

## FUNDAMENTALISM AND SECULARISM

Professor T.N. Madan delivered three lectures as a Visiting Professor at the Institute during June 1995

The first lecture on "Defining Fundamentalism" stressed that Funda-mentalism is a trendy word enveloped by a great deal of ambiguity. It is a naming word and an evaluative term but not an analytical concept. Any attempt to introduce some precision into its use would help to lift it from everyday speech and make it useful as a concept. This may be done in a number of ways.

One way to proceed would be to take a couple of cases in respect of which the use of fundamentalism as a term of reference is well established, and try to construct from them, through a process of selection, a substantive notion of fundamentalism, which would not be a complete description of any particular case, but analytically useful in respect of all. In doing so one would have to be careful about the distinction between concept and reality.

Taking into consideration the case of American Protestant fundamentalists – with reference to whom the term seems to have been first used – and the Iranian Revolution of 1978-79 – which is generally regarded as fundamentalist – the following defining criteria are suggested: (1) Reactivity (fundamentalism is not an original impulse); (2) final authority and inerrancy of scripture; (3) cultural critique; (4) selective retrieval of tradition; (5) intolerance of dissent (monopoly over truth); and (6) quest for power.

Application of the above criteria to certain so-called Indian fundamentalist movements, e.g. the Arya Samaj and Bhindranwala's call for orthopraxis among the Sikhs confirms the heuristic value of the paradigm and introduces some order into the Indian materials.

The second lecture on Secularism and Pluralism in the Hindu Religious Tradition pointed out that Secularization, defined as the process by which the control of religious ideas, institutions and personalities over everyday life is gradually narrowed, is a universal process. In the West it has generated the ideology of secularism which arises out of not so much a total repudiation of religion as the dialectic of Protestantism and the Enlightenment.

In India we have adopted the ideals of a secularized society and the secular state. Whatever exists of them

empirically but not also ideologically exists but weakly. What support may we expect to draw from the Hindu religious tradition in the promotion of secularism in India?

Two arguments may be examined. First, does the classical tradition recognize the autonomy of secular power? Second, what is the nature of religious pluralism in modern Hinduism? Third argument worth examination would be the Weberian thesis that Hindu religious beliefs like *karma* and *samsara* do not promote rationalization of the type Protestantism did in Europe.

A quick examination of Vedic and post-Vedic texts reveals that spiritual authority and temporal power are joined together with the former encompassing the later. The contention of some scholars that the *Arthashastra* places *artha* above *dharma* and *kama* in the *purushartha* scheme is based on a partial reading of the texts.

The Smriti literature does seem to support a pluralist position. Thus, the *Manusmriti* maintains that if two shrutis are in conflict both must be accepted. In modern times, Swami Vivekananda emerged as the major promoter of the idea that Hinduism is pluralist in orientation and tolerant of other religions. This is a defensible thesis only partly. Not only the Hindu social organization, but also Hindu (brahmanical) thought is hierarchical. If tolerance of other religions takes the form of encompassing them, we do not then arrive at a truly pluralist position which requires the interdependence of different religious traditions.

The third lecture on Maulana Azad's Quest for Pluralism drew attention to the fact that there is a general agreement among the scholars of Islam that the ideology of secularism cannot be accommodated within this religious tradition. In India this point of view was stated forcefully by Muhammad Iqbal, Maulana Mawdudi, and Maulana Azad. Azad remained committed to pluralism, however, throughout his life.

In the first phase of his adult life, which is marked by pan-Islamism and fundamentalism, he argued for pluralism as a political necessity. No Muslim can put up with political slavery, but to drive out the British Indian Muslims must cooperate with the majority community, operating from a position of confidence. Towards the end of this phase, Azad embraced the position of a nationalist

## TIME, SPACE AND ICON: NEW PERSPECTIVES ON INDIAN ICONOGRAPHY

Professor Kalyan Kumar Dasgupta delivered three lectures as a Visiting Professor during May 1995 at the Institute.

In his introductory remarks on his three-part lecture on "Time, Space and Icon", Professor Dasgupta's aim was interpretative iconography, or iconology, rather than descriptive iconography; in other words, he would be dealing with ideas and ideologies—time-bound and timeless and space-bound and universal—which have been at work behind the countless images of major and marginal Indian divinities over the centuries. His study of Indian iconography from new perspectives draws on the works of Ananda Coomaraswamy, Mircea Eliade and Erwin Panofsky. He further added that the intrinsic meanings of our divine images would be clear from an inter-disciplinary study involving disciplines like Psychology, Comparative Religion and Anthropology.

In his first lecture, 'Indian Iconography and the Collective Unconscious', Professor Dasgupta stated that Indians in the remote past, as elsewhere, created icons of deities representing God, the supreme and the supernatural, the roots of which lie in what Jung has termed the collective unconscious. To illustrate his point he made use of Indian and non-Indian materials, both conceptual and visual and dealt with themes like archetypal parents, sexuality and life-cycles, ancestor worship and the cults connected with trees and snakes. These themes, he said, are timeless and universal as creative forces behind the icon-making activity.

In his focus specifically on Indian situation in the second lecture, he gave a connected narrative of the growth and development of iconography from the pre-Harappan times to the end of the sixth century A.D. Alongside the perpetuation of age-old

themes of primordial parents, tree-and-snake cults and the like, Indian iconography centering on the divinities of three pantheons as well as on the peripheral deities became crystallised, particularly during the age of the imperial Kushanas, from the first century of the Christian era. But the iconographic formulae were not yet clearly laid down and a number of iconic examples testify that the iconography was at an incipient stage. The most noteworthy contribution to Indian iconography of this period was the creation of the image of the Buddha. In a significant deviation from the established norm in Indian iconography, Professor Dasgupta divided Indian iconographic history into Period I (earliest times to the end of the first century B.C.), Period II (first century A.D. to 600 A.D.) and period III (600 A.D. to 1200 A.D.). This history terminated around 1200 A.D., when all creative potential and possibilities were virtually exhausted.

In his third lecture Professor Dasgupta confined himself chiefly to eastern India to illustrate that the trends and proclivities of earlier epochs, particularly the Gupta culture period (300-600 A.D.), were perhaps more articulate in this area than in other segments of the subcontinent. The chief characteristics of this period, period III of his chronological framework, included a culmination of all the trends and tendencies of the earlier epochs, relative preponderance of the archetypal mother, increasing popularity of syncretistic deities, the creation of new ones of the genre like Surya-Narayana and Martanda-Bhairava, close interaction between followers of all the three major religions, the rise of Tantrayana Buddhism, and, above all, the assertion of regionalism.

All the three lectures were illustrated by several slides.

Muslim under the influence of C.R. Das and Mahatma Gandhi. He became the President of the Indian National Congress in 1923 and placed Hindu-Muslim unity above national independence.

Subsequently, he tried to construct an argument on the basis of the *Quran* in favour of pluralism as religious philosophy. The core of this argument was the Quaranic notion of God in relation to God's creation. Azad interpreted the notions of God's overlordship, mercy, and instruction

in such a manner as to include non-Muslims too in a partnership with Muslims. He strove to find common motifs across religious traditions and saw *tawhid* and *advaita* as convergent concepts.

In the last phase of his life (during which he became the President of the Congress a second time and then Education Minister), he continued his quest for pluralism in both the religious traditions of India and in India's cultural history, which he portrayed as composite.



## ON TRUTH, MEANING AND KNOWLEDGE

*Professor Pranab Kumar Sen, who teaches philosophy at Jadavpur University, delivered three lectures at the Institute during June 1995 as a Visiting Professor.*

The first lecture on 'Truth' is a defence of the correspondence theory of truth in one of its possible forms.

This form of correspondence theory was suggested by Aristotle, and later developed with great technical power and finesse by Alfred Tarski. The lecture begins with a consideration of the question regarding what can be taken to be the bearer of truth, and answers, tentatively, that it is the occasional utterance of a speaker which alone can be in the most fundamental sense. The paper then proceeds to consider Gottlob Frege's argument that all definitions of truth are doomed to failure because they inevitably lead to an infinite regress. In answer to this charge, Michael Dummett's suggestion is accepted, the suggestion being that a definition of truth would avoid the infinite regress if it admitted a (reductive) equivalence of the form 'It is true that p if and only if p'. It is then pointed out that this requirement of reductive equivalence is in fact the same as the Tarski equivalence, the famous Convention T, which Tarski laid down as a condition of material adequacy of any proposed definition of truth. If that be so, the definition of truth which Tarski has worked out, and has taught us how to work out, can avoid Frege's regress, for, as Tarski has shown, this definition of his does avoid Frege's regress. Tarski's definition, however, makes use of the concept of satisfaction, which is basically the relation in which objects of which a given predicate is true stand to the predicate. This use of the concept of satisfaction establishes the definition to be a definition of something which is objective, and hence something which has to be understood in realistic terms. But the realism here is of the minimal form for it invokes as few entities as possible, although it can still make room for a certain concept of a fact, a concept which takes a fact to be transparent. (To talk about a fact is to talk about the things the fact is supposed to be a fact about.)

The second lecture on 'Meaning, Reference and Realism' builds upon first thesis that a theory of meaning must be a theory of truth, in the sense of a theory of truth-conditions; and that being a theory which has to make an essential use of the concept of reference (at least of objects by singular terms), the theory must be realistic. The thesis is developed in the following way. In order to be able

systematically to understand speech, we need a (general) theory for interpreting the words of the speaker, a theory which would enable us to tell what is said by the speaker X on any given occasion in the language he or she uses. This general theory is called 'a theory of meaning'. Now the question is: what must a theory of meaning be like? Whatever else the theory of meaning be like, it must be a theory based on a theory of truth, a theory which would enable us to specify for any given sentence of the language the conditions under which it would be true. A theory of truth of this kind must, however, make an essential use of the concept of reference. This use of the concept of reference, in its turn, leads to realism, at least in the minimal form. Thus understanding of speech, and of man for that matter, is possible only within a framework that is minimally realistic.

The third lecture on 'Knowledge, Truth and Scepticism' calls attention to what may be called a 'misuse' of the concept of truth, while the second lecture was concerned with an essential use of the same concept. In the classical account of knowledge, knowledge is defined as justified true belief. Usually, this account is given by laying down three conditions, supposed to be individually necessary and jointly sufficient. These are that the subject must have a belief, he or she be justified in having the belief and the belief be true. This way of formulating the classical conception of knowledge has the consequence that the condition relating to truth is treated as a separate and independent condition of knowledge. But the idea that truth is such an independent condition is bound to lead to absurdities and contradictions; as well as to scepticism of the worst kind. If truth is a condition of knowledge then, we have to realise, it is also a condition of ignorance. It is only when there is a truth that the question of knowing, or failing to know it, arises. So what we can say at most is that the existence of a true proposition is a presupposition of knowing (as well as failing to know). But that is very different from saying that truth is a separate condition of knowing, on a par with belief and justification. In fact, epistemically, there is no difference between a belief which is true and a belief which is justified. The addition of truth as a separate condition is fundamentally wrong because of just this.

## Research Seminar on Objectivity in Social Sciences and Symposium on Understanding Tradition

A research seminar-cum-workshop on 'Objectivity in Social Sciences' meant for young scholars and teachers in humanities and social sciences was held at the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur from March 23 to 30, 1995. It was sponsored by the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla under the auspices of Inter-University Centre for Humanities and Social Sciences. The seminar had two parts. The first one (March 23-28) was concerned with the main theme of the research seminar, namely objectivity in social sciences and other related issues. The second one (March 29-30) was devoted to a symposium on Understanding Tradition. The symposium was appropriately dedicated to Professor Mohini Mullick, one of the faculty members of the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences of IIT Kanpur, who was retiring, and who has been deeply concerned not only with the methodological issues in social sciences, but also with practice of philosophy in contemporary India, and who believes in the intimate connection between philosophical practice and the socio-intellectual tradition in which the practitioner is situated.

Four resource persons to the research seminar included Professors M. Mullick (Philosophy, IIT Kanpur), Gurpreet Mahajan (Political Science, JNU), Rajan Gurukkal (History, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam) and TVS Ram Mohan Rao (Economics, IIT Kanpur). Nineteen participants, drawn from various disciplines such as Economics, History, Linguistics, Philosophy, Political Science and Sociology, from all over the country took part in the seminar. Besides, there were several other local participants. These were a mix of university/college lecturers and research scholars.

Each day of the first part consisted of three sessions: morning, afternoon and after-dinner. The three-hour long morning sessions were mostly engaged in lectures by the resource persons followed by discussions. The three-hour long afternoon sessions and two-hour long after-dinner sessions were used for presentations by the participants followed by discussions.

In the last after-dinner session of the seminar, on 28th March, 1995, participants and the resource persons gave accounts of their impressions and suggestions regarding the conduct and the theme of the seminar. These accounts were audio-recorded. The resource persons delivered their lectures on the following topics: (i) 'Why Objectivity: Concept and Content' (ii) 'Truth, Objectivity and Relativism'

by Mullick; (i) 'Ethno-Social Science' (ii) 'Post-modernism and Social Sciences' by Gurpreet Mahajan; (i) 'Hermeneutics, Objectivity and Historian's Practice' (ii) 'Objectivity and Explanatory Human Geography' by Rajan Gurukkal; and 'Limitations of the Objectivity Paradigm' by TVS Rammohan Rao.

Some of the notable presentations by the participants were on: 'Representing Social Process and Tribal Identity', 'The Process of Knowledge in a Traditional Religious Setting', 'Policy Research and the question of Objectivity', 'Rationalization of Politics and the Concern of Pluralism', 'Reflections on Critical Theory', 'Phenomenological Approach to Objectivity', 'Sources of Bias in Scientific Investigation: a View from Economics', and 'Objectivity in Linguistics'. The entire proceedings of the second part of the seminar, the symposium on 'Understanding Tradition' was audio-recorded. The symposiasts were Professors A.K. Saran, G.C. Pandey, K.N. Sharma, M. Mullick and Rajan Gurukkal. The central issue debated in the symposium was whether tradition is to be understood in terms of the actual manifest material process of human history or in terms of a certain transcendental core. While the latter view emphasized the eternal, ineffable and mysterious, essence of tradition and hence insistently denied any possibility of either pairing or contrasting tradition with modernity, the former, mainly advocated by the practicing social scientist and historian, considered the transcendentalization of tradition to be something programmatically inimical to his professed concern of 'scientifically' investigating socio-human reality. For the practitioner would then be confronted with a dilemma. If the core of tradition is inaccessible, and yet alluding to that core is required in any deep understanding of socio-human reality, then how can the project of understanding any bit of socio-human reality ever get off the ground?

The problem of understanding tradition had appropriately echoed in the discussions and deliberations of the issue of objectivity in social understanding. For the concepts and categories employed in social inquiry may be alien to the inquirer's own social environment. And this mis-match between conceptual apparatus and social reality may result in serious misunderstanding of the object of research. Thus the relevance of the symposium to the seminar was deemed to be unquestionable.