurturing in some measure, concern for truth.

2. Meaningful critique of the Other requires a searching self-critique.

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The twenty stories collected in *Her Mother's Ashes and Other Stories* are a significant contribution to the corpus of writing by women. The anthology confronts the western feminist theory and its almost canonized pronouncements with a diversity and complexity which defy any reductive homogenizing of women's writing. It problematizes various assumptions about women's writing: does all writing by women have to have a political feminist agenda? Does it confine itself to only women's personal, private or body experiences? Is it stylistically different from men's writing? Is it to be studied merely in the restrictive category of women's writing? The anthology refuses to be contained in any such

## Memory, History and Articulation

Pankaj K. Singh\*

*Her Mother's Ashes and Other Stories*

by South Asian Women in Canada and the United States

Edited by Nurjehan Aziz

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restrictive categories as it also challenges certain other assumptions about ethnicity, assimilation, culture, nation etc.

One finds a certain 'commonality' or affiliation of voice in the stories: these are stories by South Asian women who are 'first generation North American, arriving there from

the countries of South Asia, Africa and the Caribbean' as the editor informs in the Preface. However, as Arun Prabha Mukherjee in her characteristically pointed and emphatic Introduction cautions us, the stories require a sensitive and careful reading of the connotations, springing from 'the ethnic, religious, linguistic and

caste identities of the authors' (Xi), which may require some effort, particularly in view of the diversity of cultures and identities clubbed under the label 'South Asian'.

Gender figures as one of the many factors confronting and conditioning the lives of women. It intersects with issues related to racism, culture, memory, history and the multiple identities, fixed but also evolving. Quite a few stories centre around the experience of women in marriage, trapped as they are in the uneven power structure of patriarchy. Lakshmi Gill's 'Altered Dreams', Surjeet Kalsey's 'Crossing the Threshold' and Vidyut Aklujkar's

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of cognitive enterprise, each having its own set of *a priori* principles and conceptual frames. In this, his position is very similar to that of Ernest Cassirer in his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. It is in this form as a crisis within transcendental philosophy that Devaraja moves into the debate over relativism and alternative rationalities (chapter 1).

Second, he seeks to ground the Kantian categories themselves in a more ultimate level which he calls 'pre-theoretic consciousness' (p. 170). This idea obviously has a measure of similarity with Husserl's ideas of 'the life world', but unfortunately Devaraja leaves this idea of a pre-theoretic consciousness in teasing ambiguity. In particular, one would have liked him to clarify the following:

1. If the pre-theoretic consciousness is not pre-linguistic, one would like to be shown the relation between language and consciousness at this level and how it differs from the relation between language and consciousness at higher levels.

2. Devaraja specifically argues that the pre-theoretic consciousness has its own set of categories (pp. 206-07). If so, how are these categories of the life-world related to the categories of theoretical consciousness? And what are the 'interests' which now ground these categories of pre-theoretic consciousness?

3. But perhaps the question of access to the pre-theoretic consciousness, the issue of the recovery of the original sense of life, is the most awesome of the problems which arise for any philosophy of humanism of the type of Devaraja's Creative Huma-

nism. This is the crux of the crisis of the human sciences — the loss of the life-world and its recovery. Devaraja seems to be suggesting that a burst of imagi-nation would suffice to see us through these problems. In that sense, there is a breathtaking naivete about him which is so refreshing when compared with the agonizing efforts of Edmund Husserl in *Experience and Judgement*.

The third departure from Kant comes about in his linking the categories with human interests.

Important as this idea surely is, yet if a few preliminary precautions are not taken, such as a careful distinction from pragmatism and psychologism, the idea of the interest boundedness of human knowledge may lapse into a kind of 'sociology of knowledge' approach which is precisely the problem he is proposing to solve. Because of a certain impatience with the philosophical demands of what I have called the humanization of transcendental philosophy, Devaraja does not really deliver us from the crisis he is talking about; on the contrary, his book plunges us deeper into it.

The second principle of his analysis is the idea of creative re-ordering of experiences by way of preferences. This basic anthropology of innovation is the strength of the book. It is this thesis of human creativity that gives to the book a dimension of depth and tolerance; in this lie the unique gifts of the text — its range of participatory empathy balanced by a

peculiar inner spirit of detachment (pp.210-13). When the chips are down and all the argumentation has ceased, we are left with the serenity of this detachment, a kind of hermeneutic tolerance. What is unique and important about Devaraja's book is that it should uphold the virtue of a spiritual quest, i.e. the sense of detachment, in the interests of humanism. It is also this connection which makes his humanistic philosophy peculiarly 'Indian'. And finally, one must also record the

**The book is also engaged, not merely as a spectator but as a participant, in some of the great debates which characterize the present situation in philosophy as one of contestation and dispute.**

delicate and interior dialectic between interests and detachment. It is perhaps in this dialectic tension that one should really look for the limits of disagreement. The withdrawal, the detachment, which Devaraja is pleading for, is not a flight away from life but a disciplinary preparation for understanding it; it is a moral preparation for a hermeneutic task.

But beyond the strictly philosophical concerns of objectivism and subjectivism in epistemology and of the possibility and prospects of metaphysics in a post-Cartesian and post-Heideggerian age, the book is also engaged, not merely as a spectator but as a participant, in some of the great debates which characterize the present situation in philosophy as one of contestation and dispute. Some of these fires have died long ago in Europe but still seem to burn in the memory of scholars like Devaraja. For example, the controversies over the verification principle and the sense datum theory,

and the elimination of metaphysics, seem like relics from a much brasher and doctrinaire age. But other debates are still with us, such as the great questions about the growth of knowledge, of the interpretative nature of human sciences and of the significance of language for the human sciences. It is indeed a sign of vigour that the book confronts these issues in a determined and explicit manner, but it is something of a pity that Devaraja should see some of these trends in an alarmed manner, as signs of scepticism and irrationalistic relativism, for example the hermeneutical position itself.

Understood in its depth, the hermeneutical programme, as in Ricoeur, for example, is a way of overcoming the relativism and dichotomies of the Cartesian tradition. It could also, by way of a philosophy of language, go a long way towards healing some of the epistemological wounds inflicted upon the human sciences by the critical theory of knowledge. It is both saddening and somewhat amusing to see possible allies taken as threats — surely this too is a question of interpretation at higher levels.

Finally, a very attractive and laudable feature of the work which the present reviewer would like to commend specifically, is the natural manner in which Devaraja involves classical Indian philosophy in the controversies and disputations of the present, thereby showing the great power of ideas which come from a very different philosophical landscape.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

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'Behind the Headlines' focus on the loneliness, emptiness and self-negation experienced by women in the long years of married life.

Loneliness, oppression and a void are also felt by the single immigrant women in the racist society of their present 'home'. Lally, the protagonist of Geeta Kothari's 'Her Mother's Ashes,' although she is born and brought up in America, feels lonely and lost as she returns to America after immersing her mother's ashes in the Ganges. Equally forlorn and empty inside feel the women in Hema Nair's 'Why Am I Doing This?' and Himani Banerji's 'On a Cold Day'. Home for these women is not a place of security and love. It is more like a trap they want to escape. Asima ('On a Cold Day') jumps down to death from her seventh-storey balcony. In Asima's physical death Devika Bardhan, who has changed her name to Debbie Barton to find a job, sees manifested her own cultural and spiritual death. Vijaya gets into the habit of stealing useless items from shops just to break the monotony of her 'suffocating' apartment ('Why Am I Doing This?'). Ironically, back home for parents, every child in America is a 'success' story whereas for most women it is a journey from one oppressive culture to another, though in different ways.

Articulate as some of these stories are about women's anguish they do not posit any female aesthetics of suffering and victimisation. Despite long years of silent suffering Chetna ('Crossing the Threshold') and Lakshmi ('Behind the Headlines') have the capacity to step out of marriage on an impulse, in spite of an unchartered future, once they become conscious of their own worth and significance.

The narrators of Arun Prabha Mukherjee's 'A New Reading of "Wasteland"' and Nazneen Sheikh's 'American Date' have the capacity to turn the fact of being used and cheated, though in widely different ways, into almost a joke directed at their own selves. The stories articulate both the resentment and complicity of the protagonists in most unsentimental terms. Scarred by her Professor's hypocrisy and the fact of her being fooled every time the narrator teaches 'Wasteland' she is reminded of the Professor 'in his foreign-retained glory and his flabby

arm invading my body' (p. 62), in a small town in India where she went to college. Even more candid is the seventeen year old Pakistani girl in 'American Date' in expressing her sexual craving for and frustration by her American date Burt who takes her for a date 'just to look good' while in fact he 'really like[s] boys' (p. 66).

Only a few stories adopt the language of 'rebellion' or the bold irreverent tone of protest that Yasmin Ladha's narrator adopts in 'Circum the Gesture' in lashing out at men and the 'mullah-jati' (p. 159). Yet under an artistically smooth, calm and a light-hearted narrative the lurking note of subversive anger is not hard to miss.

Among the numerous stories in a lighter vein is 'Love in an Election Year' by Tahira Naqvi. Set in Pakistan at the time of Presidential elections in 1964 it is about the love affair of young Baji Sughra with cousin Javed. Interestingly the agonies and ecstasies of love are all expressed in the melodies of Lata, Mukesh or Talat, and the pair reminds the teenager-narrator of Nargis and Raj Kapoor or Madhubala and Dilip Kumar — so much for the boundaries marking nations. Bapsi Sidhwa's 'The Spouse and The Preacher', with its tongue in cheek humour is an account of a newly married Parsi girl's conscious adjustment to her self-righteous Americanised husband, as she bolsters up his ego for the 'moment of bliss' in their married life (p. 25).

Some poignant stories build around more culture-specific issues. Perviz Walji's 'A Child Departs' recounts, through a child narrator, her widowed Aunt Fatma's separation from her child. She is forced to remarry and the child is handed over mechanically to a paternal aunt, following the Muslim practice. Chitra Divakaruni's 'Bad Luck Woman' is a touching account of Mrs. Ghosh called 'Alakshmi', an inauspicious

woman, due to the trail of misfortunes in her life. The narrator describes how by succumbing for a moment to a superstition, she shattered Mrs. Ghosh beyond retrieval.

Even as they struggle to find their footing in an alien culture the immigrant women yet cling to their cultural memory that sustains them here. The stories provide ample evidence of the fact that, as Arun Prabha Mukherjee observes, 'Ethnicity is a tenacious things,' (xiv)

**The anthology opens up windows on the subcultures for South Asian Women to know and understand each other better across the continents. At the same time, in articulating their 'stories' in print it records the history, both past and present, of South Asian immigrant women who remain marginalized along with their respective communities in the racist mainstream white North American society they live in now.**

and that 'people do not leave their histories and cultures behind when they migrate' (xiii). The narrator of M e e n a Alexander's story feels herself to be a 'No Nation Woman' because of her constant travelling away from home. Splitting the self into 'I' and 'She', she reminisces about the endless travels, in a rather tedious narrative replete

with decadent imagery (with repeated echoes of Eliot's 'The Waste Land'). Significantly the images that 'calm' her troubled and 'vacant' mind are those of her childhood in her ancestral home in Kerala.

Mothers play an important role in linking the immigrant protagonists to their cultural roots and history. For Lally her mother and her 'stories', which unfortunately never had a happy ending — about Partition and about her being 'a first-born girl child' (p.182) as these were — are her connection with her native past and culture which she only half likes. No wonder Katy Cooper, the protagonist of 'A Memory of Names' by Roshni Rustomji-Kerns, fails to connect with her Parsi culture since she has 'no memories of her mother' (p. 188). Even though she comes to India, to Devinagar, 'to begin her long-deferred search for her mother', and she is supplied with a whole lot of intriguing family history complete with names, by her aunt, in Katy's mind they figure no more than 'names'.

Mothers, however, are not always

so unproblematic. Farida Karodia's delightfully told story 'Crossmatch' depicts the dilemma of the youngsters who almost feel choked in the presence of their mothers. The latter see marriage as the ultimate universal destiny and undoubtedly a happy one, and refuse to treat their grown up children as adults. The twenty-eight-year-old Sushi, a successful actress in London, has problem in convincing her mother in Lenasia, near Johannesburg, that she doesn't want to marry. The same problem is faced by the thirty-year-old Dilip who teaches in U.S.A., and is seen as a prospective match for Sushi. Each visit 'home' in fact distances them from their parents yet they don't have the courage to tell them the truth about themselves. Sushi is living with a white man and Dilip is a homosexual. Their problematic relationship with their respective mothers also signifies their predicament, caught as they are between two cultures.

Another sensitively told story is Feroza Jussawalla's 'AIDSwallah'. While recording the tragedy of an AIDS victim it also includes glimpses into Parsi culture, problems of acceptance in one's native culture after marrying a non-Parsi, the innocence and dedication of the expectant sixteen-year-old-bride-to-be and the insensitivity of society to an AIDS victim.

Seldom self-consciously stylistic these stories aim at a directness of communication or 'telling'. Wit, humour and an unsentimental irony impart an exuberance to the narratives which are usually very brief and intense. Impressive in their range of subjects and felicity of style the stories, at least half of them, need to be read over and over again to obtain the full import of their densely textured narratives. The anthology opens up windows on the subcultures for South Asian Women to know and understand each other better across the continents. At the same time, in articulating their 'stories' in print it records the history, both past and present, of South Asian immigrant women who remain marginalized along with their respective communities in the racist mainstream white North American society they live in now — a task being carried out, and creditably, by the TSAR publications since its inception a decade ago.

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The philosophy of science has become, over the past few decades, a subject of intense discussion as a result of changes in our basic concepts brought about by the developments in science during this century. For instance, the special theory of relativity has led to changes in our conceptions of space and time; quantum mechanics has led to the abandoning of strict determinism; and developments in statistical analysis have left the concept of probability undefined. Though these developments belong essentially to the physical sciences, they have brought changes in all branches of human knowledge. Annual conferences were organized by the Departments of Philosophy of the Delaware and Minnesota Universities to discuss these philosophical aspects of modern science. It is gratifying to note that Indian scientists belonging to the physical, natural and social sciences came together, probably for the first time in India, to discuss the philosophy of science, adding to the discussion the elements of Indian non-theistic philosophy. The book under review comprises papers presented at a seminar held at the University of Cochin in 1990 in collaboration with the Indian Science Congress.

There are in all 27 papers presented by different authors. Some of the authors are senior scientists, philosophers and social scientists of international reputation, and others are young and not-so-young scholars of some distinction. All but one are Indians. The papers are grouped into three parts. Part I consists of 6 papers

It was very thoughtful of you to send me a copy of your book *Making Sense of the First Quartos*. I've read it with pleasure, the kind of pleasure that comes from seeing common sense and logic at work in a field where it is usually absent. Jenkins is an example, all too frequently encountered in the groves of academe, of a person who puts himself in possession of all the facts and then gets himself so snarled up in them he looks ridiculous. Your book lays out everything very clearly and gets rid of all those stupid actors who can't remember lines and who can't understand the play they are in.

I particularly liked what you had to say about 'To be' in *Hamlet*. The speech is of course central to the meaning of the play – for once something that everyone, except a few actors, agree on. But I've long thought that the Q2 version of it is not fully understood. For one thing, it is not

## PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

N. Umakantha\*

### PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE: PERSPECTIVES FROM NATURAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Edited by Jayant V. Narlikar, Indu Banga and Chhanda Gupta  
Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, and  
Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 1992  
pp.vii + 265, Rs.300

on science and philosophy 'with particular reference to symmetry and spirituality, method and values, and culture and language'. Part II consists of 15 papers which 'discuss causation from the perspective[s] of physics, philosophy, social sciences and history', and the main thrust here is 'on the concept[s] of chance and determinism'. Part III consists of 6 papers on science in society, rather than on the more popular subject of science and society, the main focus being on 'problems of scientific and technological development, science education and research, traditional health care systems, and the constraints of the politics of science on the orientation of science to societal needs, traditions and goals'.

The papers cover the philosophy of all branches of science except psychology and economics. Some of the papers are review articles expounding the present status of the subject and some are the views of the individual authors presenting their subjects in a broad perspective, with the result that while some abound in references others are totally devoid of

them. Except for a few, most articles can be followed by experts in other fields and even by educated laymen. Thus this book can be useful for all educated persons irrespective of their specialization. Just as the standing of the authors in their own fields of specialization varies over a wide range, the quality of the papers varies from excellence to mere collections of disjointed ideas and quotations. Evidently the articles have not been through the usual process of peer reviewing.

Two articles in particular are excellent and deserve to be read by all educated men and women, specially by students who are in their formative period so that they come to understand the spirit of science. These are P.M. Bhargava's 'The Method of Science and Its Value System' and R. Singh's 'Mechanistic to Holistic Concept of Reality: A Paradigm Shift in Life Sciences'. However, in the first article the question of how the scientific community deals with misconduct in science should have been discussed.

Though the bulk of the book deals

with the framework of cause and effect, that there is an alternative approach which does not deal with cause and effect at all is not mentioned by any author. For instance, the geometrical properties of a triangle, that the sum of two sides is greater than the third, the sum of the angles is 180°, etc., are not understood in terms of cause and effect but are recognized as interrelations. This geometrical approach, pursued by Einstein in his general theory of relativity, may be more meaningful in social sciences and psychology.

The volume is said to be edited but very little editorial prerogative seems to have been exercised. The references are not given in a uniform format in all the papers. Some authors have reproduced data and even diagrams without mentioning the original sources. They neither explicitly claim to be the original authors of the ideas nor explicitly state that they are reproducing data from open literature. This tendency should have been checked by the editors. In many running lines words have been split and joined by a hyphen, e.g. cosmo-logical (p. 7), com-mensurate (p. 11), astro-nomy (p. 28), myste-rious (p. 71), etc. In the list of contributors Dietric Wahl appears twice on the same page.

In conclusion it may be stated that this is a welcome addition to the scarce Indian literature on the philosophy of science.

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## Reconstructing Shakesperian Texts

Evert Sprinchorn, Vassar College, New York.

(A Letter of Appreciation of Y.S. Bain's *Making Sense of the First Quartos of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, Henry V, The Merry Wives of Windsor, and Hamlet* Published by Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, 1995 pp.ix+138, Rs.150/-)

fundamentally a speech about suicide, which was the subject of Hamlet's first soliloquy. Now his mind is moving beyond that. By Act III his thoughts are broader and deeper. My hunch is that when Shakespeare re-read the speech in its first version, he realized that here was material for a much richer play, and he set out to rewrite it, bringing to it the insights of an older and wiser man. (Did reading Montaigne make the difference?) For once he put theatrical considerations behind him, and like Shaw when he wrote *Man and Superman*, wrote a drama that would satisfy himself, even if it would overwhelm actors and bore audiences. In

its full-length version it would probably have been unplayable before unruly groundlings. I think it significant that the title page of Q2 says nothing about its being performed, whereas the publisher of Q1 wants it known that that is the play as it was acted. If it was performed – after it appeared in print – it was probably cut, witness the excision of the Act IV soliloquy in the Folio version.

I haven't studied *Henry V* at all intensely, so I may be saying something terribly obvious in observing that the archbishop's speech on the Salic law and the succession to the French throne is meant to be rather

funny and must come across to the audience as pedantic rigmarole. The speech has dramatic point; it's essential to the exposition; and the playwright's problem is to involve the audience in the complications without losing their interest. The actor's clue is the archbishop's line: all is 'as clear as is the summer's sun,' which must have made Shakespeare guffaw when he read it in *Holinshed*. In his first try at the speech Shakespeare made it too short; it didn't build as hilarious confusion. So he went back to *Holinshed*, lifted large sections from there, to make the speech have the same effect on audiences as it had on him when he first encountered. I shouldn't be surprised if the actor who played Corambis also played the archbishop.

Thanks again for a sane and sensible book about a hardworking and practical playwright.

Ainslee Embree's association with India dates back to 1948, when he taught history at a college in Indore. He was at Columbia University for years, where he is now helping to raise \$2.5 million for a chair in Indian studies. His latest assignment is to raise an 'independent voice' as adviser emeritus to the U.S. ambassador to India.

In a recent interview (*Times of India*, 7 August 1994) Ainslee Embree described this book as most closely reflecting his thinking on India. He went on to say that nationalism was being defined in religious terms the world over, but this was a greater challenge in India where the process was divisive.

The book under review is a collection of articles, versions of which were published over the last two decades. The focus is on the re-emergence of religion in national and international affairs in the 20th century, a subject discussed more provocatively by J. Sacks, head of Anglo-Jewry, in *The Persistence of Faith* in the context of the abiding interest in Judaism despite secularization of society.

One reason offered by Embree for the resurgence of religion is that religion can act as an ideology of transition, as it brings about change without too much of a break. The advocates of tradition, then, are as modern as the votaries of modernity. They too have their vision of the future. Embree calls them the radical right. They are part of the waves of the future as much as the spokesmen for modernity are, and not the debris of a retreating sea of faith. This is an important departure both from the conventional tradition-modernity duality and the fashionable idealisation of religion as pre-modern innocence.

The author's central proposition is that as every group asserts its vision of the good society, tensions are generated. This is particularly so in India where two great religions, Hinduism and Islam, existed. Hinduism was more individualistic, while in Islam individuals often defined themselves as part of a religious community. When identification with this community took precedence over the nation, further problems were created. For Hindus the community and the nation were generally not in conflict, making the process of identity formation easier.

Embree's thesis of 'utopias in conflict' infuses pessimism as it implies that the resolution of the

## THE FORWARD MARCH OF RELIGION?

Sucheta Mahajan\*

### Utopias in Conflict: Religion and Nationalism in Modern India

Ainslee T. Embree

Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1992, pp.144, Rs.175

conflict is impossible. Past can perhaps be cleansed through catharsis and presents shaped jointly, but what does one do if futures and ultimate visions are in conflict? The general thesis of communalism is that the histories of the two communities are characterized by conflict. As Jinnah said at Lahore in 1940, their villains are our heroes, their defeats our victories, there is nothing in common about our past, hence we are two nations. But even Jinnah did not speak of visions of society being incompatible.

Embree is sceptical about Hindu tolerance and about synthesis between Hinduism and other religions. He coins a term, 'encapsulation', to describe the Hindu response to other cultures. He would rather see Sufism as a part of Islam than as a synthesis between Hinduism and Islam. He believes that there was no lasting movement from one culture to the other. This is debatable.

The author's thesis on the linkages between religion and politics, and more specifically religion and nationalism, is not only questionable in general; it is based on formulations regarding Indian nationalism and Gandhi's understanding of religion and politics which are ungrounded, to say the least. For one, while religion is often the vocabulary of nationalism, as Embree points out, one cannot assume, as he does, that religious allegiances are fundamental to nationalist ideologies. This is generally true of Indian nationalism before 1947. The Hindus may have been predominant in the Congress in numbers but the Congress did not espouse Hindu nationalism. On the other hand, Muslim League did use religion to validate the two-nation theory.

Gandhi has been quoted to the effect that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics know nothing about either. However, to our mind, Gandhi's conception of the link

between religion and politics was not an Embrean one. For him, religion was morality, it was Religion, which transcends specific religions. Gandhi even said that 'for me politics bereft of religion are absolute dirt, ever to be shunned', but he defined politics as concern for the welfare of nations. Thus leading a religious life made it

incumbent on one to take part in politics as that meant identifying with the whole of mankind. Religion provided a moral basis to all activities, including politics; in fact, Gandhi confessed that 'politics and all other activities of mine are derived from my religion'.

These are very different conceptions of religion and politics from the conventional usage. Interestingly, Gandhi's notion of religion and politics being indivisible goes hand in hand with a belief in a secular state, though the two conceptions are generally opposed. Gandhi said, 'if I were a dictator, religion and state would be separate. I swear by my religion. I will die for it. But it is my personal affair. The State has nothing to do with it'. This statement, if read with the one that religion has everything to do with politics, makes it clear that Gandhi was not taking the anti-secularism line currently fashionable among sections of both the left and the right.

The chapter on secularism and the Indian state is a useful contribution to ongoing debates on the subject. Embree's analysis of the Shah Bano case brings out the predicament of the secular state in a multi-religious society. The basis of Indian secularism, in any case, is not the usual denial of the claims of religions but the belief that religious neutrality on the part of the state can solve religious differences. This is because there is no ultimate conflict between religions, as all have a common core of truth. In the Shah Bano case the state extended the scope of secularism even further than its usual ensuring of freedom for

all religions. The state became the upholder of minority religious customs or traditions, in this instance the shariat law. The ruling party reversed its earlier liberal stand on the issue, betraying liberal Muslims, secularists and the minister, Arif Khan, who challenged the traditionalist perspective. The message was that the state would bend backwards to prove its secularism, hence minorities could get away with more than their 'legitimate' rights by creating enough trouble. The Hindu communalists cried appeasement once again.

Embree's analytical categories are often problematical. Religion and communalism are sometimes used somewhat imprecisely, the distinction between the two getting blurred. Then the use of the term 'Muslim rule' — the medieval Indian historians' efforts to show how religion was not the defining characteristic of Mughal rule or the Sultanate obviously haven't converted Embree. Then the use of the term 'the Sikh historian' to refer to J.S. Grewal. One cannot but wonder if Embree would wish himself to be described as the Christian historian?

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### OBITUARY

Professor Adapa Ramakrishna Rao who died on 15 March 1995, spent two years at the Institute as a Fellow. He was working on a project entitled "The Impact of Vaishnavism and Savism on Telugu Literature" for the Institute.

Professor Rao taught English at Osmania University and Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning in Prasanthimilayam in Andhra Pradesh. A bilingual writer with several books and research papers in English and Telugu, he translated extensively creative writing from English into Telugu and vice versa. His small monograph on Annama-charya published by Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, is popular among both scholars and laymen.

His death is deeply mourned by the Fellows and employees of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study.

The Indian political scenario underwent a significant structural transformation both in the pre- and post-Independence periods. The patterns that were sought to be knitted with the needles of 'political arithmetic' during the British period took their real form and colour either in the late 1940s or in the period beginning with the early 1970s. Minority politics and the 'politics of backwardness', accompanied by vote-bank-centred political one-upmanship, populism and demagoguery, not only gave a new orientation to the 'politics of numbers' but also completely changed their tone and tenor. The 'politics of nostalgia' and 'nostalgia for tradition' too contributed in their own ways to the perverse understanding of social issues, making the task of fashioning a just social order still more difficult. In such a muddy and marshy political landscape, the dalits — once an apolitical, ostracized and indigent mass — have become a crucial factor in the political power structure. Yet for ushering in a true egalitarian order, they have to vigilantly and unitedly watch every measure of reform and every act of legislative making, as also to extricate themselves time and again from the mire in which the 'politics of backwardness' itself is sinking. Not only this, the elites amongst the dalits have also a responsibility to ascertain that in the process of levelling they do not forget their own 'lowest of the low', the real 'baggage' of the dalit movement.

In this emerging socio-political reality, *The Flaming Feet: A Study of the Dalit Movement* by D.R. Nagaraj is a distinct and welcome addition to the steadily growing volume of literature on the dalits. The book is a very perceptive, engaging and down-to-earth analysis of the dalit movement by a leading Kannada writer and critic who is in a sense part of the movement and in certain respects also above it. His approach is allegorical: so much so that the title of the book itself has a metaphorical connotation. It is based on the medieval Kannada folk epic 'Maheshwara of the Hills', an episode of which is entitled 'The Flaming Feet'.

Nagaraj studies the dalit movement and its varied manifestations, situating them in the context of other forms of protest, both spiritual and secular. In particular, he analyses the movement alongside the Gandhian model of tackling the Harijan question. No doubt the genesis of the dalit movement could in several ways

be attributed to Ambedkar, or even prior to him to Jotiba Phule, but Nagaraj stresses that the dalit movement in its proper connotation, obviously the Ambedkarite or militant brand, was the product of a mental state that believed in the firm rejection of the Gandhian model. This fact is accepted and emphasized to a great extent by other scholars as well. While comparing and contrasting Ambedkar's and Gandhi's perceptions of the varied issues associated with the untouchables, the present reviewer, in his book *The Scheduled Castes in Modern Indian Politics: Their Emergence As a Political Power* (1985), pointed out that the Gandhian model of tackling the problem of untouchables primarily hinged on (i) his unflinching faith and life-long commitment to non-violence and the prevention of social discord and (ii) his larger national responsibilities. The differences between Gandhi and Ambedkar did not primarily pertain to the broad objectives to be achieved. Rather, they centred around the question of pace and progress as also on methods and means. Whereas Ambedkar had one and only one objective — of seeing his community rise rapidly in the political, economic and social scale — Mahatma Gandhi and other Hindu leaders were concerned not only with the removal of untouchability but also with issues and problems of greater political and economic significance. Such objectives not only necessitated the forging of unity and cohesion and the conciliation of the estranged sections of society but even imposed limitations and demanded greater compromises, especially in matters of detail.

Some of the leaders of the depressed classes, including Ambedkar, could not share this dilemma. This, however, does not mean that

Ambedkar did not have his own predicaments well entrenched in the socio-religious fabric of Indian society and the typical psyche of the orthodox Hindus. Ambedkar's charge that the caste Hindus did not fulfil all the obligations of the Poona Pact, especially the hopes generated by the intense feelings of goodwill created during the days of Mahatma Gandhi's fast, is irrefutable. No doubt, while the leaders were busy bringing about a settlement at Poona, a whirlwind campaign was being conducted in many large centres throughout the country for the removal of the disabilities attaching to the depressed classes: temples, wells, etc., were being thrown open to them; untouchability was generally being exorcised; schools, night schools, hostels and free kitchens were being established for the untouchables; and a spate of legislative measures was being envisaged for the welfare of the depressed classes. But much of this enthusiasm was the outcome of emotionalism. No sooner did it begin to subside than the signs of reaction became apparent. Many orthodox caste Hindus even began to reverse the clock in certain parts of the country. In a nutshell, the veracity of the dictum that customs and tradition die hard was vindicated. That the system so deeply embedded in the history and tradition of the people would succumb neither to a sudden onslaught of emotion nor to the jolts and kicks of militant action had become sufficiently clear both to Ambedkar and Gandhi.

It is in this context that the present work provides a fresh analysis. Nagaraj says that both 'Babasaheb and Bapuji plunged into history with such creative impatience and clashed...[that] they emerged as transformed persons at the end of a very intense encounter...of the

nineteen thirties'. By about 1935 'they had internalized each other and had cured each other's excesses. Gandhiji had seen the movement to eradicate untouchability as a sacred ritual of self-purification. To Ambedkar such an approach had serious constraints'. Ambedkar emphasized the self-respect, the militant or the Mahad model and the constitutionalist-materialist approach. However, Nagaraj maintains that as a result of the confrontation both of them had changed their emphasis: to put it crudely, 'Gandhiji had taken over economics from Babasaheb. Ambedkar internalized the importance of religion'.

Despite this transformation, the differences between Ambedkar and Gandhi persisted. Ambedkar remained critical not only of the Gandhian ideology and cultural politics but also of the Congress Harijan leadership created by Gandhi. The author emphasizes that Babu Jagjivan Ram and Ambedkar represent two entirely different sensibilities. Following the militant Ambedkarite model, the new dalit movement does not regard Congress-Harijan leadership as one amongst them but dub them as symbolizing the 'cowardice and domestication' of dalits.

Ambedkar was equally critical of the Non-Brahman Movement. He regarded it as opportunistic and described it as 'a rat race to join the ranks of government clericaldom'. Non-Brahmans were keen to enlist the support of the dalits when it was a question of fighting the hegemony of other powerful social groups. But having internalized the Brahmanical value system, they shied away on fundamental, social and cultural issues. Nagaraj says that this is one of the major problems faced by the dalit movement today. Another problem is the attitude of wilful amnesia adopted by both the dalits and the backwards towards their past. The dalit movement is also distinct from the Marxist-Leninist inspired struggles of the landless prevalent in rural India. Nagaraj contends that the old village where there once existed the cordial bond 'between the upper and lower castes, though within the framework of strict hierarchy, is fast disappearing'. Violence against the dalits is on the increase. In this regard, two patterns are discernible: one is linked with the notion and practices of justice as outlined in the ethos of the caste system; and the second form of

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## Ambedkar, Gandhi and the Dalits

S.K. Gupta\*

### THE FLAMING FEET: A STUDY OF THE DALIT MOVEMENT

D.R. Nagaraj

South Forum Press in association with the Institute for Cultural Research and Action, Bangalore, 1993, pp.x + 79, Rs.80

**The book is a very perceptive, engaging and down-to-earth analysis of the dalit movement by a leading Kannada writer and critic who is in a sense part of the movement and in certain respects also above it.**



Suresh Sharma's book on 'Tribal Identity' is an important contribution to the ongoing debate about the encounter of various pre-modern cultures and modernity, and it is so with a difference. It is important because it opens up issues for discussion in ways which go beyond the established frameworks. We have often talked on these issues either in the context of modern vs. traditional or, more recently, modern vs. post-modern. While deeply sceptical and extremely critical of many aspects of modernity, Sharma is not anti-modernist in the currently fashionable sense. He says, 'Rejection of the "modern universa"' as the definitive referent does not mean that modern reality is to be negated in its entirety. It also does not mean that some kind of the pre-modern restoration is possible or desirable' (p. 58). In the course of doing his critique of modernity he brings to fore the pre-suppositions underlying articulated propositions of modernity, some of which are very persuasive and, perhaps valuable too. Through this, what he tries to establish is the inability of modernity to enter into a dialogue of equals with other values and ways of living embedded in other cultures. The implicit hope is that only through such a dialogue we may be able to learn all that is valuable in the journeys that we as human beings have made in the course of our history.

What can such a dialogue of equals be able to achieve? Suresh Sharma's

## Anthropology as Philosophy

Javeed Alam\*

### TRIBAL IDENTITY AND THE MODERN WORLD

by Suresh Sharma

Sage, New Delhi, 1994, pp. 215, Rs. 225/-

argument endeavours to recover the possibility of legitimacy for alternative universals which can inhere in 'pre-modern facts' (p.12). But there is more than that in this book. He is making a bold claim in asking that a particularity be recognised as valid 'beyond the ambit of modern validation', (p.22) unlike what we now do to treat it as an archaic survival. In the latter parts of the book (Ch.4) e.g. the epistemic conception of limits or (Ch.5) e.g. the social and political implications of 'Shifting Cultivation' or *penda* as a local tradition he demonstrates what he has earlier severely reprimanded as the tendency on our part to subject the particular to the strain of 'constant compulsion to either posit another universal or yield to be moulded by the universal already posited' (p.22).

**It is important because it opens up issues for discussion in ways which go beyond the established frameworks. . . . While deeply sceptical and extremely critical of many aspects of modernity, Sharma is not anti-modernist in the currently fashionable sense.**

Particularity as such ought to be recognised because what it contains as valuable for a happy human existence may not be capable of giving rise to any kind of universal at all; this

inability by itself cannot be a basis of its rejection. Let us look at this a little closely by looking at the two issues hinted at above.

To the tribal sensibility and its social cohesion, among Agaria, recognition of limits is a 'precondition for order and human sanity.' Limit has to be seen in terms of human situation within cosmic placement. In the course of a long conversation with the author, a tribal Gunia talks of limits as follows: 'In the entire cosmos, there is not a thing that does not have a place, all its own. And if each and everything has its own place, then there are also limits. To transgress

limits is to shake everything from its place. The balance is disturbed. That means everything ought to be in between. And that means to be in mandras'. This means: 'each thing being in its place' (p.130), which means that 'there are no things absolutely apart' (p.131). This contrasts sharply with the world-view entrenched in modernity. Limits here are always contingent and ever to be surpassed. With the Agaria tribals they are 'final' (p.132). The author seems to be in deep sympathy with the conception of limits entailed in the Agaria World-view.

Now a question of intrinsic significance has to be gone into. If we are to argue that an ontology of limitlessness (in our dealings with the world) is something that makes man's existence precarious by its disastrous implications for nature, environment and ecology, we are still left with the need to answer whether any conception of immutable limits, unreflexively coded in a culture, can be tenably defended. The author leaves us with an inscrutable silence. All that his persuasively powerful critique of modernity gives us is a counter-positing of two alternative world views. There is also a difficulty in this counter position; conceding that modernity is culpable of such an ontology, we are faced with too incommensurable space-time scales of human existence. While the local and confined may illuminate for us

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Ambedkar, Gandhi and the Dalits  
contd. from page 12

violence is a sharp reaction to the birth of new awareness and the consequent beginning of a new form of social presence of the dalits. There is a structural crisis as caste-structured rights and duties would no longer be valid. The Gandhian notion of the village or gram panchayat and consensus approach has no relevance for dalits; for they have internalized the Ambedkarite fear of village society. They are also getting disillusioned with the development regime.

The last three chapters, though small, provide us with the feel of dalit sensibility and dalit writings in Kannada. The earlier dalit literature has very little in common with the dalit writings of the period beginning with the mid-1970s. The first category of writings are 'emotionalistic since simple emotions like pity and anger

dominated the form' and 'dalits were the objects of aesthetic pleasure'. This assertion of the author may not go unchallenged. Yet it is true that there is a world of difference between a tale told by one who has actually experienced it and one told by someone who has simply observed it. Nagaraj is quite right in his assertion that when the subject himself speaks, the ethos, the sensibilities or the structure of emotions is altered in a radical way. Using the Zen metaphor, he says, 'the distant hills are recreated in the eyes of the bird'. If the 'subject' is an angry young man, it makes all the difference.

Nevertheless, the dalit literary movement in Kannada is not monolithic: it contains different categories of writings, having at times conflicting ideologies. Even the problem of social change has been tackled in Kannada fiction in different ways by different authors. Broadly, the modes of dalit writing could be grouped

under two schools, namely Social Rage and Spiritual Quest. The former is more in line with the temperament of Ambedkar and believes in the total rejection of the traditional cultural self of the dalits, whereas the latter freely interacts and borrows from the traditional cultural forms. These schools have their own problems, and the 'modern individual is yet to emerge in this literature' but Nagaraj emphasizes that 'realism' can never fully comprehend the dalit sensibility and 'provide full justice to the collective psyche and world-view of the lower castes'.

To sum up, Nagaraj has analysed the nature and character of the dalit movement with the ingenuity and skill of a litterateur and as an adept subject expert. What makes him rise above the dalit movement, despite being a 'fellow-traveller', is that he highlights the contradictions within the dalit movement while he sees the relevance of Gandhi. While concluding

the first chapter, which also happens to be the most notable one, he says that 'both Gandhiji and Ambedkar can and should be made complementary to each other. Surely such efforts will be met with stiff opposition from hardened ideologues and researchers, and they are bound to unearth fresh evidence to fuel the fire between the two. One way of fighting such tendencies, apart from pointing out the political necessity of such hermeneutic (sic.) exercise, is to file a philosophical caveat highlighting the notion of ontological difference to distinguish between contingent details of historical fact and the truth of a deeper historical concern. At the level of deeper historical truth the conflicting fact disappears to reveal underlying unity'.

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the signification of limits, can it in anyway be utilised in working out viable notions of limits in civilizations which are self-consciously transformative?

The difficulty in defending this view can be explicated by looking at an issue central to the author's critique of modernity. Crudely put: modern man is involved in an unending quest to bring nature under greater and greater control, to dominate the physical world, deplete its bounties through a predatory kind of possessiveness. His words finely capture this mood, 'Modern technological mediation in its capacity for limitless self-generation is seen to represent a new terrain of infinite promise for human beings' (p.26). The author correctly infers that this attitude of conquest towards nature has become an attribute of our freedom and possession of things the measure of man. Nobody would quarrel with the view that such has been the story of modern civilization since 18th-19th centuries and this story is also the history of capitalist world.

There is no space here to work out the details but it can be argued that the form of modernity that became dominant and entrenched since 19th century is only one of the many intellectually available trajectories that came to be known as modernity. It can be shown that the one which came from Descartes-Hume and crystallized in Kant has had a deep affinity to capitalism and a great deal of it becoming embodied as a 'universal' in the modern world is also a testimony to the story of the success of capitalism. What it, no doubt, shared with the other trajectories was its ability to 'posit' itself values entailed within it as valid for others in the world as well. Positing is fine so long as it remains free from aggression or imposition. That it became so is too well known a feature to be recounted here. So let us continue with 'positing' as a question for debate.

Most cultures of the kind like the Agarias or Madias of Bastar who are the empiric references in Suresh Sharma's work may have very valuable and, many a times, superior values about man-nature, man-woman, parent-child relationships and other facets of man's interaction with the world but, more often, these do not have the intellectual resources to posit what they have in their cultures as valid for others or, in other words, to be able to extend their notion of good beyond limited spatial

zones. Modernity was the first world-view based on rational criteria and a secularised ethic to self-consciously seek extension of what it entailed. Not that what it always posited as a universal for humanity was capable of providing a common good or a basis of emancipation for human beings. But its ability to do so is a historical given. This is what Gramsci meant when he remarked that 'European culture is the only truly universal culture' (cited p.37).

This remark of Gramsci, Suresh Sharma, thinks is a valorisation of European Culture, and, I think, that he got it wrong and with that the relationship of the entire Marxist tradition to European modernity. Gramsci's difficult political-intellectual endeavour had been to seek the basis of how this culture has been able to represent itself as the culture of humanity and further to seek ways and terrains of struggle to displace it with an alternative hegemony. The direction of meaning of a sentence or a set of sentences can only be grasped by placing it in the body of work. Read this way what Gramsci does is a grudging recognition (of that which has to be fought) and therefore reading it as valorisation is to miss the sense of the remark.

The notion of limit(s), alien to capitalism, has always been implicit in certain other trajectories of modernity ever since Hegel; one can here refer to Hegel's relentless argument against endlessness and absolutisation—of freedom, of self-interest, of (subjective) preferences, of homogenization, of ramified production and so on. Here is an illuminating, prescient remark: 'It hence becomes apparent that despite an excess of wealth civil society is not rich enough, i.e., its own resources are insufficient to check excessive poverty' (*Philosophy of Right*, p.245). Endless ramified production, an unchecked practice of capitalist societies, is not integral to every version of the philosophies that inform modernity, it may well be so with entrenched modernity with its individualism—the atomistic, possessive individual as the yardstick of all in the world. This tendency to collapse the entire corpus of philosophical thought in the period of modernity is a feature of author's argument. See for instance the unrestrained assertion that 'the modern quest began with a firm and irrevocable demarcation between Man and Nature. Complete subjugation of Nature was to be the decisive step towards human freedom' (p.39). It is therefore easy for the author to see Marxism on the one

hand and the undifferentiated class of writings of all others on the other hand as arising from an 'identical cognitive terrain' (p.33). Such then is the case with class among Marxist or nation-state among other intellectual persuasions of modern thought to prise 'wide open the grand path to universality' (p.33), in different ways, epistemically privileged as vehicles of unification, progress, and universal future. Suresh Sharma is quite right in pointing to their privileged status. But it is a nagging question whether and if certain categories are having an epistemic privilege do they necessarily occupy an identical cognitive terrain? There seems to be a rather big mishit here. The meaning and cognitive status of such a concept is only fractionally determined by their epistemic position. Unless nominally viewed, the social content and historical direction suggested by these concepts is equally important. Logically, nation-state is a non-transcending category whereas class as deployed in marxist philosophy is a self-negating concept. The proletariat acts in history, theoretically speaking, to undo itself along with other classes. Greater care and attention to such questions rather than seeking to work through the lowest common denominator of modernity would, perhaps, have allowed the author to bring out the valuable in his empiric referents in a much more nuanced way.

Epochal changes brought about by entrenched modernity not only played, as rightly observed, havoc with cultural diversity but also led to 'cognitive closures', a closure which 'demarcates the structure of attention and hearing space' (p.46); for example, the deep connection between social practice, ecological balance and survival of human life. All of this is brought out brilliantly in the section on shifting cultivation or penda. We the moderns have for long ranted against the practice of shifting cultivation on the ground that it is inefficient, lacking in productivity, destructive of forests. The author shows both through his field experience and shifting of aggregate data that 'forests have survived best in regions of shifting cultivation' (p.144) and rightly says that ignoring this is a 'perverse disregard'. The discussion on penda is illuminating from another angle. It is true that shifting cultivation is marked by low productivity but far more significantly, from the point of view of life, harvest in these regions never fail completely even in years of bad monsoon. Good enough reason to allow it to survive. But to allow it to survive is also to put a higher value

on the life-style that goes with it. It can survive only if these people are assured and have self-confidence that the life they live—non-possessive, with minimal needs, sharing, non-coercive and so on — is worthy of esteem.

But in a world no longer self-contained and enjoying the protections of isolation, can we compel people not to change? And if they want to change what can provide for us basis for non-coercive, self-willed change? It is important to ask this question because as natural beings we are only our potential. Penda mode of livelihood is a realization through the self coming to terms via the minimal transformation of nature. So the Madias of Bastar are no longer natural beings. They draw a line beyond which they will not fiddle with nature. Entrenched modernity is culpable because it has refused to, and refuses to, draw any line. But the question still remains as to where other cultures can draw a line which is not above the point at which nature can renew itself. We therefore need more than counterpositing. None of us can remain as natural beings and we all want to realize ourselves and we can't do so without doing some transforming of nature so as to acquire capabilities. Limits which are anthropologically given remain philosophically elusive. We need to be cautious in looking at anthropological givens. In a book ostensibly on tribals I have talked more of the philosophical side of modernity. So, as I end, I owe an explanation. Whatever the author's intentions, I remain undecided, on the exact thrust of this book: whether it is on tribals and their identity or the question of identity in a situation of the cultural encounters where one culture enjoys all the power and the others are made to feel vulnerable. My intuition tells me that this book has more to do with the latter theme. It is a book therefore on philosophy and not anthropology and that gives it strength. In any other reading, it will look that the philosophical discourse of Modernity is very much overdone and the tribals get less space than they occupy territorially. It is a book that poses for us epistemic dilemmas, and undermines the certainty which has, unfortunately, characterised our choices about future. It is a book meant to illumine the conditions we are living in. One can therefore unhesitatingly thank Suresh Sharma for writing this book.

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Studies that have focused attention on the nature and dynamics of the Indian State have, in recent times, attempted a multi-track analysis—from diverse ideological perspectives—of the subject. The book, *Character of the Indian State: A Non-Marxist View*, by J.D. Sethi, is a significant addition to the scholarly studies on this vital theme. The above publication is an elaboration of the Silver Jubilee Lectures delivered by Professor Sethi at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study in 1991 and 1992.

At the outset it must be stressed that the author defines his study in essentially negative terms—as a non-Marxist perspective. In his introductory remarks he asserts that the Indian State, which in 1949 was modelled on the lines of a strong State, has today become a soft and corrupt one. The weakness of the Indian State is demonstrated in its incapacity 'to translate its power into authority' as a result of 'criminalization, casteization, lumpenization, violent conflictualization and corruption' (p.1). Elaborating on this theme, the author opines that the deinstitutionalization of the Congress Party and of State structures—a process initiated by Indira Gandhi—coupled with the frequent and flagrant violation of the Constitution have contributed in their own way to the weakness of the State. Further, the 'increasing levels of political mobilization' resulting in the articulation of 'hard-to-fulfil demands' and an overload of expectations have virtually paralysed the State. Such a mobilization, often on caste or class lines, has heightened the competition for scarce resources. Beyond the shadow of a doubt, new innovative means (not necessarily legitimate) have today been devised by each of these competing groups to ensure that it secures for itself what it considers a proper and rightful share in the allocation of resources. The emergence of a new religious fundamentalism that

## The Imperial Bureaucratic State: A Critique

Sandeep Shastri\*

### CHARACTER OF THE INDIAN STATE: A NON-MARXIST VIEW

J.D. Sethi

Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, 1992, pp.vii + 82, Rs. 60

has made the accommodation of interests even more difficult has, in the author's view, contributed to the further weakening of the State. Finally, the development strategies sponsored by the powers that have benefited only a 'small section of the people', are contributing further to the crisis of legitimacy of the State.

After a preliminary survey of the Marxist, liberal and Gandhian theories of State, the author examines in depth what he considers is the authentic character of the Indian State — the Imperial Bureaucratic State (IBS). The IBS incorporates the characteristics of all the other theories of State. In the IBS, the bureaucracy is the 'linchpin of the State'. The IBS has, the author opines, all the trappings of a typical imperial State: imperial constitution, imperial capital city, imperial language, imperial coercive power and imperial dynasty. An Imperial Bureaucratic State is symbolic of authoritarianism and negates the very essence of democracy. In the context of his analysis of Africa's experience with democratic governance, Bangura has rightly stressed that the authoritarian trend in democratic processes is directly linked to the particular forms of accumulation and social structures.

The political conditions and structures that were created in independent India were ideal for the establishment of the IBS. As part of its passionate commitment to the principle of unity in diversity, the framers of the Constitution created a highly

centralized polity. Professor Sethi opines that the members of the Constituent Assembly, in spite of being legal celebrities, had a 'poor sociological imagination' and thus formulated a constitution which was largely non-empirical and created 'an abstract state which refused to go through the deconstruction of the colonial state' (p. 77). Further, the centralized State system as envisaged by the Constitution was clearly reflected in the nature of the federal system wherein the role of Panchayati Raj institutions was consciously ignored. The IBS was additionally strengthened by the 'control raj' — a by-product of the Nehru-Mahalanobis Model.

The author emphatically asserts that Nehru was the legitimizer of the IBS. He was responsible for transforming the Congress into a right-wing party and making it a natural ally of the IBS. Over a period of time, 'in every inter-elite and intra-elite conflict, it was the bureaucratic elite which came out more powerful' (p.32). Gradually, in the IBS, the bureaucracy emerged as the 'official caste'. The Marxists, the author states, wrongly believed that the bureaucracy was the instrument of the dominant class and failed to grasp the fact that 'as a part of the ruling class itself, it rules first for itself' (p.35). However, the author's contention in no way negates the fundamental principle of Marxian analysis, that the bureaucracy is the appendage of the dominant class.

In the author's perception the IBS rests on the bureaucratic mode of

production, which is defined in terms of the 'agencies exercising control over means as well as institutions of economic and political decision-making' (p.40). Thus, the 'permitlicence-quota raj' system further strengthened the role and position of the bureaucracy.

In the post-Independence period the leadership came to acknowledge only two theories of State: the Marxist and the Liberal. While the Marxist theory spoke of the ultimate withering away of the State, the liberal theories underscored the importance of limiting the role of the State. In the author's view both the theories have 'been made short shrift [sic] by history'. The reality in the Indian context is the emergence of a paralysing statelessness triggered off by the presence of 'enormous state power matched by equal powerlessness' wherein 'everything is reduced to something personal' (p.80). In the IBS, Professor Sethi concludes, there has emerged a new 'coalition of compradores' — the politicians, the businessmen, the bureaucrats and the intellectuals — who, to use Sartori's expression, are prompted to arrogate privileges to themselves that at the same time mean disadvantage to others.

While the author develops a masterly critique of what ails the Indian State, he stops short of offering the much-needed solution. How best can the civilizational character of the Indian State be protected? What are the strategies that need to be adopted to challenge the domination of the new compradores? Should the focus be on expanding the democratic space? Can structural changes be the answer to the crisis? These questions remain unanswered and the quest for a more just State remains elusive.

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Durga Das Basu is a household name to all those associated in one way or the other with the Indian Constitution, Comparative Constitutional Law and Comparative Federalism. His massive scholarship, his keenly analytical approach and the insights he has, make his works a source of illumination for all students of legal theory and practice at various levels and in contexts. The appearance of his latest monumental work, *Human Rights in Constitutional Law*, should be regarded as a most welcome event.

Human rights, whether in their Indian garb of Dharma or in the Western tradition of natural rights, have been floating around in history for hundreds of years, without any historical opportunity to be operationalized as

## Human Rights in Constitutional Law

K. Raghavendra Rao\*

### HUMAN RIGHTS IN CONSTITUTIONAL LAW

Durga Das Basu

Prentice Hall of India, New Delhi, 1994, xi+676, Rs. 400/-

part of a practical legal system. It is only recently that municipal legal orders have shown an inclination to incorporate human rights through different modalities. Human rights are now no longer abstract phenomena, and they impinge on our daily lives. In India we have now a Human Rights Commission to deal with violations of human rights. Thus, Basu's new volume will be of use to ordinary citizens as well as experts. Basu writes so lucidly that a

layman can easily get something out of his scholarly discussions.

The present volume has seven substantial chapters, besides an introductory chapter. The volume offers a succinct history of human rights and then analyses the complex relationship between them and the more conventional Fundamental Rights. It also goes into the question of whether these rights, fundamental or human, have any limits and then conceptualizes

these limits. It is also concerned with the institutional embodiments of these rights through procedural mechanisms. There is a discussion of the effect of the Emergency on human rights.

Above all, the volume is situated within the usual comparativist framework of Basu. With copious references to theoretical and practical developments across the globe and with his unrivalled mastery over intricate legal and jurisprudential material, Basu has produced yet another magisterial work. One can only feel grateful to the great legal *rishi* for continuing to labour so hard in the fields of his love.

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The volume is a collection of a series of three lectures delivered at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, during May-June 1990. The first chapter 'The Polemic' sets the tone of the entire book by energetically rejecting the Western view based largely on experiences of the so-called monolingual societies, which holds that a monistic paradigm is a necessary concomitant of development and that homogenization is prerequisite for such development. Quoting extensively from Western linguists and social scientists, the author succeeds in highlighting the fact that these scholars have failed to comprehend the baffling heterogeneity and linguistic diversity of some of the developing nation-states of Asia and Africa. The chapter focusses on the need for a pluralist paradigm (more of it later) for setting up priorities and programmes for language planning and development, particularly in the Indian multilingual and pluricultural context. The author assures us that within this pluralist paradigm one can imagine a theory of development that enables us to solve problems by identifying, classifying and describing them; promotes the use of tools and techniques that are appropriate for given types of entities, and does not require an alteration in the basic social and cultural entity while, at the same time, it does require it to accept conscious changes. Already we have a bit of a problem here, which the author foresees but tackles with aplomb, stating in a foot-note 'Although these tools and technicalities are likely to be foreign to the culture of the underdeveloped speech community...special aspects of our genetic endowment...make us very adaptive to technology. These should not, therefore, pose any difficulty for the members of the particular community undergoing such modifications to adapt to the changes, provided they perceive them as desirable'.

The second chapter provides a detailed typology of 'language problems', as well as, 'planning problems'. The author prefers to think of planning as the deliberate movement towards a desired goal through an orderly sequence of actions. The desired goal for language planners in the well-known 'Haugen schema' would include the selections, condensation, elaboration and acceptance of norm(s). The achievement of this goal through an orderly sequence of actions would, of

course, have to encounter, en route, problems relating to language form and language functions; problems relating to language contact, and to demographic factors. Language planning would also depend, the author agrees, on who defines language problems in the context of language material, language structure, language user and language symbol. Language problems which, according to the author, are usually 'wicked', become further complicated when seen in relation with such factors as power, politics, caste, religion, culture and society (as if it is possible to see language in isolation from these factors, except, of course, for the 'pure linguist').

The third chapter resumes the debate between monism and plurism. While monism and its correlation of development with homogeneity is challenged, the author also shows his awareness of the inherent dangers of plurism. Thus, rather dextrously, the author builds up a case for pluralism which can accommodate both monistic and plurist view-points. There is a reiteration of the need for a typological approach to language planning, with Sanskritization acting as a strategy for leveling diverse systems. This is accompanied by a disparagement of the planners' concern for cost-viability which can and does result, all too often, in a neglect of inter-ethnic relations and the uneven implementation of plans to protect the rights of ethnic and linguistic minorities. The chapter also suggests a possible typology of language planning in terms of comprehensive vs. partial; intrinsic vs. extrinsic; global vs. local; imperative vs. indicative; centralized vs. decentralized; public vs. private and predictive vs. predicative planning.

## Rhetoric of Pluralism

R.S. Gupta\*

### ON LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING: A PLURALIST PARADIGM

By Udaya Narayana Singh

Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla 1992, pp.xi+116. Rs.120/-

The next chapter provides an overview of some language planning problems in South Asia where a number of seemingly contradictory processes are at work, viz. Sanskritization and de-Sanskritization; maintenance and shift in the use of minority/minor languages, and tolerance and shift in the use of minority/minor languages, and tolerance as well as hostility in language attitudes. The author moves

**The book provides absorbing reading and creates an impressive illusion of commitment to a programme of development within a pluralist paradigm which can accommodate both monistic and plurist strategies for sustaining homogeneity as well as heterogeneity.**

on to a discussion of the post-modern condition in terms of 'openness', 'choice' and 'change' which contribute towards 'praktization' and a reassertion of faith in the vernacular languages, leading to the creation of a valuable body of knowledge in them. This would, hopefully, bring about a restructuring of the power groups within the cultural hierarchy. Two well-known cases of language planning are cited from the Indian context in order to give an indication of the kind of problems that confront the language planners in the complex heterogeneous linguistic ground realities that obtain in India. The final chapter is in the nature of an epilogue, summing up the arguments and providing a final plea for a pluralist paradigm.

The book provides absorbing reading and creates an impressive illusion of commitment to a programme of development within a pluralist paradigm which can accommodate both monistic and plurist strategies for sustaining homogeneity as well as heterogeneity. However, while the author is relentless in his attack on monism, attributing all homogenizing approaches to Western thinking, the pluralist paradigm he so eloquently advocates, is never spelt out in any

great detail. Typologizing languages, situations and problems is one step, a big step no doubt, but it is only one step. The author takes this step with verve and admirable rhetoric, but becomes rather opaque and tentative when launching into the next stride. Is it because the book is intended to be read as a defence of the prevalent policies and planning as well as a rather fashionable stance of laying all the blame squarely on Western modes of thought? The volume makes good reading and has all the quotable 'quotes' from all the important social scientists and thinkers. However, it needs to be read with caution lest one is swept off one's feet by the sheer rhetoric of pluralism and loses sight of the realities of the situation one is placed in. The author himself, to his great credit, becomes rather cautious in the concluding section perhaps because he realizes that he is treading on slippery grounds when he gets into the nitty-gritty of his pluralist paradigm; so much so that, after all the fire and thunder, he recommends a 'majjhim nikaya' and a careful, cautious approach based on a qualitative assessment of language development (QALD) which itself is subject to 'judgements with relative degree of precision', and which can lead to subjective readings of a given language community and its needs and aspirations. To conclude, one is tempted to comment on a statement of the author, 'Very often languages do not wait for planners to get cultivated'. If the author is referring to languages getting cultivated without waiting for the efforts or intervention of planners, one can go along with it; but if he is thinking of planners getting cultivated, I am afraid, they never will. Or perhaps, planners are not only a cultivated lot but also a very astute lot, who will only permit the cultivation/development of these languages that fit neatly into their hierarchical scheme of things for, after all, hierarchies are rather convenient structures for governance, as all the levels or strata can be kept in a constant state of mutual tension, while the 'whole pyramidal structure' gives a semblance of order and neatness. Perhaps, this is what the national euphemism 'unity in diversity' means in the final analysis.

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## Constructing Communities

Naresh Jain\*

Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences Vol.1, November 1994.

Edited by Jaidev

Subscriptions: For Institutions, Rs.150/-, for Individuals, Rs.100/-,  
and for Students and Retired teachers, Rs.80/-

The Journal of the Inter-University Centre for Humanities and Social Sciences at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study is a most welcome addition to periodical publications in India. If the inaugural issue is any indication, it has set itself both in content and production, values and standards that are enviable. The editor's own introduction is a fine example of synoptic writing and leads the way.

Explaining the objectives Professor Mrinal Miri, who is the General Editor, says, the Journal is meant 'to encourage theoretical thinking and debate on issues relating to our understanding of man, civilization, culture, and society. While the context will be our own experience ... it will also naturally be a part of the larger global debate about problems besetting mankind'. Each issue will focus on a single overarching theme.

The theme chosen for the issue — Images of Communities in Modern Indian Literature — is particularly relevant for us for two reasons: our multi-community situation and also the rising tide of individualism in the country. And the fare provided in it is both diverse and rich. As many as 14 writers and scholars in 8 different Indian languages including English zero in on communities, big and small, as they appear in our literature. The term community itself has been loosely defined by the contributors. In addition to the usual definition of community in terms of religion, caste, region and class some contributors have talked of child widows, lovers across the community divide, even prostitutes as a community. Most of the works studied are novels and short stories; only one piece takes up a play and one other, poetry. As the contributors subject their chosen texts to close scrutiny they raise some important issues: How does one write a community? How does a writer achieve objective distance while writing about a community one knows intimately? What is the place of 'invention' in such writing? What happens when such 'inventions' falsify history? And what is the relationship between narration and nation?

The issue opens with two papers which give the writer's perspective on the theme under discussion, one personal, the other concerned with the writer's craft. Bhisham Sahni in his 'Reflections' mixes memory, observation and desire to give a bitter-sweet close-up of some of the

communities that make up the Indian mosaic. He closes with recalling a weird scene at a Banaras ghat where he saw a bunch of Brahmin lepers driving away another leper from their area of begging because he belonged to a lower caste. The 'message' is clear.

M.G. Vassanji, the author of *The Gunny Sack* and *No New Land*, in his paper asks the basic question: How does one 'write' a community? In reply, he talks about the problems he encountered while he was trying to write a novel with a strong community presence. He apparently knew the community about which he wished to write quite intimately. But he needed aesthetic

distance between himself and the community and freedom to choose significant details of history and custom, and also to invent them if necessary. Finally, he decided to use a fictional community and called it the Shamsi community. The Shamsis in his novels are a community of Gujarati Muslims who had gone over to East Africa in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and who had later moved on to Canada. The use of this invention enabled the writer 'to play around with the geography of Gujarat, ... I could invent towns in India and East Africa and thus I was able to adopt a more elastic approach to history. ...'

But what happens if 'writing' the community involves inventing facts that falsify history? Rupinderjit Saini in her thought-provoking paper 'From Harmony to Holocaust' points out that most of the Indo-Anglian and Punjabi novels on partition depict an almost idyllic picture of inter-community relations before the sudden eruption of riots and killing and rape. Most of these novels also introduce a mandatory love affair between a Hindu/Sikh boy and a Muslim girl 'whose somewhat idealized romance gets disrupted' by the partition. This idyllic picture, the

writer persuasively argues, is at once a concession to sentimentality and a distortion of history, and what is more serious, betokens an inability to confront reality which is far too complex and terrible.

Ipshita Chanda's paper on 'The Tamasa of Political Forging of Political Communities in Satinath Bhaduri's *Dhorai Charit Manas*' gives a fascinating account of the 'construction' of a political community through the use of tamasa/teohar/puja structure under the impact of the nationalistic movement of Mahatma Gandhi or 'Ganhi baowa' as he is identified by the villagers in the novel.

A close parallel in the creation of a political community is the well-known *Kanthapura* by Raja Rao.

The focus of Sudhir Kumar's paper is on 'Reconstructing the Nation'. He begins with the recognition that 'literature recreates the nation it belongs to'. In his analysis of Abdul Bismillah's *Jhini Jhini Bini Chadaria* and Rahi Masoom Raza's *Topi Shukla*, he tries to show that the problems of Muslims are, partly at least, the problems of the entire nation and the reconstruction of the nation will not be complete unless there is an attempt at de-differentiation of the Muslims as the 'other' and also unless the Muslim community awakens to its full potentiality.

Nayak and Mohapatra's paper on 'Narrating Individuals: Narrating Communities' is a close analysis of three novels in which a self-seeking individual is pitted against the community. These novels are: H.E. Beal's *Indian Ink*, Fakir Mohan Senapati's *Mamu* (1913), and Gopinath Mohanty's *Danapani* (1955). The writers single out *Mamu* for praise because, though written in 1913, it valorizes the pre-colonial values of community and orality over aggressive individualism. If, the writers suggest, a major feature of

post-colonial writing is the 'abrogation of the imperial centre within the text; then the emerging post-colonial or decolonizing consciousness might with confidence be represented by Senapati's *Mamu*.

There are three other papers that must be mentioned. Harish Narang's paper on Manto's short stories does what almost no other paper does—it deals with lunatics, pimps, prostitutes, daily wage earners and other marginalized people who could be described as constituting a community of sorts. Narang begins by arguing, 'I think quite convincingly—that Manto, in spite of his own disclaimer, is a political writer because his stories dealing with conflict and cruelty and violence raise questions of power and empowerment and therefore of politics'. The stories themselves written with brutal frankness and shot through with cruel irony hit us hard, awaking us into a new awareness. In one story, for instance, the municipal authorities give a young widow a license for prostitution but not one for driving her husband's tonga.

The two papers on disadvantaged women—widows and women's education—are partly of historical interest because the current situation in relation to both is vastly better than it was in the period covered in the literary works cited here. Of particular interest is the negative role the Hindu society has played in 'creating' a widow—a term which not until long ago signified not a woman who had lost her husband but one who had lost her entire life. Though B. Chandrika calls hers a selective study, the subject is too vast for an essay of five pages. The other paper by Mohanty on Fakir Mohan Senapati's short story "Rebati" (1898) is self-confessedly historical. However, it still speaks to us because gender discriminations—subtle and not so subtle—in the matter of education still continue. Both these papers would have been more interesting had the contributors taken up more recent works also and shown not only the change but also the continuing old habits and prejudices. One hopes that this Journal will become an open forum for free and fearless debate on issues that concern us all. It is a Journal to which every college and university library should subscribe.

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