

Indra's Cunning:
The Challenge of Modernity
The Indic Experiment

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ABBREVIATIONS

AV	Atharva Veda
BG	Bhagavad Gītā
Bodh	Bodhicaryāvatāra
BS	Brahma Sūtra
BU	Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad
CU	Chāndogya Upaniṣad
Jo	Gospel of John
KathU	Kaṭha Upaniṣad
KausU	Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad
Is	Isaiah (Bible)
MandU	Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad
MB	Mahābhārata
MK	Mūlamadhyamaka Kārikā
Mt	Matthew (Gospel)
PL	Patrologia Latina
Ram	Rāmāyana
RV	R̥g Veda
SB	Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa
SN	Samyutta Nikāya
TB	Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa
TU	Taittirīya Upaniṣad

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R. Panikkar

Preface

In 1955 I wrote *Letter From India*, which was published in book form years later.¹ It was written only seven years after the Independence of India and Pakistan. Goa and Pondicherry were two living, and for some, painful reminders of India's past. Bangladesh did not exist; Sikkim had not yet been annexed to India. It was a formative time, bristling with possibilities, but not without its confusions and political intrigues. Independence had created some thorny problems, and had thrust the country into new crisis.² From as early as 1950, when the 'planning' began, it was evident that the gandhian dream of decentralization and village-level democracy had been obscured by another antipodal dream: that of power and world prestige.³

Almost fifty years later, I feel encouraged to offer the fragments of a 'New Letter' on the *Indic Experiment* as a major example of the destiny of what we call 'modernization' — and ultimately of the fate of India and the indian peoples.⁴

¹ Panikkar (1960/III).

² George Orwell's remark about India in 1946 was prophetic here: "Your problems will begin when you are free just as our problems started after we won the war", quoted by Jay Dubashi (1984) 92-93.

³ We are certainly far away from Lady Wilson's *Letters from India* (1911) written from 1889 to 1909. The 50th celebration of Independence was marked by bitter criticism of the politics of the government. Although one is grateful for the freedom of the indian press, it is useful to recall that when Amartya Sen visited New Delhi in 1991 he "pointed out that the Indian Press, though free to an unparallel degree, often got its priority wrong..." He drew attention to the small number of articles on education and particularly on rural education (Muralidharan (1999/1) 122-124).

⁴ Precisely because I would like to invite the reader to consider ultimate problems I have taken pains in the footnotes

I wanted to keep the ideal of the first book and answer positively the underlying questions which already emerged at that time. Year after year I have been studying the situation. If indological and philosophical research loses touch with daily reality, it becomes an abstraction or a lifeless museum piece. If, on the other hand, we lose sight of the whole, we are carried away by the latest news reports. The gestation period of this study may have been necessary for writing this Second Letter in the present book.

My argument could be presented like this: In the vedic pantheon, Indra is the tempter God. Real temptations always come from the Gods or the angels, which is why such temptations place us in a humanly inescapable dilemma. The objects that tempt us are good things, or so we are led to believe: appetizing, enticing, and luminous, as shiny as a ripe apple or, in the modern myth, an Apple (computer). If you succeed in resisting the real temptation, you may harm yourself, or perhaps even irreparably destroy something within you. Repression rarely has a positive effect. You may also lose many advantages. In our case, if India resists the temptation of modernization she may not be able to stand as an independent State and may lose any chance of being a rising 'power' in the political arena of the present world. On the other hand, if you don't resist, you are caught, and though you may feel the excitement of new discoveries, the fascination of the unknown, and the awakening of your potentialities, you may also lose your identity, perhaps your joy, and likely your soul — even if 'they' respect you because you have the atom bomb.

If you truly had the strength to overcome the temptation, there would have been no real temptation at all. If there is nothing to make you doubt, if you feel no allurements, you will not be tempted by any apple. You would have discovered that the 'apple' is no longer that appealing "round firm fleshy fruit of a rosaceous tree", as the Oxford Dictionary, with theological undertones, still defines the word.¹ You would discover that in order for the Apple computer to function, it must computerize your mind, rob you of much of your spontaneity, and sap your subjectivity in favor of some so-called "objective data".² Yet,

to adduce anecdotes and examples which cannot be dismissed as atypical or mere curiosities. Most of these notes and the bibliography have been prepared by N. Shāntā who has revised the successive manuscripts offering penetrating reflections; Steve Hopkins assisted for the first manuscript, Josep Maria Garcia for the manuscript of 1995 and Marcel Farran for the last one; to them thanks are due.

¹ Cf., Engels' Preface to his *Anti-Düring*: "It was the kind of apple that once bitten into, had to be completely devoured; and it was not only very sour, but also very large" [apud Burns (1978) 10].

² Let us quote a remarkable piece of Chinese wisdom: "Sze-kung had been rambling in the south in Khu, and was returning to Sin. As he passed (a place) on the north of Nan, he saw an old man who was going to work on his vegetable garden. He had dug his channels, gone to the well, and was bringing from it in his arms a jar of water to pour into them. Toiling away, he expended a great deal of strength, but the result which he accomplished was

once you have yielded, the only way out is through forgiveness or redemption. Otherwise, there is simply catastrophe.

Indra himself has made the allurements irresistible. He, the drinker of Soma, the destroyer of "stone-built cities", the giver of arms, the seducer and tempter, is taking his revenge. He, the most prominent God in the Ṛg Veda — Agni his twin brother being a special case — is no longer using his *vajra*, the thunderbolt, against the *dāsyus*, the first inhabitants of the indic subcontinent, but against the *āryans*, the conquerors themselves¹. The ancient battle still rages. What goes on in heaven we do not know, for there Indra has disappeared from the modern indic pantheon. He is too busy on earth. But in this study, I would like to narrate something of what is going on among the mortals. He, the Father of Arjuna, seems to delight in the fact that even his son no longer obeys the biddings of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Yet the heavenly drama does not end in tragedy because it has no end. What may 'end' is simply its earthly re-enactment. The word *tragedy* may not be used here for the simple fact that there may be no one left to witness the 'event'. The apple may explode.

In sum, if we merely resist the temptation of Modernity, we are thrown back into the worst obscurantism of past ages. However, if we do not resist, we are doomed. Is there any way out of the dilemma?

My suggestion is that we may overcome the dilemma not by eating or not eating the apple (principle of non-contradiction), but by doing something that the serpent suggested, and which Adam did not understand. Adam could only think in defying or not defying the order, but could not even imagine challenging Yahweh himself, since Adam was his created image. In contrast, the vedic myth allows this challenge to the Deity. Men and Gods belong together. Indra himself is a cunning God. It is all a question of integral *jñāna*, saving

very small. Sze-kung said to him, "There is a contrivance here, by means of which a hundred plots of ground may be irrigated in one day. With the expenditure of a very little strength, the result accomplished is great. Would you, Master, not like (to try it)?" The gardener looked up at him, and said: "How does it work?" Sze-kung said: "It is a lever made of wood, heavy behind and light in front. It raises the water as quickly as you could do with your hand, or as it bubbles over from a boiler. Its name is a shadoof." The gardener put on an angry look, laughed, and said: "I have heard from my teacher that, where there are ingenious contrivances, there are sure to be subtle doings; and that, where there are subtle doings, there is sure to be a scheming mind. But, when there is a scheming mind in the breast, its pure simplicity is impaired. When this pure simplicity is impaired, the spirit becomes unsettled, and the unsettled spirit is not the proper residence of the Tao. It is not that I do not know (the contrivance which you mention), but I should be ashamed to do it." Kwang-Sze (ed. & transl. Legge 1962) Book XII, Part 2, section V. The continuation of the story, telling about the reaction and bewilderment of the confucianist, is worth pondering.

¹ We do not enter here into the historical problematic regarding *āryans* and *dravidians*.

knowledge; of unraveling Indra's trick and thus dissolving the very temptation. Indra does not use any snake as intermediary.

My thesis is this: after pursuing "modern development" with neither the excuse nor the handicap of colonial rule, fifty years of independence in the indic subcontinent are sufficient to demonstrate that the path of modernization India has taken has not delivered the promised liberation. It has not delivered the goods, and has failed.¹

The reason does not lie, the thesis continues, in the fact that we — both the governing and the governed — lack moral strength or intellectual know-how (the official thesis), but because we have taken the wrong path. We are actually marching in the wrong direction.

This has not always been the case. Perhaps under the influence of Gandhi's ideals the wise policy of the indian government at the beginning was to stand apart from the world economy. It was not felt to be a temptation, and this aloofness enabled India to avoid enduring the impact of the 1982 world recession to the same degree as other nations. This made India self-supporting in 90% of her basic needs and free from the rampant inflation felt by so many countries, as well as from the burden of borrowed money.²

Let me emphasize at the very outset that the fact of having chosen the myth of Indra in no way implies that I am defending the sanskritization of India, or am ignoring the polychromic mosaic of the indic subcontinent as a whole, and the Republic of India in particular. One of the most negative aspects of modern India is the practical contempt for *ādivāsīs* (first inhabitants) and *dalits* ("down-trodden"). The concentration on "nation-building" during the first years after Independence caused the neglect — to be excessively gentle — of the most ancient inhabitants of the country and the most oppressed citizens of the land. Indra is a vedic God, although no longer of so-called classical hinduism and much

¹ In gentler terms this is the overall conclusion of the special issue of *Daedalus*, "Another India", Fall 1989. Cf. especially Nandy (1989) 1-26 and R. Kothari (1989) 51-67.

² It was, a known fact that India was not exactly a paradise for the multinationals, but more recently even the marxist West Bengal government has contacted a host of foreign investors which are not only exploring the possibilities but are proposing concrete projects. Cf. Sen Gupta in *The Hindu* (Sept. 15, 1985 pp. 81 ff). So did the previous leftist government in Kerala. Cf. R. Menon (1990) 101 ff. Five years later the indian deficit had increased in alarming proportions. Cf. the figures of the VIII Five-Years-Plan. As of December 1990 it has been calculated that the deficit for 90/91 may be a minimum of 14.000 crores. Cf. *The Hindu* (Dec. 13, 1990). After the assassination of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, and especially after the Fall of the Soviet Empire and triumph of Capitalism, the situation has worsened beyond measure. Cf. the data we give later. In February 1992 the World Bank was ready to make heavy investments and this was greeted as a great push to the indian economy, ignoring the fact that the major benefits will go elsewhere. The temptation has not been resisted. Indra had it.

less of the living religions of India — yet is also mentioned in jaina and buddhist Scriptures. Indra is the God who has oppressed those of “inferior race”, the colored people (*dāsam varnam*). But now, it seems, he turns against his own allies, and might serve us as a symbol of reconciliation and as an example of how myths can be cross-cultural. I could have used an orāon or a bhil myth, or even a muslim or a christian story, but there is no denying the fact that, for good or for ill, vedic lore has a wider resonance and can divest itself up to a certain extent of particular connotations. Without denying that India belongs to “The Continent of Circe” (N. Chaudhuri [1978]), I feel that Indra resonates better with the indic soul than any greek myth.

In any case, we need to recur to myth for a very fundamental reason: only a new myth can save us. But myths are not produced at will. Myths emerge. A new myth can only emerge when the myth of rationality, as the only horizon under which Modernity sees reality, gives way to another wider and deeper horizon. Modern Man lives almost entirely in a two dimensional world, that world formed by human events and material things. The third dimension (the sacred or the Divine), even if theoretically accepted or recognized, does not play a major role in the lives of the self-appointed “First World”, except in the form of religious fundamentalisms or private practices. If we want to overcome the modern predicament we need not just the help of the Gods, we need to associate them in our (and their) endeavor. May we confront Indra's power?

* * *

The *first part* of this study, after scratching the surface of the present situation, gives enough background to situate what I optimistically call the *Interludes*.

The *second part* intends to show that the deep reasons for our predicament are twofold:

i) The inadequacy of traditional indic civilizations to confront the technocratic complex of Modernity.

ii) The intrinsic self-defeating character of technocratic civilization.

The *third part* suggests the overcoming of the dilemma by showing it to be a false one, a trick of Indra. And it will address the question of the traditional bases for a desirable society. The task is hardly possible, but the Gods love the impossible, and Viśvakarman may be the only one to appease the Vṛta-han (killer of the demon Vṛta), which is one of the names of Indra.

The first two parts, which are simply descriptive, are needed in order not to build

the third on merely hasty impressions. We are engaged in a *daivāsuram*, a struggle of historical, even cosmic, proportions.

I.- *Sociological Introduction*

Although I am convinced that India's predicament owes much to the neglect of the metaphysical tradition and onto-anthropological thinking, it would only foster a distortion of both — as it has often been the case — if we should lose sight of the concrete and actual situation of the people. We are not dealing with Being or with Man, but with a political country and actual individuals, though they are also trans-historical and super-individual realities.

1. A First Approach

I begin with what is visible in daily life, some ordinary facts or events which, revealing underlying currents, may offer some clues to unravel the complicated fabric of indic society today. I will draw on only some apparently non-transcendent and familiar examples.

In Madras, before it had regained its former name Chennai, you emerge from the railway station, avoid the few peddlers who offer you their services, and go straight to a taxi. As for the fare, there is no point in arguing: the taximeter does not 'work'. The driver will demand a price two or three times the 'normal' one. If you are not indian, I assume the fare will be considerably higher. There is no point in asking help from a nearby policeman. Possibly, the foreigner will receive better treatment from him — it is a question of prestige. But even if the policeman had no share in the cabdriver's profit, he would certainly sympathize with him, since, although the cabdriver may well earn a little more than the policeman, both earn considerably less than any prospective client of the taxi. They are well aware that what they — the relatively well-to-do of the working class — earn in a year is what the tourist from overseas or the rich indian is likely to earn in a day. Not to mention the many women breaking stones or carrying bricks for repairing roads or building houses, who still make only a few rupees per day. Why on earth should the rich and the tourist not pay more? Seen from this perspective, the taximeter is an unjust burden on the taxi.

But it becomes an altogether different matter if I were to ask a favor of the taxi driver. Some years ago the Ganga-Kavery train arrived late at Central Station. I had to catch a connection at Egmore Station which was scheduled to depart in only a few minutes. Since I had to be in Madurai the next morning, I hailed a cab, and told the driver of my plight. He

understood. We flew through Madras and I managed to catch my train (which fortunately was a little late in starting). The driver did me a favor, and you don't pay for favors. Here we touch a human dimension that is not monetizable.

It is romantic to say that on Indian roads pilgrims, pedestrians, bicycles, bullock-carts, strayed cows, motorbikes, camels, elephants, cars and lorries mingle together. But the difference between the rickshaw and the car is really a qualitative one, and the key here is quick money.¹

Some taxi drivers only rent their vehicle and do not make much profit, but if the driver owns the car he feels he belongs to a superior category of beings. He will honk his horn mercilessly at any pedestrian, even if that poor creature respectfully stands aside; and more often than not he drives recklessly.

Why do I indulge in such a description? Some might say that a philosopher should not pay attention to these trifles since India is the land of lofty spiritual doctrines and otherworldly ascetic practices. In fact, the firecrackers still go off in the temples, and the festivities of Dusserah, Rāmlīlā, Id, Durgāpūjā, Dīpāvalī, etc., are not only noisy and popular, and imbued with glamour and ecstatic fervor, but they also represent something entirely different than what one would expect of the mystical or philosophical India of the textbooks. People seem to be happy. In fact, only a few seem to want to protest the abuses of the drivers, the visible exploitation of the women, children, and dalits, or the breaking of the most elementary laws. Is this selfishness or "holy indifference"? Inherited passivity or impotency? A realization that nothing will change, or utter despair?

An 'educated' minority will tell you in the same breath that technology is needed but harmful, unavoidable but no lasting solution to India's problems that it is leading the country to catastrophe, and yet thanks to it India has improved in many fields.² They will also explain that there is really no solution for the miserable poverty of the vast majority.³

¹ "... with the help of science, the possibility of profit has suddenly become immoderate" wrote Tagore in 1920 (Reprint 1980) 66-67. Front page advertisement of *The Hindu* (Dec.13, 1986) says "Earn more than 80% per annum. Invest in ..." The ad then cites the example of giving only 50 Rs., which will be converted into 90 at the end of the year. Any psychologist will explain to us the alluring power of the small amount of the example, and any economist will tell us where the profit comes from.

² No less a person than the former President of India, Zail Singh, has uttered the same words almost verbatim: "Man must inevitably advance along the lines of industrialization and modernization. And at the same time he must suffer the harmful side-effects of such activities." *The Hindu* (Apr.4, 1987).

³ Cf. "Crippling Contradictions", *India Today* (Jan.15, 1984) 8: "The public indifference to the entire development process stems primarily from the Planning Commission's failure to relate the plans to the ways of life of different segments of Indian society. Almost six plans have created an elitist, dominant way of life which is so cut off from

The problems are complex, and we cannot tackle all their implications.¹

I would like, however, to single out only a few instances which may shed light on the current crisis.²

All my life I have been urging a mutual fecundation among cultures and religions. In India, I find this mutual fecundation taking place in the outlook of few people, but there remains a distressing confusion among the majority. What is taking place on the macro level is only a travesty of what I have been urging, it is the meeting of the worst aspects of indic culture with the most negative features of western tradition. The blare of traffic, unbearable pollution, and the sheer recklessness of drivers could serve as examples. In a traditional society, city streets are the prolongation of the habitat, and can also serve as the bazaar or market — a place where people meet, converse, transact, play and quarrel. By contrast, in a modern city, the streets are simply “avenues” of transportation — and obstacles to communication. In India there are both, and neither. The first function (extension of the house) is made impossible by noise, cars, trucks, and auto-rickshaws; and so is the second (place of human transactions) is also hampered by that same din of engines and choking fumes.

And yet, the mutual fecundation, even in India, is a historical fact. What is Europe if not the result of such fertilization? An important, and too neglected example in India, is the mutual impact of islām on hinduism, and vice-versa. ‘Hindu’ India, after six hundred years of muslim presence shows the positive influences of islām on music, arts, literature and even

the quality of life of the vast numbers of poor that it is no longer possible to look at the plans as harbingers of development with social justice and civic morality. Whatever rural programs are initiated end up helping everyone else but the poor.”

A.S. Ramasamy (1989), in his article “State planning without native orientation”, starts his lucid analysis by those alarming and desperate words: “If there is one country in the world, where its own socio-cultural setting is not the basis for its development efforts, where fancy ideas and ornamental institutions tried at heavy cost abound, where conspicuous and ostentatious consumption is most and the art of economizing is the least, and where its own people are not trusted, it is India.” He strongly emphasizes that “Planning for rural development would be realistic if done by the rural people.” But, he concludes “... do the people in the cities know that if the villagers organize themselves and stop producing food grains over and above their requirements, urban culture would come to an abrupt end?”

¹ I was once talking to a dalit friend of mine while driving somewhere: You give a car to a dalit and he becomes a brahmin driver. The change has to be more radical because the issue is much deeper.

² In 1992, I asked a high official of the UN agency for development: How many officials and NGO’s submitted development projects have been thought and written in the vernacular languages of the people to be developed? None! was his answer.

religion (the *sufi* influence on hindu *bhakti*),¹ and it is enough to compare a north-african and an indian muslim to note how 'hindu' the indian muslim is.

Religion, to be sure, is an outlet. Without the consolation of religion, many people would not survive; yet with it, passivity and resignation may take over. Muslim self-confidence and hindu tolerance often produce resignation rather than serenity and a balanced outlook. Hindu piety and christian concern for the neighbor often generate sectarian factions in lieu of a more mature spirituality. Sikh sense of purpose and hindu vagueness often beget irritation. All this is far from any theoretical mutual fecundation; instead it represents a sense of frustration that is often clothed in cynicism, selfishness or utter indifference.

Let me try to be a little more specific.

2. Some Statistics

I 'indulge' in such details in the footnotes to show the awareness of a responsible press. Besides, by putting these data together I respond in advance to those who complain about the "prophets of doom". The different dates of many footnotes show how the severity of the situation is growing in geometrical proportions.

India is developing, and allegedly developing well.² It has plenty of cars, electronic gadgets appliances and new factories; there is no lack of food; fancy shops and fast-food restaurants are springing up in the great cities. A technological boom under way. Indeed, India belongs to the 10% of the most powerful industrial nations in the world.³ Others say among the 8%. She has the third largest military in the world.⁴ One hundred and fifty million people have begun their long march on the road of technology. They may still be clumsy in their new role, but the tourist (11 lakhs in 1987) and official visitors are overwhelmed by the rapid 'improvement' of such an enormous amount of people.⁵ The newspapers are full of the

¹ Cf. Rizvi (1978/1982).

² The notes of this section are a tiny selection of mainly indian sources from the past few years so as to give an idea of the complexity of the problems. We prefer the press to the books just to show the relatively little impact of the mass-media when information has crossed the saturation point.

³ *India Today* (Nov.30, 1983) 107, classifies India as being among the top fifteen or so industrial nations in the world — which amounts to our ten percent. Cf. Weid (von der) & Poitevin (1978) 11, where it is spoken of the tenth industrial power of the world.

⁴ Larson (1995) 9.

⁵ Ernest Stern, Managing Director of the World Bank while in Madras (February 1993) was all praise and flattery

latest advertisements,¹ not excluding the most tempting ads for cigarettes.² Certainly, there are traffic jams in the cities, air pollution and noise pollution well beyond tolerable levels;³ corruption is still rampant and on the increase, but we are told, "this is the way things are done ..." It's the way they are done if you have enough energy — and unlimited sums of money. English medium schools are mushrooming, along with the constant rhetoric in favor of the vernacular languages. "Otherwise how can our children get the best and perhaps only available jobs?" The 'missionaries' are frowned upon, yet christian schools are in great demand. It is a great asset to be a "convent educated girl". One must keep in mind that India has the third largest english publishing industry in the world.

The ecological prospective of the earth is increasingly deteriorating.⁴ Daily papers, as well as bi-monthly and monthly journals, tell us in no uncertain terms how Mother Earth has been mutilated, forests 'mercifully' devastated,⁵ hill resorts robbed of their beauty,¹ a

about the achievements of the country. Cf. his interview in *The Hindu* (Feb.23, 1993).

¹ Unfortunately, an increasing number of advertisements do not conform to the code of conduct laid out for 'Advertising'; quite the contrary. "They distort facts, mislead the public with false exaggerated claims, often without even offering a hint of the product's quality. In the end, their sole purpose seems to confuse and intimidate the consumer into buying through vulgar and suggestive themes." Bhatia (1984) 28 ff. Cf. Bhaskaran (1990) for a survey and a field study on the subject with pertinent queries: "Should an advertisement aim only at selling a product? Does it not also have an obligation to the consumer to not mislead with falsehoods and suppressed facts? Is it right for it to exploit women and children?"

² A non verified source has assured me that in view of the decline of smoking in the West, as result of conscientization, the U.S. tobacco companies have spent 1.2 million dollars in 1982 alone with the most refined psychological propaganda aimed at the so-called Third World. And apparently, it pays off. The official visit of the british Prime Minister, John Major, in January 1993 included the presence of the Director of a british tobacco firm in order to export cancer and lung diseases, according to a complaint in the british (not the indian) parliament.

³ Delhi automobile pollution is among the worst in the world. "Delhi has one vehicle per 10 persons. Thanks to the highest per capita income it has one car, jeep or station- wagon per 50 persons against the national average of one per 800, and the highest travel of 2.6 vehicle kilo miles per day person [...] Size to size, Indian vehicles emit seven times more pollutants than Japanese vehicles and five-and-a-half more than American vehicles." Dutt (1984) 49. According to a survey carried out in major urban centers, Calcutta is the noisiest metropolis, even in the residential areas the sound level is more than 80 decibels (*The Statesman*, Oct.18, 1990). The situation has worsened considerably since then.

⁴ Cf. the Geo2000 (1999) report of the UNED with alarming data.

⁵ To give only a few examples at random among so many. About deforestation in Madhya Pradesh, cf. Khandekar (1984) 102 ff: "The fraud has been going on for more than two decades. There are no estimates to indicate its size or volume, but it is known for certain that millions of trees have been cut and villagers — predominantly tribals — have been swindled out of crores of rupees by contractors, officials and politicians who have fattened on the spoils."

green island denuded,² rivers highly polluted,³ and Men deeply affected in the process.⁴ The Himalayas suffer not only from extended deforestation⁵ but also due to the evil consequences of limestone quarries; landslides have destroyed valleys, villages and people.⁶ From North to South one hears a permanent, painful and unanimous cry from Men and Nature.⁷ Even wild-life is endangered,⁸ but the cries of the people are silenced.¹

From the same State, an ādivāsī, Mr. N. Netam, member of Parliament, says "the extent of deforestation can be gauged from satellite pictures, which shows that 4% of the forest — 18,000 sq. km in area — has been destroyed in just 7 years. During the last 10 years, the forest cover in the State has come down from 1.85 lakh sq. km to 90,200 sq. km" in *The Hindu* (Sept.8, 1985).

¹ It is a sad and widely known fact that the hill stations are fast losing their beauty and peace due to a spate of constructions. Cf. S. Sen (1984) 160 ff. about Darjeeling; Dutt & Kapoor (1984) 130 ff. about Mahabaleshwar; *The Hindu* (Apr.3, 1987) about the decline of Nainital. There is a deep concern for the Nilgiris, see Alvares (1988) 46; for Ooty, "A paradise in distress", see Padmanabhan (1990) 58-71; and for "The declining Kodai", see Balasubramanian (1990) 75-81; the tiny Kodagu (Coorg) has been ravaged, see Ramachandra (1988/2).

² Even Nhava Island, near Mumbai harbor, has not been spared. The Oil & Natural Gas Commission (ONGC) has established one of its bases there, which has led to the tragic devastation of the lush green island. Cf. Pandit & Goenka (1984) 64 ff.

³ "To cite some examples, in Tamil Nadu, the tanneries in Vaniambadi area, North Arcot district, have ruined over 4600 hectares of land in which over 2000 wells have become saline. The factories at Tungabadra river, like the Gwalior Silk Manufacturing company, emit so much untreated effluence that the fish-yield has declined 75%, and is causing skin and respiratory diseases. Similarly 12 million liters of effluence per day from over 700 textile processing units along the Bandi River in Rajasthan have made the river water unusable for irrigation, leading to crop failures in many villages along the river. Similar is the case of Dhrangadhra Chemical Water in Gujarat and Kesoram Rayon Factory in Calcutta." Wilfred (1988) 57; cf. also Khandekar (1985) 133 ff; R. Menon (1991) 118 ff "Woes of a river — The Cauvery faces degradation", due to the 60 urban centers, some highly industrialized in her basin.

⁴ Cf. Santhanam (1985) 136 ff on the dreadful effects of dust on the quarry workers employed by the 110 crushers on the Delhi-Faridabad border. Cf. also Lakshman (1985) on the second Citizen's Report on the State of India Environment (1984-85) by the Center for Science and Environment relating the extensive damage, injuries and deaths caused by chemical industry, especially in Maharashtra and Gujarat.

⁵ Dr. M.S. Swaminathan, in *The Hindu* (Aug.11, 1985) said: "forest cover on the Himalayas, estimated to be 60% of the land area in the beginning of the century, has now dwindled to a quarter of that."

⁶ Below 2000 m., 35% was jungle; now less than 8% is wooded, according to Jon Tinkles, International Institute for Environment and Development, London (as reported by Santa Barbara - California - *New Press*, April 6, 1984, p.A.3).

⁷ Cf. the striking article of Vijayan (1984) 76 ff.

⁸ Cf. Gosh (1986) 108 ff on the neglect of the largest bird sanctuary at Bharatpur (Rajasthan) and the penetrating analysis on "Nature and Human Survival" with confirming examples by Wilfred (1988) 55 ff.

In order to heal the wounds of the negative side effects of 'modernization' — we pretend we can buy our way out of this troublesome situation with western dollars. Instead of going to a tea shop to talk and gossip, we can go to the cinema,² or even better to a 'video bar' and lose ourselves in the murmurs and alluring images of a TV screen.³

There is, of course, a price to pay in all this. But one also hears a typical reaction: were not the American Indians decimated as the U.S. developed westward? Did not the industrial revolution in England and elsewhere begin with hunger salaries, child labor abuse, and the like? The villages of Italy are deserted; Sicilians and many others of the south have begun to emigrate to the north, allured by the big cities and modern wealth. "Nobody can stop 'modernization'" —so goes the common voice. Gunnar Myrdal many years ago predicted what was bound to happen. In his *Asian Drama* he complained of the lack of field-work and of indigenous solutions to the problems of the continent, offering Mahātmā Gandhi as one of the few exceptions.⁴

Let me put it another way. The history of religions, that often neglected field of the study of human experience, shows that in almost every traditional society, and certainly in that of India, human sacrifices were considered propitious for the culmination of any great work. Modern India still has records suggesting that workers now and then would sacrifice a child to assure success, for instance, in the building of a bridge.⁵ Something similar seems to be taking place before our astonished eyes, which we would prefer not to see. In ancient times the priest spoke with the voice of heaven and the child had a face. The difference today is that the modern priests, the technocrats, do not explicitly call for such a sacrifice,

¹ In Bihar, ādivāsī people living near the uranium mining and processing ponds are complaining of the injurious effects of radiation on their health. But the Uranium Corporation of India (UCIL) attributes their diseases to other factors. Nevertheless, the villagers have organized themselves into the JOAR (Jarkhand Organization Against Radiation). Cf. Chattopadhyay & Subramanian (1999) 70-72.

² Cf. the editorial in *The India Magazine* (June 1984) about film stars as today's superheroes in India, the new Gods.

³ In 1975, the former director general of All India Radio, N. Menon, in his Sardar Patel Lecture, New Delhi, announced that India had become "TV conscious". Big cities like Calcutta and Mumbai have a flourishing industry of imported pornographic films. They are shown in private halls at exorbitant prices, which makes possible the payment of fines — or bribes — needed for continuation of the business.

⁴ Cf. Myrdal (1968). Cf. also A.S. Ramasamy (1989) reporting Myrdal's study visit to India in *The Hindu* (Dec. 12, 1989).

⁵ The well-founded rumors of the case of child sacrifice at the big bridge between Moghulsarai (that had the greatest railway network in the whole of Asia at that time) and Varanasi across the Ganges were still alive in the 50's. Cf. some data in Deliege (2000), with bibliography.

and in fact, not one of them is individually responsible for it. In addition, the 'child' has no face, while the priest is undetectable has been absorbed within the "anonymous corporation" or transnational. The 'child', however, stands for more than 500 million starving children all over the world. And the death is not instantaneous, but an interminable period of suffering, despair, starvation, and small hopes that only prolong the agony as more and more children are born. It is literally a living death, a slow diminution of vitality, intelligence, and capacity to work and react. And certainly the consciousness of these children has been deadened to the fact that they are being victimized. But by whom? Nobody knows — the infection is everywhere, yet strangely invisible. Nobody wants it this way, but hardly anybody seems able to avoid it.

This process is well known. Brazil is another blatant example of a great economic technological, and industrial success, yet at the same price of the sacrifice and living death of a majority of its people.¹

It should be plain that I am not exaggerating.² But we should not find fault with the present system alone. To be sure, the India of over half million villages, with its so-called scheduled castes, of which a large number are dalits, along with the zamindars (landowners), the moneylenders, and the prevailing exploitation, did not and does not paint a rosy picture. I am not defending a romantic past; radical change is needed. Revolution may not be the word, but surely we need a profound transformation. "Modernity" as such is not a bad word, or even "progress" for that matter. Certainly hygiene, justice, reason, and especially art, i.e. *technê* (not technocracy) are urgently needed in India, as in the world at large. Some may object, therefore, that whereas a great part of India was in rags before, now at least some people have improved their lot, some wealth and well-being have filtered in, and there is some hope that the rest may be lifted up.

This objection, however, takes two facts for granted: 1) that the entire country was in this same predicament before, and 2) that conditions for the underprivileged have improved.

Both are simply not the case. To begin with, the population explosion has caused the endemic famines to be much more tragic in scope and intensity.³ This is also true in the case

¹ Cf. for background, Deelen (1980/1981) 385-409.

² The bibliography today is overwhelming. Cf. a single book on a single example, S. George (1976).

³ India's population in 1983 was 730 million [*The Hindu* (Aug.27, 1983) gives 715 million]. But *Le Monde* as reprinted in *The Hindu* (Sept.24, 1983) speaks of 730 million) with a birth-rate of 16.3 million *per annum*. In 1987 the population was 780 million. 1991 was the year of the census; according the final surveys the country population in March 1991 was of 843.930.861, in *Frontline* (Apr. 13-26, 1991) 33-40. "[T]he billionth Indian has been born..."

of floods and other natural calamities.¹ Moreover, it is the imbalance caused by westernization that has created many of the present crises, for example, the floods. A fundamental distinction must be made between economic poverty (which in no way we condone, much less glorify) and moral misery. In ancient times, for instance, the sub-animal conditions of the slums of the 'great' modern cities of India hardly existed; nor were the differences between people so great with the accompanying envy. A big landlord could exploit his people through ruthless intermediaries, but they all had a human face and he needed laborers to till the land and work for him. A modern tycoon does not need people and does not even need to see them. The machines work for him in a more efficient manner — and once within the System in a much cheaper way.

The traditional justifications for a hierarchical order in society encouraged a certain contentment with differences and even an acceptance of inequalities which we see today as injustices, but which in older times had a certain religious sanction. It served as consolation — however perverse we may judge it now. Today inequality and injustice are unbearable; the poor have no outlet for their frustration and repressed anger (rebellions are ruthlessly put down), and this suffocation of suffering affects the very soul of the people. Since so few sociologists have entered into this inner sanctuary of the peasant soul,² sociology has neither the tools nor the language for such an undertaking. You cannot understand the unspoken, unspeakable troubles of an Indian soul by employing questionnaires or tape-recorders; you will never fathom the depths of a human being who lacks even the most rudimentary

Cf. Murthy (1999) 89-90, with a well documented report — rather alarming — on "world population".

¹ For example, the recurring drought in so many villages and cities is a most painful fact. In summer 1987 about 100 million people in nine States were suffering from an acute shortage of water. Among the several reasons, like soil erosion due to dwindling forests, there is utter negligence in irrigation planning. It is known that of the 246 big surface irrigation schemes planned since 1951 only 65 have been implemented; cf. Bakshi (1987/2) 45-46. And what about the Indira Gandhi Canal project in Rajasthan — conceived as the World's largest canal project — which was to have brought life to the desert? It is far from being completed after 32 years. Cf. Jain (1991) 8. Even the evergreen Kerala has been deeply affected in so many places, cf. K.P. Nair, Venkiteswaran, Venugopal, R. Madhavan Nair (1987) 33 ff. Cf., as an extreme example, see Farzand Ahmed (1985/1) on the permanent agony of Kalahandi (Orissa): "Here is a picture of hell, there is no food, no water. For 20 agonizing years, no one has come to help ... Two out of every three children die in infancy ... women have now begun to abandon and sell their children because they can no longer afford to feed them." 52 ff.

² There are, of course, outstanding exceptions; to quote Srinivas (1979) in his own words: "As my field work progressed I began to view the village and its environs more like a native than an outsider." 333. The whole of chapter XI is in this vein and worth reading. Fortunately, contemporary vernacular literature comes to the rescue of the indigenous soul.

elements with which to voice her sufferings. And I stress *her* sufferings, because women are the main victims of this situation, having been robbed of the little 'revenge' they enjoyed in traditional society, that is, bossing in the home, having a great deal to say in the marriages of the children, or subtle use and/or abuse of their sex. All this has almost disappeared, along with the destruction of traditional cultural values and mores¹. And "we" are not better off than "they", and "they" — after their honeymoon with a so-called "higher standard" of (technological) living is ending, are apparently not happier. Western-imported civilization is too alien to fulfill the stirrings of the indic *psychê*.

Heavier than material inertia, which at least we can measure, is the inertia of the mind. The relative success of the first "Five Year Plans" has given the impression that the failures, after hardly a couple of decades, were simply due to miscalculation or imperfect implementations. In fact, the failures demonstrate that the country had taken a wrong direction.²

It is simply wishful thinking to dream that what is considered the modern standard of living can be universalized. There is simply not enough energy or raw material for it. The success of technology is built on the fact that only an elite is able to own a car, travel by plane, read a voluminous newspaper, have a frigidaire and air conditioned rooms. The statistics are unequivocal: 98% of research in science, 91% of all exports and 85% of all armaments are controlled by a few agencies belonging to the 30% of the world population, i.e., the "Big 7" countries. These countries consume 94% of all copper and aluminum, 78% of all fertilizers and 87% of the total world energy. 6% of the world population (the USA) alone uses nearly 40% of the global resources.³

If every country in the world had the same paper consumption as the United States, in two years there would be no trees left on the planet. 'Fortunately', a majority of people are "illiterate"! Even if the rich nations wanted to lend a helping hand to other countries,

¹ "Delhi a major transit point for trafficking in women," declares an article of *The Hindu* (Feb.8, 1988) with staggering figures (including 10,000 children below 16 kidnapped to meet the demand in U.P. alone).

² At the end of the british rāj India was pauper. In 1929 the per capita income was Rs. 282. In 1950 it had fallen to Rs. 249. Both in rupee value of 1948. In 1965 it had increased up to 315. Agriculture registered a growth of about 4.5% per annum in the first 14 years of planning. Cf. data apud Kurien (1967) 24 ff. The down-hill regression began afterwards, and today the figures are masked by the sky-rocketing 'progress' of the so-called upper middle class. The 1989 GNP of India is among the lowest of the world: 340 \$ in comparison with 650 \$ of Senegal, 1099 \$ of Bolivia and 1010 \$ of Botswana, *The Sunday Times of India* (Oct.28, 1990).

³ Data of UNCTAD (*Handbook of International Trade and Development Statistics, Supp.1973*) as quoted by Parmar (1981) 56. The entire issue is devoted to *Development, Justice and Religion*, and is worth reading. Since then we had time to correct these inequalities — and yet they have increased in the years that followed.

they could not do it, given the peculiar mind-set of technological civilization, unless those acts of 'charity' were not also advantageous for them as well.¹ Everything done must bring some profit, and the result is, as we know only too well, that the rich become richer and the poor poorer.² According to the 1990 statistics 29.9% of the Indian population lives under the poverty line.³ The share in world trade, for instance, on the part of non-oil-exporting countries has steadily dropped from 19% in 1960 to 15% in 1970 and 14% in the mid-seventies.⁴ The world is just beginning to be aware of the deficit on the balance of payments and the general increase in foreign debts.⁵ The trend continues unabated.⁶ What has until now only occurred between countries will begin to come noticeable within the nations.⁷

¹ Frances Moore Lappe, founder of the Institute for Food and Development Policy (IFDP) and co-author of *Betraying the National Interest* concurs fully with our data with her two decades of experience in this field. Cf. *The Hindu* (Feb.4, 1988) reprinting an article of *The Christian Science Monitor*.

² "From the mid-fifties non-oil-exporting countries of the Third World have increased the volume of their exports by over 30% but their earnings increased by only 4%.", Parmar (1981) 57. Even accounting for a constant gap between the countries (which in 1976 was 1/127 at the extremes), after 24 years (at a growth rate of 36%) those who earned an annual income \$2600 would get \$5200, which is mathematically the same growth, but humanly no comparison.

Much of this is admirably summed up by Sheth (1983) 2: "The global trends are clear: increasing dualism in the human community caused by an accentuation of poverty, inequity and exploitation; global economic crisis, threatening the life chances, even physical survival, of millions of human beings; militarization of global economy, technology and industrial R & D; growing militarization of major polities and regimes the world over; accentuation of the repression of, and atrocities on the poor and deprived; brutalization of the wielders of power at the local level, aided and abetted by both national and international elites and by a defensive and hardening world capitalism."

³ Cf. A. Mukherjee (1991) 30 ff.

⁴ Cf. Parmar (1981) 57.

⁵ Cf. the data in Parmar, *ibid.*, who was one of the first Indian voices denouncing this fact which is now, at the dawn of a new millennium, commonly seen as a moral imperative.

⁶ According to the "World Debt Tables" of the World Bank (1990) for 1990/1991 the external debt of 'developing countries' had climbed to an all-time high of 1341 billion dollars by the end of 1990, i.e. 6% more than the previous year. How can they be called 'developing countries' when (in 1988) net transfer of capitals from those countries to the rich nations has been 50 billion dollars? They are 'undeveloping' these countries which contribute to a "blood transfusion from the sick to the healthy". India's external debt in 1988 was \$55 billion. In 1989, \$62 billion and in 1990 \$77 billion. The ratio of India's external debt to the GNP was 15% in 1984 and will soar to nearly 30% in 1991, predicted *The Hindu* (Dec.20, 1990). It is instructive to see the further 'development'. *The Hindu* (Feb.23, 1993) on occasion of the new budget reports that India's external debt has skyrocketed to \$71.11 billion. These figures are the official figures of the *Economic Survey* for 1992/93. Africa in 1997 has repaid two and half times the debt of 1980, and in 1997 her debt has tripled (*Le Monde diplomatique*, X-1997).

⁷ Even in a country like the United States there is hunger. As of 1983, almost 20% of the population was below the

A century ago 70% of the workforce of the USA was involved with agriculture. Today it is only 3% — and on the other hand, this 3% can turn food into the greatest profit and weapon.¹ Yet if poverty increases, so do military expenses.² The relative shares of the budget that are devoted to armaments and education are revealing.³ The situation is drastic, especially in the villages.⁴

It is widely agreed that the social system is unjust;⁵ the problem lies in finding an alternative.⁶ Given the limited scope of this chapter, we can only touch on the immensity of

poverty line. As of 1999 the figure has substantially increased.

¹ Cf. *Epiphany* (Fall 1983) 12.

² Since 1978/79 India has increased its military budget 15.8% annually. In 1951/52 the expenditure was some \$ 28 crores. We read in *The Hindu* (March 1, 1987) that the Prime Minister allotted Rs. 12.512 crores for defense (while the 86/87 deficit is of Rs. 8.285 crores). And it looks as if it will increase further. The former Defense Minister M.R. Venkataram remarked in Parliament (Dec.6, 1983) that India "might go in for a nuclear-powered submarine." It had become a fact by 1988. The Sixth Plan allotted 9000 million Rs. for R & D in space and nuclear programs against 120 for all of education, i.e. 75 times more. Cf. Dh. Sharma (1983) 141. And yet the country owed in 1993 2,18 billion \$ (in foreign hard currency) due to 'defense' purchases alone. The main creditor is the ex-Soviet Union. It seems it is the first time that the figures have been made public, *Economic Survey* for 1992/93, *The Hindu* (Feb.23, 1993). Besides other arguments concerning military expenditure there is something literally thought-provoking in the fact that India has felt the need to triple her 'defense' spending in 5 years (from round 4000 crores in 1981/1982 to over 12,000 crores in 87/88). So big is the threat? Or so unstable is the country? Or is it the overall system that is unrealistic? Cf. Chandrasekhar (1988) 18. In 1993/94 it has soared up to 19,180 crores which represents an increase both in absolute and real terms from the previous year. And yet, it is argued, it is insufficient. Cf. *The Hindu*, (March 1, 1993). This trend is not of India alone. The 6 nations of SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation), but practically 5, because Bhutan has hardly a military budget, have spent in 1986 over 11 billion \$ for the military budget. Cf. *The Times of India* (Nov.19, 1990) on occasion of the meeting in Male in November 1990.

³ Archbishop Thomas Menampampil, on occasion of the incoming elections of 1999 gave the following figures about the National Budget of India: 13% spent in armaments; 1,5% in education, 0,34% in health and 0,12% in slum housing. *Vidyajyoti* 63/6 (June 1999) 411. The proposals of the earlier VII Five Year Plan were slightly different. The money allocated for education in the VII Five Year Plan is 2.8% of the total budget (over 18.4% for military).

⁴ In 174 villages of Madhya Pradesh, writes the Chairman of the National Center for Human Settlements, Bhopal, in *The India Magazine*, X,11 (October 1990) 90-91, 95% of the people are illiterate (99% of the women). In a cluster of 69 villages only 32 have safe drinking water.

⁵ O. Chinnappa, Judge of the Supreme Court, publicly castigated the present system in New Delhi (during the Bertrand Russell Study Forum) on August 26, 1983.

⁶ For more technical data cf. the five articles in *Religion and Society* (1980) [September, XXVII,3] on "Economic Development and Social Justice".

the crisis and the difficulty of finding a way out. But without this background, all my later reflections will seem unrealistic. The example of Gandhi is telling. On the 26th of January of 1930, which was declared Independence Day, M.K. Gandhi wrote a letter to the Viceroy "pointing out that while the average income of the Indian was only 2 annas, that of the Englishmen was Rs. 2 per day, that while the pay of the Viceroy of India was Rs. 17,000 that of the Prime Minister of Britain was much less, and that 50% of India's national income was spent on the armed forces".¹

3. *The Example of Mumbai*

If we pass from the macro to the micro level, we could write one tale of woe after the other. I take an intermediate example: the city of Bombay between 1983 and 1990. Against this background we may situate the tragedy of the city with its thousands of victims, after the demolition of the mosque at Ayodhya, December 6, 1992.² The Unfortunately, those events are not anecdotes, but constitute a syndrome.³

Certain types of data provide the most exhilarating picture: Mumbai, the great gate of India with its prospering restaurants, luxurious hotels, its 55 skyscrapers and awe-inspiring sea-reclamation project, is the center of a growing film industry, of business, of tourism, and a model of modern success — at least from the outside. And these are not mere impressions.⁴

Sixty percent of international tourists visit Mumbai. The city alone (1.2% of the total Indian population and 6% of the urban population) pays 80% of the sales tax revenue to the Government of Maharashtra and 38% of income tax to the Center,⁵ 20% of the central excise tax, 60% of customs duty and the port processes over 40% of the entire maritime trade of the nation. Its trade amounts to a total of 2500 million dollars annually, engaging some 1.5 million traders. The Mumbai textile mills spawn the largest cloth-market in the

¹ Gandhiji was arrested in May of that year. Apud Chandy (1990) 23. It is illuminating that independent India has widened the gap still further.

² Cf. Noorani (1998) 116-118 reporting the results of the judiciary on the riots of January 1993. Cf. "The Great Betrayal" in *The Week* (Dec.20, 1992) and the synthetic and tactful commentary in Larson (1995) 266-277. Cf. also "Ayodhya: Tactical Retreat" in *Frontline* (Dec.18, 1992) and "Behind the Ayodhya Catastrophe" in *Frontline* (Jan.1, 1993)

³ Cf. Ram (1993) 22-23.

⁴ Several of the following data are taken from the excellent report of Sheth & Kapoor (1983).

⁵ Cf. James (1986) 69 ff.

world. The city, the Greater Bombay with its 12.57 million people,¹ sparkles with life 16 million today — in contrast to its 4.1 million in 1941).

But at what price? The city's density is four times that of New York. The open spaces are 1/16 of the minimum accepted norm. More than 4 million of its population are slum dwellers or pavement squatters.² Those people come to the city from all over the country. Over one lakh every month enters Mumbai from the villages. Most of them have left their home in the countryside where they lived in utter poverty.³ They want first a job and to secure one they are ready to stay anywhere and to face any hardship. They are an integral part of the city and indispensable to its functioning: construction laborers, textile workers, carpenters, domestic servants, sweepers. Yet for "every job that we are now creating in the big cities, at least 20-50 could be created in the rural areas."⁴ The inhuman and tragic aspect of the situation is that, though these former villagers serve the affluent, and contribute to the building of posh residences, hotels, and skyscrapers, they have no decent housing and are living in subhuman conditions. Insurance, compensation for accidents or lost life, security of employment, indemnification, hygienic conditions, or even dialogue with the employer are notions not even dreamt of. Their conditions are intrinsically related to those of the rural poor⁵. It is the national economy which obliges the villagers to migrate

¹ According to the 1991 census in *The Hindu* (March 25, 1991)

² *The Indian Express* (March 22, 1985) reports that the Rajya Sabha was informed that 20 million people are living in slums in the country and gives the figure of 4.3 million for Mumbai. But it is difficult to assess the exact number of a fluctuating population. One reads in *The Hindu* (Oct. 25, 1985) that according to one estimate of the Planning Commission, 32 million to 40 million persons lived in urban slums in 1981. In 1989, 52% of Mumbai city population lived in slums; cf. Vijapurkar (1989/2) 79. In 1990 the slum dwellers of the same city were 5 million (D'Monte (1990)). And this in spite of a 20 points program of July 19, 1984 of the Ministry of Work and Housing. K.N. Panikkar, professor of modern history at the J N University, Delhi, soars the figures of the slum dwellers to "over 60%" (1999) 2.

³ Many young girls from the villages and the hills are brought to the city and forced into prostitution. There are 50,000 prostitutes in Mumbai of which 20% are minors, cf. Therukattil (1987) 389, quoting P. Singh (1987) 10.

⁴ Kapur (1999) 8 quoting a prior study of the author of 1975.

⁵ Cf. the review of A.Patwardhan's remarkable documentary film "Bombay, Our City", in *Manushi* (May-June, 1985) 45 ff and the interview with the same in *Manushi* (July-August, 1986) 16 ff where he says "The film "Bombay, Our City" is, in broader sense, not just about slum dwellers in Bombay but about the economy that polarizes the rich and poor." Already in "The Slum World" in *Swaraj* (June 28, 1958), Rajaji was writing: "We live in slums in Madras. The wise ones who live in Delhi, and whose pity is great, dislike our ugly thatched roof huts and threaten to send us back to our villages ... Have they ever gone into or seen our own huts in our villages? Do they imagine they are so many 'home, sweet homes'? We have no water there, no drainage, underground or over ground, no lights at night, no sanitation service ... If a slum is removed from your sight it settles somewhere else. What poets

to the city.¹ And those who are able to live with a roof over their heads exist amid the most lurid conditions: in 1980, 78% of the families were living in *one* room tenements (normally 12 x 12 feet). 25% of the families consist of 6 to 9 persons.² The total water available in the slums, when they are not flooded by monsoons, is less than four gallons per day, i.e., 1/8 of the required minimum.

Not only are the slum dwellers' living conditions subhuman,³ but they live under the constant fear that their dwelling will be judged an "illegal structure" may be knocked down by a demolition squad. Since the authorities planning the so-called resettlement do not seem aware of the immense harassment to which they subject the poor. There is an on-going the struggle for "protection of the right to shelter".⁴

In addition, there is rampant corruption, not only among the higher echelons of the society, but in the slum as well. Due to their insecure living conditions, slum-dwellers are vulnerable, prey to all sorts of influences and an overall climate of criminality. The slum bosses include some well-known smugglers, along with their political accomplices.

Due to its hundreds of factories, Central Mumbai is known as 'the smoke city'. After the Bhopal tragedy, both the government and the people began to realize that the 1600 tons of pollutant released in the city daily could lead to an even greater disaster.⁵

you are to imagine that what is not seen has been extinguished! Do you know we prefer to live on the slope of a dirty drain in Madras because we get work and send money home for the wretched ones whom we have left there?" *apud* R. Gandhi (1984) 271. That is why many of the slum dwellers are single men. Cf. Tully & Masani (1988) 67.

¹ Six lakhs of new people from the countryside stream into the 5 bigger cities of India every month.

² Data from A. Gracias [reproduced in *The Sunday Standard* (Aug.10, 1980)]. The problem is endemic to modern India. 41% of all Indian families live in one room. In 1970 there were 102.4 million households but only 18.7 million houses (that is 83.7 million short). In Kalbadevi locality, 10,500 persons are living on a hectare (Vijapurkar (1989/2) 78 ff.

³ Cf. Bhargava (1987)

⁴ Some years ago, after the entire demolition of a colony, in Mumbai, when negotiations with the Government failed, some slum dwellers went on indefinite hunger strike. Refusing to yield to Government wishes, they succeeded in obtaining the right to settle on private land with a lease of 99 years. They named their new site "Sangarsh" (Struggle). Cf. Vanita (1986) 16 ff. PROUD (People Responsible Organization of United Dharavi), which operates in the largest slum in Mumbai also deserves mention as a community struggling to improve slum conditions. Cf. Patel & D'Souza (1987).

⁵ In fact, in March 1985, in Chembur, a former green picnic spot, a thousand people complained of the effect of 'ammonia' gas leakage from the prestigious RCF government owned fertilizer Company. Cf. *The Hindu* (Sept. 8, 1985). In the "smoke city" the industrial workers suffer permanently from tuberculosis and various pulmonary diseases. Cf. a comprehensive study of Mumbai main factories by Jagannath Dubashi (1985/1) 74 ff.

India also has one of the highest percentages of road accidents in the world.¹ These accidents kill four persons a day in Mumbai, not to mention those who are merely injured. The problem of transportation is a nightmare.² The western Railway runs 750 trains daily between Churchgate and Virar. During peak hours, they run every two minutes carrying 3 lakh passengers every 3 hours. Trains meant to carry 900 passengers now carry 3000, many of them hanging out of doors. Three million people are passing daily through Churchgate Station. As for road transport, every day 2049 single, double-decker and trailer buses transport 36.11 lakh commuters.³ One is forced to ask, what kind of human project undergirds the necessity of such a mass transport? Are we dealing with men and women, each of whom is supposed to be a microcosm and a center of the universe, or with ants whom we deign to call "humans"? What needs to be questioned is not the efficiency of transport and the proper technology for the smooth stream of daily commuters, but the underlying assumption that a mature and cultured human community needs such monstrous megalopolis.

It is not surprising that Mumbai is one of the noisiest cities in the world, to the point of affecting mental balance and creating permanent psychic damage.⁴

All this takes place in spite of the 'Save Bombay' campaign and all manner of ecological, civic and social movements that proliferate in this city, perhaps more than anywhere else in India.⁵ This goes to prove that the problem lies in the very nature of the enterprise itself. Far from creating a new heaven for India, technology seems to have

¹ Cf. R. Ramakrishnan (1985), senior Deputy Director (Designs) Ministry of Transport on "Accidents and Damages in 9 metropolitan cities of India" and "Accident Cause" with charts. According to the police data of 1989, Delhi with 1,580,450 cars has had 1581 deaths in traffic incidents (and 7377 reported injuries). In Chennai 530,197 cars have killed 226 (and reportedly injured 2158) people. There is one accident for every 220 cars in Delhi and for 95 cars in Chennai.

² "On an average, according to unofficial estimates, a person spends 22% of his or her waking hours in commuting." Cf. Vijapurkar (1988/1).

³ Cf. James (1986) 69 ff. Besides, Mumbai suffers from an acute lack of parking space. In Nariman Point an average of 50,000 vehicles enter this business center during the day, but there are parking facilities for about 1200 cars. As a remedy the government plans to reduce progressively the number of taxis from 34,000 to 26,000. Cf. Vijapurkar 1988/1.

⁴ On festival days the noise level will reach as much as 90 decibels. And one must consider the fact that the decibel is measured according to a logarithmic scale. Therefore, 90 decibels is 106 times more than 40 decibels. Data from the Mumbai-based SOCLEEN (Society for Clean Environment) (Sept. 12, 1983).

⁵ Cf. *Save Bombay Committee* (1987), Citizen's Report (second report).

brought only short term advantages, and only for a tiny minority.¹

Some years have elapsed since the foregoing data were collected. The situation has worsened. The boom has continued for a few, but for the majority there seems to be no way out. Life is a sheer chaos for lack of proper planning.² The specter of Bhopal is a genuine reason for fear.³ "Can Bombay be saved?" is not a sensationalist report.⁴ And the controversy about the "dereservation scandal" has triggered a series of studies which show that there will be no improvement unless change is much more radical.⁵

I repeat that it is neither diplomatic nor agreeable to dwell on such gloomy figures. But we can no longer ignore them, or as is often done, dismiss them as accidental or provisional. The span of over fifty years since Independence has made most of citizens suspicious about the cause of the crisis, which lies deeper than the miscalculations of the Planning Commission or the greed of a few warmongers. The instinctive reaction of many of the upper middle class is: "Let's become 'prosperous', at least we who can afford it." As for the victimized poor, apathy and sporadic outbursts of violence are unconscious surrogates for despair.

* * *

I am not a pessimist, but would like to do more than describe mere appearances and adopt the opinions of a small powerful minority. I take my stand with the perspective of 80% of the people, who are unable to enjoy the 'benefits' of modern technicures are simply the victims of its fringe disadvantages. This majority is the 'material' which makes the 'progress' of the others possible. I am not speaking in the detached language of the philosopher or religious scholar, but in a style that is easily comprehensible to the modern

¹ A further example of how the systems does not work is the danger of drug poisoning among the indigenous peoples because of ignorance of modern medicines: "WHO had repeatedly pointed out the danger of the indian populations being bombarded with Rs. 400 crore worth of antibiotics every year by over a million registered practitioners of indigenous medicine whose acquaintance with the intricacies of microbiology is at best at the nodding level." *India Today* (Nov. 30, 1983).

² Cf. Vijapurkar (1989/1).

³ Cf. *Asiaweek* (Jan. 19, 1990) reporting on the reopening at Chembur, in a grand scale, of the former *Union Carbide* petrochemical complex (closed in 1985 after the Bhopal disaster). Kisan Mehta, President of the *Save Bombay Committee*, reminds us that Bombay has a density of 45,000 people per square km.

⁴ Cf. *The Week* (Apr. 22, 1990) [editorial].

⁵ Cf. Vijapurkar (1989/2) 78 ff.

mentality, which prefers figures, examples, and a plain description of something that is not adequately covered by sociological analysis. Most of us maintain too dispassionate an attitude toward events and facts. We want to be 'sympathetic' observers, and refuse to consider the fact that we may belong to the very causes of the crisis. Indifference in human affairs entails betrayal of our humanness and reveals a momentous and disastrous decision: the decision of inaction. Since the problems are so complex, can we jump into the vast sea of human events if we do not know how to swim? But how will we ever learn how to swim if we continue to refuse to get wet and do not enter the sea?

II.- *Interludes*

There is an awakening in India. Independence was not for nothing. To be sure, even without the Gandhis, Nehrus, and Jinnahs the Subcontinent would have attained political independence, as have most of the colonies of the European powers. We should keep in mind that the phenomenon is not exclusively Indian. Decolonization began in Europe as much as in the colonies. But it is a fact that since independence India has been in constant ferment. If on the micro-level we recognize such anarchic vitality, on the macro-level the picture appears chaotic and bewildering. Out of this kaleidoscopic picture, however, one is able to discern the possible pattern of a slowly crystallizing *maṇḍala*. If we remain where we are, the image is dismal. If we view it as an interlude before an approaching mutation the future appears hopeful.

India has ceased to appear, indeed she never was, merely a passive land, accepting everything as the sovereign law of *karma*.¹

We should overcome this (probably Western) cliché, convenient both for rulers and one-sided 'spiritual' persons who are so tolerant and unworldly that they absorb everything. On the contrary India is a land in turmoil, in constant movement. Gandhiji remains our best known symbol belying the passive attitude. Vinoba Bhave and Jayaprakash Narayan, along with many others, aroused hundreds of thousands to action, and we should also recall the recurrent outbursts of communalism, Hindu-Muslim riots, and events like those of Ayodhya and Mumbai in 1992/93. But the present day situation has older roots. From the beginning of the 20th century there have been not only Tilak and Gokhale, but also Surendranath Banerjea, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Rabindranath Tagore, Subhas Chandra Bose, Narayana Guru, and many others are symbols of this Indian awareness. Let us look at a few contemporary instances.

For heuristic reasons one could distinguish three main reactions of contemporary India to the present situation. These three reactions: 1) technocratic revolution, 2) inner resistance and 3) rebellious protest, are not mutually exclusive; but interpenetrate and work together.

¹ Cf. the field study of Poitevin (1975), being an "Enquête sur une population étudiante indienne". One of the conclusions reads: "Une énorme capacité d'endurance qui ne saurait plus se prolonger indéfiniment." 251.

* * *

Before entering into this field a sobering remark imposes itself. Modern India is a Nation-State, but it is not a Nation. It is a conglomerate of nations. "India has never had a real sense of nationalism," said Tagore long ago.¹ And even today after Independence and the centralizing tendency of the Central Government, Kerala is not Tripura, nor Maharashtra Bengal. What is said about one State may not apply directly to another. Since modern India is our case study, however, I am obliged to simplify.

¹ Tagore (1980) 105.

1. *Information Age Enthusiasm and Western Education*

These two phrases may sum up the official position of the country:

"India's endemic poverty, and all our national problems will be solved if we succeed in creating a welfare state on a socialistic pattern according to the model of a middle way between the liberal and the communist ideologies represented until recently by the two superpowers." India still follows officially a political non-alignment which would also hope to be reflected in the internal policy of the Nation, a balance between the private and the public sector, between industry and agriculture, a multiparty political structure and a certain local autonomy of the States of the Union.¹

There is a slogan which says:

"India has engaged herself in a way of no return. We have to modernize and this implies and demands westernization in the basics and maintaining a certain indigenization on the accidentals. The Indian subcontinent missed the industrial revolution. We should not allow it now to miss the electronic transformation of society, while keeping our own identity not only as a separate nation, but also with a certain 'Indian' style of doing things."²

Efficiency, however, does not permit many styles of banking, running an industry, participating in the stock-market, or in the modern automation of social life. Once in the System, one has to abide by the rules of the game.

We may have colorful local TV programs but the *dūrdarshan* has to follow the technological imperative, the financial dictatorship and the exigencies of the market.

To the question as to whether there is incompatibility between traditional ways of life and modernization, the standard answer is that the values of the modern science and technology are neither western nor eastern but universal.³ No doubt, the 20% of the population that is the economically well off believes this. For them, the technocratic system

¹ But is not this socialist pattern still a dream? "...That much abused word [socialism], which found its way into the Constitution only at the end of the third decade of Independence [42nd Amendment of 1976], has for a long time been nothing more than a fig-leaf. In truth, India has never been socialist unless socialist consists merely of having a large public sector and controls, and an unimpressive net of welfare measures which pale before what really socialist countries have and aren't even a patch on what out-and-out capitalist countries have put together." *India Today* (May 31, 1985) 7. After the 'Fall' of the USSR the mask is out and capitalism is rampant.

² "Removal of corruption at all levels in public life, use of modern technology to help farmers achieve greater results and the need to keep cultural heritage in view, while modernizing the country were the three guidelines that the Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, proposed today as the blueprint for progress." *The Hindu* (Aug. 3, 1985).

³ Cf. Panikkar 1984/26; 1988/33; 1996/55.

has provided a boost in the conditions of living.¹

The officially active Indian nation is an inner State of 15 to 20 crores of people who enjoy a 'prosperous' life notwithstanding the hardships of competition and the need to sacrifice the 'romantic' ideals of past times.² We know by now that in order for a country to become rich in a global competitive technocratic market a substantial part of its citizens has to become poorer, or at best clients of the rich.³

The slogan here is education. Although there is lip service to traditional values, the emphasis is placed on information about technological know-how, not only in the so-called 'scientific' disciplines but also in the social sciences and humanities at large.⁴ The aim of higher education, for instance, is no longer that of creating "babus" for the subservient echelons of 'modern life' as during the British rule, but to produce skilled laborers capable of getting jobs in the national market, and, as experience proves, in foreign lands as well.⁵ The so-called brain-drain of the skilled workers and technicians is evidence of the efficiency of the educational system, besides being a sign that the country cannot yet absorb the amount of expert technocrats and meet their demands standard for a high standard of living. It is not for nothing that they have become medical doctors, specialized engineers, and the like. They demand higher pay. The political establishment tries to create the necessary substructures for them, but except in a few cases of "national interest" (military, upper bureaucracy, and some hard-currency earning enterprises) without much success, and Indian

¹ Four Indian firms are among the world's 500 largest corporations outside US. Cf. *The Hindu* (Aug. 23, 1985). Those firms undoubtedly, provide a high standard of life for their top executives, and sometimes better than average conditions for their workers, but their greater competitiveness leaves the rest of the population worse off than before. A tractor makes a family rich, but leaves twenty other families without work.

² It is said that "11 crore of its [the country's] people have a standard of living comparable with those in the developed countries." Rajan Guha (1991) 48 ff.

³ Cf. Sridhar (1999/2) 89-95 and Reddy (1999) 97-104 as an example of the Hi-Tec-City built in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, financed by the World Bank (Rs. 1,500 crores) which will be "Harsh on the poor" (Sridhar).

⁴ T.S. Eliot's first verses of his choruses for *The Rock* come to mind:

"All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance.

...

Where is the Life we have lost in living?

Where is the Wisdom we have lost in knowledge?

Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?"

⁵ The Radhakrishnan Commission on Education of 1949 aimed to produce the "good man". The emphasis now is, in the words of Moonis Raza, Vice Chancellor, Delhi University, the "useful man". Cf. *The Hindu* (Feb. 16, 1988). Cf. special feature: computer education and training "A flourishing industry"; "Taking the computer to school"; "New technologies on offer" Sridhar (1999/1) 92-104 and Ghosh (1999) 101-102 on "Sensory addiction".

specialists leave the country.

By and large the theory and the praxis of education means western or technological information. Universities, colleges, and even secondary education are western in orientation. I am not saying whether it is good or bad, but am simply recognizing a fact. The curricula, the ways of thinking, and usually the language and externals are all of western origin. As a consequence, the education of the majority, the village children, has been neglected.¹ If the country has sometimes supported indigenous studies like sanskrit and ayurvedic medicine, this has only taken place in "higher education" with very little or no impact on the country.

Except for some specialized schools, artistic education is practically absent in indian education. One does not make a living out of it, and therefore it is neglected.²

There is a concern in the West about the influence of oriental gurus and spiritual practices. This overlooks the fact that western influence on the world in general and on India in particular is a hundred times more pervasive and powerful.

Official policy is to accelerate the process of economic transformation, to speed up the industrialization of the country, and to rely on education to indoctrinate citizens on the values of the technocratic civilization.³

The official stand of the country makes it sufficiently clear that this is the direction we are pursuing, whatever the human cost. The second heart transplant in the world was done in a hospital in India, but the situation of the hospitals in the country is dismal.⁴ India is becoming an industrial world-power. But its products can only be competitive because of the low cost of labor, i.e. of the appalling social conditions of the workers.⁵

¹ Cf. Acharlu (1986) 357 ff. on the concept of a model school for the rural children. Cf. also for the tribal children's education K.R. Sharma (1987). Cf. Bommai on the failure of our education in his presidential address to the Janata Party in *Frontline* (March 2-15, 1991) 41. Some other extremely alarming consequences: one, is the lack of dedicated and competent teachers. Teaching, as a whole, is no more a vocation, it has become a job, obtained more and more by stiff bargaining and bribing (the amount ranging from 25,000 to 100,000 Rs.); second, the mushrooming of new colleges, tuition centers and the like. Cf. Nayar (1985), highly critical comment on those two negative aspects in Kerala. He laments too, and rightly, about the defective or non-existing physical education.

² Only the rich can afford special classes for art as a hobby, and not as an essential part of the cultivation of the total personality — exceptions notwithstanding like some private initiatives. Significantly enough, 50% of the already meager budget on education goes to institutes of higher learning.

³ The newspapers are full of advertisements to allure the people. Not only about computer centers and classes which promise to lead the students to a bright future, but there is a mischievous tendency to convince the families that a 'Home Computer' will work magic, for the children's education, for managing the home, for everything.

⁴ *The Times of India* (Nov. 19, 1990).

⁵ The average net benefit of the most representative chemical companies of India is 16%.

In spite of Gandhi's emphasis on basic education in the villages, Nehru's policy of rapid individualization and heavy engineering has prevailed and accelerated.¹

2. Inner Resistance and Withdrawal

These policies have led to inner resistance and withdrawal, which are not the same as the Gandhian "passive resistance" and the "non-cooperation" movement. Such withdrawal and disenchantment has meant a sinking into the deepest recesses of the soul until there is no concern for anything but immediate needs and interests. This goes a long way to explain the much denounced public corruption in India. The present System, from western democratic ideology and forms of technology to the required objectification of reality and individualism of modern life, is not congenial to the immense majority of our people. The Indic *psyché* reacts to this situation by offering an inner resistance, which manifests itself in a lack of fervor and commitment. Such a response produces a pathetic resignation and inertia. Many speak of how "things have to be done", "how the game has to be played", and that "the comedy must go on", etc. To avoid serious penalties, people simply 'get along', acting with cynical unconcern. Sociologists agree that most people do not envisage change, and those who are aware that things must change very often lack proper support to bring it about. Their bitter experience of the past has shown them that any change is often for the worse. Most of the people simply want to improve their living conditions, their standard of life. Change is a modern category; improvement a traditional symbol, and growth a natural event.

¹ Here are some excerpts of the daily press [*The Hindu*] of January 26, 2000: "That India is keen to make the most of the growth in information technology became amply evident during the Republic Day parade here today, where a large number of tableaux focused on the use of computers in various fields of activity.

The most striking of these (...) came from the Central Department of Education. It depicted the changes in the educational system, from the days of 'gurukul' to the modern age, when computers and satellites have become an integral part of the education mechanism.

The tableau from Mizoram, whose subject was peace, also showed a woman working on a computer. Her presence among dancers performing the bamboo dance, showed that computers had become a part and parcel of life in the State.

[Andhra Pradesh] is creating ripples through its «electronic governance»..."

The new Messiah is high technology.

³ The Dalits (downtrodden, depressed), broadly comprise those named the scheduled castes, formerly called untouchables or outcasts.

The leaders of about 160 million dalits and their well-meaning supporters struggle hard to help them change their living conditions and get rid of their long-standing stigma.³ Nonetheless, by and large, like the blacks in North America and unlike most of the *ādivāsī* (called tribals) who struggle to keep their separate identity, the majority primarily want to improve their chances of entering the main stream of the country.¹

The cliché of indian apathy or oriental fatalism is an oversimplified misreading of the situation. If one touches a vital nerve of the indic soul, its people will react as violently as any other. But it has to be something felt as ultimate, otherwise it is not worth the effort. Language is such a thing, and so is caste and religion.² Communal riots are not simply events of the past. They happen anywhere in the country, at any time, for various reasons. 1990 saw violent riots spread country-wide, particularly in the north and east: hindu-muslim antagonism linked with the Ramjanma-bhumi-Babri Masjid controversy at Ayodhya culminated in the violent destruction of the mosque, December 6, 1992. The furor over the Mandal Commission, and the reservation jobs for the "socially and educationally backward classes" attained frightful proportions.³

Prophets are at the same time both children of the culture that nourished them and personalities who have transcended the *status quo*. This is why they fight against and denounce the main trends of the particular tradition in which they live. It is not by chance that prophets suffer at the hand of their own people. India has prophets of non-violence

¹ Recently, one dalit leader from Punjab, Kanchi Ram, has launched a new political party 'The Bahujan Samaj' which groups the oppressed outcastes and low castes. "He [Kanchi Ram] vowed to end the rule of the 15 per cent which these three castes [Brahmans, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas] comprise..." (D. Mukerji (1990) 18 ff). Kanchi Ram believes that it will have between 80 and 85% of the voters. Cf. Tully & Masani (1988) 77 ff and V. Ramakrishnan (1994) 4 ff. One may remember here Shyam Sunder, the fierce promoter of India's Dalit Movement with his formidable Bhin Sena and the short-lived Dalit Panthers in Maharashtra in the mid-seventies. Cf. Shetty (1978) and Weid & Poitevin (1981) 34 ff.

² When Rajagopalachari was Premier of Madras Presidency (1937-1939) he had to face a stiff resistance and harassment from the people and from the opposition on account of the teaching of Hindustani his ministry had introduced in schools. Cf. Rajmohan Gandhi (1984) 18 ff. Nearly half a century later the issue remains as burning as ever. Cf. RGK (1986) 8 ff on the language crisis. In an outburst of violence in Goa, the recognition of Konkani as the official language was one of the major issues. Cf. Madhan Mohan (1987) 105 ff.

³ Cf. Jethmalani (1990) 64 ff. The controversy is a most crucial issue. The well-known lawyer, N. Palkhivala, paid a rich tribute to Dr. Ambedkar on his Birth Centenary's celebration: "He gave India a Constitution which guarantees equality to all as its basic feature, and ensures a truly egalitarian society where no class would be unprivileged, underprivileged or privileged on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, dissent, place of birth or residence". On this ground he challenges the validity of the Mandal report before the Supreme Court (1991) 18 ff. But this is the letter of the Constitution, and after half a century a great part of the population remains highly discriminated.

precisely because people are violent and need prophetic voices against a weakness in the culture.

Most of traditional religions, and asian dharmic conceptions of life in particular, tend to consider this material world fleeting, and ultimately only provisional when not illusory. In such a framework, if external things do not turn out according to one's wishes, it is more realistic to adapt oneself and find inner contentment than to fight a hopeless battle.

Not all the causes for inner resistance, however, are directly religious. Many believers today try to reinterpret the role of religion as fostering change and even revolution. Another subtle cause of inner resistance is the often unconscious mistrust of those developments that are dimly felt as destructive of the entire fabric of traditional life. Advertising agencies try to convince the public that paradise is being created by the products of big industry. Something must be lacking, however, in a technological product when in some cases up to 70% of its net value is spent on seducing potential buyers.¹

I submit that this inner resistance to modernity is a healthy symbol of wisdom, and not a sign of backwardness, as propaganda would like us to believe.

In addition to many political factors, this skepticism of the indic soul in regard to exogenous forms of living has also played a central role in the fact that India has not embarked on any of the varying radical revolutions that have taken place in Japan, China, Korea(s) and Kampuchea. The indic *psychê*, in a word, is not orientated to messianism — in spite of its tendency to guru worship and the “cult of personality”.

Here is a case of a conflict of kosmologies, as I will explain later. Like clouds, myths do not clash, but if they are overcharged and overstretched, myths may turn into ideologies, and unleash bolts of lightning. Another name for this process is *conscientization*, a raising of conscious and self-conscious awareness within an emerging myth that has crept in surreptitiously. This is our third type of reaction.

3. *Protest and Rebellion*

¹ Decades ago the today unjustly neglected R. Tagore warned in his lecture on “Nationalism in India” that the lack of connaturality between western modernity and the soul of India. “But the present day *commercial civilization* of man is not only taking too much time and space but killing time and space.” (Emphasis added) Tagore (1980) 120.

An increasing number of people in India today live in confrontation with the present organization of society, whether by outright civil war in the north-west and the north-east of the country or by student, peasant, dalit, weaver, lawyer, teacher, or worker protests of all kinds.¹ Some protests are underground, others are vociferous and visible; some are primarily religious, others have political, social or intellectual roots. Some are democratic and legal; others contest the very framework of society.

Some of the groups belong to the extreme left, others to the extreme right. The former have marxist overtones, while the latter represent religious, especially hindu revivalisms.² Others have a primarily political character — which does not mean they are not of a religious nature — such as the sikh revolution in Punjab. Although the established political parties share in the dynamism of the country, they are largely marginal to the protest movements, since the latter challenge the very ground rules of modern India, and thus the framework of the political parties themselves.

i) Political Opposition

The Republic of India has adopted the western model of democracy, as if it had no memory of autochthonous political styles. This has been possible due to the absence of genuine autochthonous leadership —except Gandhiji and a few others —and the profound impact of the british rāj. The british followed a pragmatic policy, which has remained the

¹ A tribute must be paid to the indian press, which untiringly and courageously reports all the troubles that affect India, political, economical, social, etc. It is still in the name of the nation-myth, but certainly has much more critical distance than the press, for example, in many other countries, which are dazzled by their nation-myth. Cf. Jagannath Dubashi (1985/2) 146 ff. *The Illustrated Weekly of India* has regularly brought out openly the corruption in political circles until 1993, cf. e.g. the issue (Jan. 18-24, 1987) "Mystery and Scandal: An Update on the Infamous Milestone in Recent Political History". Yet, freedom does not mean necessarily veracity and competence. A journalist as experienced as Arun Shourie is rather critical of the contemporary press. Cf. his views in Tully & Masani (1988) 162, and his pertinent analysis (1991) 62 ff where he makes a frontal attack on the "intellectuals, historians and experts" — including the activists of all sorts — who, he says, mislead the readers: filling the pages with platitudes, playing the game of mediocre politicians, not asserting the facts on the spot ..., e.g. "Over the last two years papers have carried scores and scores of statements on the Ram Janmabhoomi issue ... But all statements emanated from just half-a-dozen "intellectuals.", 65.

² Cf. the religious-political *ekamāta-yajña* organized in the end of 1983 by the Vishva Hindu Parishad (which at that time claimed 350,000 members) for "national integration" — mainly of the 550 million hindus — under the spell of *Bhāratamātā* or Mother India worshipped as a new Goddess. Recall also the events around the Ayodhya episode of December 1992. The reaction has increased in more recent years and hindutva has become an ideology.

pattern for independent India. They did not interfere with autochthonous institutions; they simply implanted their own more or less effective administration. This British administration has now been taken over by Indians. The Indian leaders believed, as the British did, that once they made the technocratic and individualistic system work, everything else would fall into its proper place.

There is but one substantial difference. Whereas the foreign rule of the British could coexist with more or less autochthonous local bodies, once the Indian State was created the local autonomies lost their "raison d'être". "After all, we too are Indians." The centralization and homogenization began. Only the myth of coexistence remained.

In the new democratic society, the Constitution is the recognized deity. It allows for democratic opposition. And opposition has indeed existed, although until recently, the Congress party, the protagonist of Independence (and of Partition), has continually ruled the country except for brief periods.

In spite of the dark moments of Indira Gandhi's Emergency and notwithstanding the increasing corruption, and even, according to some, the "criminalization of politics", it needs to be said that India is not a dictatorship and opposition parties by and large show respect for the Constitution. There is no point in reviewing here the ups and downs of Indian politics or mentioning the increase of politico-religious fundamentalism. The fact is that the Constitution allows for opposition and even protest.

One should recognize that in spite of many theoretical loopholes, practical abuses and demoralizing corruption India's political system has produced a relative stable way of life, maintained a certain order for most of the country, avoided open civil wars, and offered a framework of civility. Since the situation is deteriorating for the reasons I have already begun to point out, the open question is: how long can this order be preserved?

ii) Social Challenges

The social situation is threatened by injustices of all sorts. Food, water, housing, education, and more recently ecology, are major concerns.

Take ecology for instance.¹ Victory in the Silent Valley controversy is a good

¹ Cf. the different references to ecology in part I of this study. They are all related to some forms of protest, few of which leading to victory as in the Doon Valley. For several years the Doon Valley had been robbed of its natural splendor due to the quarry operations. "This is the first time that ecology has been given the due consideration in our legal system", wrote Dr. J. Bandyopadhyay, who prepared the report on the Natural Resource Utilization in

example of this growth in conscientization.¹ Scientists have also made a report on the Nicobar & Adaman Islands, where the process of modernization has proved to be very harmful both to the local aboriginals and to the highly vulnerable ecosystem.² The Chipko (to hug the trees) movement started in the Himalayas in the seventies, led by Chardi Prasad Bhatt, to prevent contractors from cutting down the trees.³ Sunderlal Bahaguna was one of Bratt's heroes.⁴ The Appiko movement in Karnataka, inspired by the Chikpo, was launched by local activists in 1983.⁵ There has been a steady enthusiasm among young people for environmental camps.⁶ This is also evident in the many volunteers for the "Save the Western

Doon Valley. Cf. "Restoring the Lost Splendor" by the Agriculture Correspondent, *The Hindu* (Sept. 8, 1985).

¹ We refer to a hydroelectric project in Kerala in one of the few virgin jungles of India which would have submerged 830 hectares of tropical forest with unique specimens of fauna and flora. After years of controversy the then Primer Minister (Indira Gandhi) decided to shelve it. Cf. Vijayan (1982) 28 ff, where the author quotes the Atharva Veda XII, 1, 35: "O Purifier, let me not pierce thy vitals or thy heart", then he comments "The Rs. 120 crores project would have done precisely that. It would have driven a wedge through the Valley's vitals and its heart, for a 10.000 hectares irrigation target and a mere 50 megawatts more of power." Cf. Parthasarathy (1999) 65-72.

² Cf. Appan Menon (1985) 73. More recently governments and industrial lobbies have learnt to keep the ecological appearances and hire experts to rubber-stamp their projects. Cf. *Frontline* (March 26, 1993) 62, on the coastal railway in Goa.

³ Cf. Bhatt's excellent study on the Chipko andolan (movement), Bhatt (1990) 20 ff.

⁴ He goes wherever, in the country, nature is threatened by Man and his technology and takes an active part in the resistance movements. He was in the Doon Valley after the verdict of the Supreme Court (*The Hindu* (Sept.13, 1988); he joined the "Save Nilgiris Campaign" (*The Hindu* (Dec. 26, 1988); he was in Kodagu (Coorg) when the controversy arose on the tea plantation project (1988); he joined the protest on the Narmada Valley project (1989). He has been on an indefinite fast in December 1989 demanding that the Tehri hydroelectric dam project in the Himalayas be dropped. Cf. P.K. Roy (1990) 77 ff. Many, inspired by him, have started the struggle in their own regions. In 1988 he asked the central government to give full support to the environmentalists' request for an emergency session of the U.N. Assembly on tropical forests. Cf. *The Hindu* (March 20, 1988).

⁵ The volunteers of Appiko utilize *Yakshagana*, the traditional folk theatre of Karnataka to convey their message "Harmony with nature for eternal prosperity". Cf. Venkataramani (1985) 83 ff.

⁶ Cf. Baskaran (1985). We learn, in the same report, that there are more than 200 voluntary organizations in the country concerned with environmental protection. Educationists are keen on awakening the students to the preservation of forest and wild life. Cf. the report on 10 days 100 km trekking in the Nilgiris by a large group of students of the National Service Scheme (NSS) in *The Hindu* (March 19, 1987). A multidisciplinary approach is taught to save forests at the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University. Cf. *The Hindu* (March 23, 1987). A scientist, T.N. Khoshoo writes about "A holy war for ecology", underlying the crucial challenges faced by India and Pakistan, Khoshoo (1990). Some informal groups of students like the "Group of Rural Activities" (Indian Institute of Technology at Powai, Mumbai) are directly contributing to rural development since 1984. Cf. *The Hindu* (Feb. 24,

Ghats March".¹

The sheer number of protest groups today is revealing. One of the lessons of the 'Emergency' of Indira Gandhi some years ago was the realization of how fragile the country was due to a lack of *vital* substructures. An attempt at dictatorship today would encounter far more opposition; the entire subcontinent is waking up.

Protests are not only directed against injustice, oppression, misguided policies, and corruption, but also question other aspects of social life.

For example, people are becoming more aware of the deleterious effects of the allopathic medicines produced by the big multinational companies. In recent years there has been increasing discussion about "popularizing indian medicine" and some positive measures have been taken in that direction by local administrations and private institutions.² Except in Bangla Desh, however, there have been no official decisions on the subject.³ Another important aspect of health care is how to tackle hunger and malnutrition on a local basis. This is not only a matter of government policy but of the proper education of people. A revolution is urgently needed in this sphere, too.⁴ The protest against industrialization projects and the urbanization which they entail arises from an awareness of their highly detrimental effects on health in general as well as on mental balance.⁵ Everything is connected. to work for the conservation of nature is to work for the well-being of the people.

In addition, consumers in both the rural and urban areas are more and more aware of

1991).

¹ What the participants reported was extremely alarming: catastrophic ecological damage, acute water and firewood shortage (Gujarat & Maharashtra), reduced soil fertility, wild animal population declining, medicinal plants disappearing, nefarious effects of development projects. Cf. *The Hindu* (May 26, 1987; Feb. 1,4,16, 1988); Vijapurkar (1988/2) 82 ff.

² Cf. *The Hindu* (Nov. 22, 1985); (March 17, 1987); (March 29, 1987); (Aug. 30, 1989); Surajeet Dasgupta (1989) 109-110.

³ Due to the untiring efforts of Dr. Z. Chowdhury, the government of Bangla Desh framed and implemented the "National Drug Policy" which banned over 300 drugs "as useless and injurious to health" (May 1982). Dr. Chowdhury founded, in 1972, the Gano Sasthya Kendra (people health center), a medical complex for the rural poor, near Dhaka, cf. Haroon (1985). Since then it has expanded: besides 23 independent units, there is the pharmaceutical branch which produces essential drugs at a low price. Dr. Chowdhury won, in 1985, the Magsaysay award for community leadership. So far, only 14 drugs have been banned by New Delhi. Cf. *The Hindu* (March 11, 1987).

⁴ Cf. Swaminathan (1985) 96-97, Director General, International Rice Research Institute.

⁵ On August 14, 1985 the Ministry of State for Health told the Rajya Sabha that the number of people affected by serious mental disorders may rise to 14 million; rapid urbanization and industrialization being the main cause.

their rights, and of the possible exploitation by the government and industry.

The Consumer Protection Act (COPRA) of 1986 emboldened the people, but the overall policies of the Government have not changed much. The capitalistic lobby is still too powerful.

* * *

Let us look at a few concrete examples of protest by exploited and oppressed sections of the society, and at other forms of 'protest' linked with different aspects of social life.

* * *

iii) Women's awakening

Hardly visible at Independence, and still in its first stages, the women's movement is increasing day by day. A few examples:

An activist women's group in Delhi voices its concern about 'Women and Society' its journal *Manushi*.¹

Some women's movements have a rural basis, like *Shri Shakti*, inspired by the late Acarya Vinoba Bhave, which has branches all over the country.

Activist groups and local women burning issues: the dowry system, alcoholism, and various forms of exploitation.²

¹ The editor, Madhu Kishwar, says:

"*Manushi* has tried to avoid a "ladies" compartment approach to women's issues, that is, confining its concern to problems like dowry, rape, abortion. To limit women's concern to these would be to accept society ghettoization of women, to accept that we are powerless to change and redefine the world. Therefore, *Manushi* attempts to explore and analyze as many as possible of the significant things happening around us, from the point of view of women, particularly women of the oppressed groups and communities... In the last few years, the content of *Manushi* has reflected the fact that the scale of injustice and violation of human rights is rapidly escalating..." Cf. Kishwar (1986) 4. The *Manushi* team is bold enough to take a firm position on serious issues. Cf. Kishwar (1984) 10 ff on the Delhi massacres (Nov. 1984) against Sikhs.

² An anti-dowry cell, Nari Nirman, run by young women has been set up in Delhi to help dowry victims and their parents. Cf. *The Hindu* (Jan. 2, 1984), and the Crimes Against Women Cell of the Delhi Police registered 2,344 cases in 1988 — some 200 more than 1987. According to figures released in Parliament 922 women were burnt to death in 1988 for dowry and there was a 65 per cent increase in the number of dowry deaths in the two years

More and more, traditions leaving low-wage girls and women in highly detrimental conditions both in the villages and in the cities have been openly exposed by the press, and some bold initiatives in rural areas have also been publicized.¹

: The dedication of young girls as 'devadasis' (Karnataka), as 'jogins' (Andhra Pradesh), which has continued even though forbidden by law, have met with social outrage.²

One begins to hear of the plight of women tobacco workers of Gujarat, their long hours of hard work in unhealthy debilitating conditions for less than the minimum salary, and their exploitation by the tobacco farmers and factory owners.³ Unfortunately, such examples could be multiplied.⁴

On the opposite side, Tamil Nadu Joint Action Council for Women has initiated a comprehensive program for the training of women wage laborers in the building industry.⁵ It is clear, however, that there are many issues besides that of wages.⁶

Whenever women rights and welfare are mentioned, one cannot forget the name of Ela Bhatt, who defied bureaucratic ties and male domination and launched the SEWA (Self Employed Women Association) in 1972.⁷

from 1986 to 1988. Harassment and murder of young married women by their husbands and in-laws have increased manifold after the much publicized amendment in 1984 to the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1951 and again in 1986. Cf. *The Hindu* (Oct. 15, 1989). In Bangalore, Vimochana, a women group, organized a seminar on "cashing in on women issues in films", in *The Hindu* (Nov. 22, 1985).

¹ In September 1987, both the press and women's organizations condemned the 'Sati' in Rajasthan, which took place despite court orders and a law that banned it 150 years ago. This is the practice of the widow following her husband to the funeral pyre to be consumed with him. In Rajasthan it is still considered a holy act and temples are dedicated to the 'Satis'. Cf. *The Hindu* (Sept. 16, 1987) and *Manushi* n.42-43 (1987) 2-34.

² 'Devadasis' and 'jogins' are young girls whose life is dedicated to the service of the temple. Cf. *The Hindu* (Feb. 15, 1987) regarding "1000 girls dedicated as 'devadasis' in Belgaum Dist"; and (Feb. 16, 1987) regarding the 'jogins' of Nijamabad. Cf. also "Prostitutes claiming their rights" in *Manushi* n.58 (May-June, 1990) 35-36.

³ Pressed by a lawyer, the Gujarat High Court ordered an inquiry. The report stated, "Appalling is too mild a word to describe the inhuman working conditions of the workers employed in these units... None of the labor laws is in practice implemented by the labor officials, though on paper everything exists..." Cf. Kuruwa (1991).

⁴ Cf. Rajalakshmi (1999/2) 87-88 on the exploitation of women workers in the export processing zone (NEPR) outside Delhi.

⁵ Cf. Lakshman (1988).

⁶ The "All India Democratic Women's Association" organized meetings in Tamil Nadu to protest discrimination against dalits. One example: the "two tumbler system" in popular tea shops with one set of glasses for dalits and another set for caste people. Cf. Sivaraman (1999) 96-97.

⁷ She started in 1972 in Gujarat with 300 women, in 1988 SEWA had 40,000 women members in 7 states. "The goal is to organize self employed women and make them "visible", enabling them to receive higher wages and to

Meanwhile an increasing number of upper middle class women have made use of their education and proven their competence in several spheres and professions that are no longer the exclusive realm of males.¹

Despite some positive trends, one cannot be very optimistic. The provisional Census 1991 shows an alarming decline in the birth sex ratio. The Committee on the State of Women in India declared that "The marginalization of women in the economy, in the family, in the community and the political process, have all contributed to women's growing poverty, hunger and higher mortality in virtually all age groups."²

iv) The Plight of Farmers

The rapid and often unnecessary transition from traditional farming to modern technological farming, transforming agriculture into agribusiness, has created an imbalance in the country. Only well-equipped land-owners reaped the benefits of the "green revolution". Again the issue goes beyond technological expertise and economic power; the question is what kind of civilization do we wish to create?. In spite of its degradation due to various causes, traditional agriculture was integrated into the rhythm of the earth and of human life — as most religious rituals show. Toiling the land was a way of making love to the Earth, so that she might yield her fruits. Today the cultivation of the earth is reduced to 'factories in the field' for the exploitation of resources and production of (fast) food by agribusiness.

The transition has had negative effects on the majority of indian farmers.³

have control of their income." Cf. Behal (1988) 97 ff; also Tully & Masani (1988) 62 ff.

¹ A few examples at random: the first woman to set foot on the Everest. Cf. Mitra (1984) 140. In 1985, Kerala had its second police station run by women to deal with cases related to women. Cf. Prasanna (1985) 17. In February 1987, seventy seven young women became the first members of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF). Cf. *The Hindu* (Feb. 6, 1987). Even theological colleges, formerly a male bastion, are welcoming an increasing number of women. Cf. *Religion and Society*, vol. XXXI, n.3 (Sept. 1984). For women in the field of education, cf. *Religion and Society*, vol. XXXVI, n.3 (Sept. 1989). Cf. Bhattacharya (1991) for women painters.

² Cf. Mazumdar (1991) 49 ff.

³ Cf. "The Other Half" in *India Today* (Feb. 15, 1985) 7. This sector, grossly neglected during the british rule is gaining more recognition due to its vital importance: "The growth of systematic awareness in agriculture at the highest levels in India is based on the recognition of the fact that approximately three quarters of total employment, half of national income, over 40 per cent of capital formation and three quarters of export, including manufactured agricultural products are accounted for by this sector." B.N. Nair (1975) 154. But, we

It is true that agricultural workers and those in related occupations, a little less than 70% of the population, have their own powerful and articulate movements. Nonetheless, daily press reports tell us of the almost desperate situation of the majority.¹ The pressure is not only economic and social. It is also psychological. We may single out a movement started in Maharashtra;² and a similar one from Uttar Pradesh.³ Both have an impact on the entire country.

v) The Predicament of the Ādivāsīs

This is one of the worst failures of the Indian Republic. In general, the neglect of the ādivāsīs is due neither to racism nor to ill-will, but is the result of an uncritical adoption of European "Enlightenment" ideology, which considers industrial Man as the acme of civilization. Benign neglect is the best the ādivāsīs can expect — which obviously breaks down when their lands hold riches, or when some dam or similar project is to be implemented.

All over the country the original inhabitants of India are suffering from exploitation by forest contractors and politicians.⁴ Though the government has launched several

must also keep in mind that 40% of the rural population are landless laborers, which means that they do not have a minimum guarantee of any source of income, and 45% of those who own land are forced by economic necessity to do additional work or to sell their land. Kappen (1977) 31. Consequently, the only ones who end up making any profit are 15% of the land owners.

¹ The situation of the dalits is the worst. 75% are connected with the land, yet 50% are landless laborers while the other 25% are very small-scale farmers. Cf. *Dalit International Newsletter* (February 1977) 3.

² Sharad Joshi, the leader of the Shetkari Sanghatna, "a non-political rural based movement" defines it as "the most fundamentalist economic movement". He defends "the process of capital accumulation, coming from surplus value — from the exploitation of labor. The Shetkari Sanghatna is concentrating on this diversion of surplus from agriculture to industry. If surplus production is left with agriculturists it results in higher wages and greater employment, and this creates purchasing power among the needy... Poverty and economic stagnation are unnatural things... All ills of society, including corruption, are direct products of perverted capital accumulation." Cf. Bakshi (1987/1) 44 ff. The movement has also a women's front, the Shetkari Sanghatana Mahila Aghadi, active in raising women's issues. Cf. Omvedt (1987) 16-17. Cf. also *The Hindu* (Jan. 23, 1985).

³ The Bharatiya Kisan (Indian Farmers) Union (BKU) launched an important agitation in Meerut, February 1988. Cf. *The Hindu* (Feb. 3, 14, 16, 17, 1988). In Lucknow, 3000 farmers of western U.P. have been arrested. Cf. *The Hindu* (March 20, 1988).

⁴ Cf. *The Hindu* (Dec. 9, 1989): after local election results, the tribals in a lonely village were violently assaulted by members of the victorious party, which they had not supported. This is a recurrent practice.

programs for their welfare, most of the time either the programs are conceived in a way that is alien to their mentality and way of life, or they are not properly implemented, or both.¹ In spite of a few private initiatives, the aboriginal population is frustrated.² The displacement occasioned by development projects has immensely affected their way of life.³ Destabilization has been caused by the measures tending to uproot them from their natural habitats to safeguard "wildlife".⁴ In some regions their sound ethno-botanical knowledge is ignored while attempts are made to involve them in technology projects unsuitable for the area.⁵

Not surprisingly, since they do not have the means to oppose exploitation, some of the ādivāsīs accept support from extremists.⁶ The present day ādivāsīs awakening is of the

¹ Cf. the terrible examples of building 'modern' housing for the pre-āryan tribals of Vynad in North Kerala in Biswas (1992). Cf. the entire issue of the *India International Center Quarterly*: "Indigenous Vision (Peoples of India Attitudes to the Environment)".

² An example: in recent years the ādivāsīs of five tribes in Gudalur (Nilgiris) have been struggling hard with the help of their own Society (Ādivāsī Munnetra Sanga) to recover their ancestral fertile forest land occupied by unscrupulous people. They want a law to safeguard their land. Cf. Thekaekara (1991/1) 85 ff; and (1991/2) 99 ff. Among the several organizations and persons committed to the cause of the ādivāsīs we may mention P.K.S. Madhavan, from Kerala, who founded AWARE (Action for Welfare and Awakening in Rural Environment). Cf. G.S. Radhakrishna (1989) 10 ff. Cf. also the Vivekananda Tribal Welfare Center in the Bilgiri Rangana Hills of Karnataka.

³ Cf. Devdutt (1987) 42-43 where statistics show the uprooting of people, particularly tribals, who are forced to abandon their land, house, identity to make room for "the temples of modern India". In 10 states 50 lakhs of people have been displaced. Not only has their land been snatched from them, but recently, in Chotanagpur (Bihar), where the ādivāsī christians are numerous, some hindu activists have launched a campaign to reconvert them to hinduism, to which they did not previously belong, destroyed some of their shrines and built Hindu temples close to the churches. Cf. Bhelari (1990) 18-19. "Development Projects" in Bihar displaced 16 million people of which 14,400,000 (90%) were ādivāsīs. Of them only 4,900,000 were rehabilitated. An Artillery Practice Project in Gumla will displace 278,000 people of which again 90% are ādivāsīs. Public reaction was only minimal. Cf. *The Week* (Feb. 5, 1995).

⁴ Cf. Kothari (1999) 66-70 for a wild life policy when the ādivāsīs are integrated.

⁵ Cf. Sekhsaria (1999) 67-71 on the vanishing Onge tribe in the Little Andaman.

⁶ In Andhra Pradesh, a militant minority among the Konda Reddis from the hills are helped by the People's War Group (PWG) branch of the Naxalites. Cf. Amarnath K. Menon (1984) 130 ff. Initially, it was to help the ādivāsīs in Naxalbari, near the Nepal border, to recover their land that the Naxalite movement was born. Cf. Vinayak (1989/2) 110-111. Cf. for a survey of the Naxalites in West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Bihar, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Punjab and Orissa, *Frontline* (Aug. 5-18, 1989) 107 ff; (Aug. 19 — Sept. 1, 1989) 85 ff; (Sept. 2-15, 1989) 89 ff and *The Hindu* (Jan. 31, 1995).

utmost national importance.¹

The fifty years of struggle for a Jharkhand, an ādivāsī state which would consist of parts of Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa, where different ādivāsī communities live, have been partially successful. On September 27, 1994, the Jharkhand Area Autonomous Council (JAAC) for South Bihar was recognized by the Bihar Chief Minister and the Central Government.²

vi) Villagers' Reactions

India is the traditional land of over half a million villages. In spite of the promised amenities and sometimes genuine improvements, there is still an uninterrupted exodus towards the big cities. This is a direct result of reducing of modern culture to a matter of fast profit, and the imbalance between the machines of first degree (*technê*, craftsmanship, arts and crafts) and of second degree (technology). If we can produce merchandise of every type a hundred times faster by machines, and have profit a hundred times greater than by following the more rhythms of traditional cultures, there is hardly a way to resist the bargain.³ The conditions, which are often desperate,⁴ represent a world-wide phenomenon. If at the beginning of this century only 13% of the world population lived in cities, at its close more than half do. The growth of indian cities is one of the fastest in the world. The industrialization of life demands it. The question is whether what results is human life.

Mass media, specially advertising, create a glamorous image of urban-dwellers which not only dazzles the villagers but gives them an increasing sense of inferiority. They

¹ Cf. *Religion and Society* "Subaltern Identity", XXXVI, 2 (June 1989). The journal's Institute had organized a group study on "Tribal Awakening" in 1965; most of the participants then were from Assam and Nagaland.

² The JAAC will comprise 18 districts. The initial struggle was for a separate state for all the different ādivāsī tribes of the region. Therefore, the present agreement cannot satisfy the different groups. Cf. K. Chaudhuri (1994) 32.

³ In the 60 and 70's the cycle rickshaw-vallas of Varanasi preferred to be idle the entire day at the gates of the two western-style tourist hotels and get just a trip or two to the Ganges for the foreign tourists than perspiring the entire day carrying 'natives'. It was more profitable.

⁴ In the state of Gujarat the farm laborers are 35 lakhs (census of 1991). In June 1990 the government fixed the minimum daily wages at 15 Rs. On an average a farm laborer is paid 11 Rs and works only between 60 to 70 days a year (120 to 180 on irrigated lands). For more than six months he/she (a good number are women) earn between 5 to 10 Rs. But when the harvest comes, farmers from Punjab and Haryana come with their machines and displace farm laborers. Cf. *The Hindu* (March 18, 1993).

end up as only fit for folklore and support themselves by producing folk art for tourists.

Sometimes 'protest' manifests itself by stiff resistance to government projects. For instance, a whole area of rich land along the coast of Balasore in Orissa has become a battlefield.¹

Another huge undertaking of national concern is the Narmada Valley Project, a cause of acute controversy between the government, the inhabitants of the valley, including several *ādivāsī's* communities, environmentalists and activists. On its 1,312 km course, the beautiful Narmada river crosses the three states of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat, and harbors many holy places on its banks. The plan is to build 30 major dams, with the Narmada Sagar (Madhya Pradesh) and the Sardar Sarovar (Gujarat) as super dams, accompanied by 3,000 smaller dams. The government claims that this will be immensely beneficial for irrigation and industry, particularly in dry Gujarat. But the issues at stake, besides the high cost and amount of time needed to complete the work, are the horrific ecological destruction that will result and the uprooting of the local population. The *ādivāsīs* will be the most affected. On September 29, 1989, a huge rally took place at Harsud (Madhya Pradesh) inspired by Baba Amte who insisted that big dams are "anti-people". As many as 300 groups from different parts of the country sponsored the rally, some of them had done a thorough study of the project so as to give correct information to the people. Among the *ādivāsīs*, 3000 of them had come all the way from far away Maharashtra. The

¹ The central government wants to acquire the land for establishing a national missile testing range under the Defense Ministry but the local people of the 132 villages of farmers and of a great number of fishermen about 25,000 oppose the project with great determination. They are not willing to leave their ancestral land to be uprooted for some industrial area where the government plans to rehabilitate them in the name of the defense of the country. Cf. F. Ahmed (1985/2) 45. Since then the fight has intensified. The villagers have closed the only road to the area by a strong barrier. No outsider is allowed to cross it including the officials. As soon as someone approaches, the women blow their conch shells and a defensive crowd appears. If it is a truck or a car, hundreds of villagers lay down on the road. They have formed a committee. In each village there is a suicide squad of children under a commander. Some leading politicians took their cause at heart and appealed to the government to find another site. Meanwhile, the government has established at Chandipur-on-Sea, on the same coast, an interim test range. There are some villages around. Before the launching of Agni, the satellite, on May 1st, 1988, the villagers refused to take refuge in shelters; they offered prayers and sacrificed 5 goats to their divinities so that Agni may not work. And, for the second time (the first was April 20), Agni remained in the ground. Cf. Ramdas (1988) 81 ff; T. Ganguly & R.L. Patnaik (1989) 32-33. Yet, up to now the government is not going to shift the site of the national test range in spite of the human suffering entailed. Eleven other sites have been considered, but they presented some difficulties. And the government is in a hurry. How will the drama end? Cf. *The Hindu* (March 4, 1991).

25,000 participants took the pledge to carry on with the struggle against the construction of the Narmada Sagar dam.¹

On December 16, 1994, the Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister adopted a new position with regard to the Sardar Sarovar Project,² declaring that the State Government was examining various technical aspects of the plan, and exploring the possibility of reducing the height of the dam, since the Supreme Court order of December 13, 1994 had established a height limit of the dam and allowed the four signatory states that are party to the Narmada project to present separate responses to the problems that may appear.

In May 1999, the "Save the Narmada" Movement was at a crossroads. At the end of July in a tremendous movement of solidarity with the affected people a huge rally "Free the Narmada" took place along the River.³

The broad awareness of those populations who were without democratic means of defending their rights merits serious reflection. Here are some excerpts from a letter of a villager of Jalsindhi (Jhabua district) to the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh.⁴

¹ Cf. P. Bagla & S. Menon (1988) 56 ff; Vijapurkar (1988/3) 79 ff; Kesava Menon (1988) 82-83, for a comprehensive study of the Narmada River with excellent photos of the project and its consequences. On the environmentalists stand and the Harsud rally, cf. Baruah (1989) 4 ff. As the Central Government decided to go ahead with the project, the controversy intensifies. Both parties have come to the capital: Baba Amte with a great number of *ādivāsīs* to protest vehemently, and the Chief Minister of Gujarat with his supporters to strongly plead for the implementation of the project. Cf. Murthy & Chopra (1990) 16-18.

² It was initiated by the World Bank, but support was withdrawn in 1993 when the main problems arose.

³ Cf. Venkatesan (1999/2) 124; Roy (1999) 4-29, an essay that had much impact; Bavadam (1999/1) 129-134 and (1999/2) 41-43. The fact that the World Bank was involved and later withdrew has attracted some attention outside the country.

⁴ "Shri Digvijay Singhji,

We, the people of Jalsindhi village...are writing this letter to you, the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh.

We are people of the river bank. We live on the banks of the great Narmada. This year, our village Jalsindhi will be the first village in Madhya Pradesh to be submerged by the Sardar Sarovar dam... We will give up our lives but we will not move from our village. When the water comes into our village, when our homes and fields are flooded, we will also drown — this is our firm resolve.

We are writing this letter to let you know why the *adivasi* peasants of Jalsindhi are preparing to drown themselves.

You, and all those who live in cities, think that we who live in the hills are poor and backward, like apes. "Go to the plains of Gujarat. Your condition will improve. You will develop" — this is what you advise us... If it is true that our situation will improve in Gujarat, then why aren't all of us ready to go there?

... We have lived in the forest for generations. The forest is our moneylender and banker. In hard times we go to the forest. We build our houses from its wood. From its rushes and splints we weave screens. From the

In Andhra Pradesh, a more recent and equally significant controversy is taking place because of the government's plan to set up a nuclear power plant near the Nagarjunsagar lake. Here, as in Baliapal, the area is fertile and has a dense population. The project, which had been given up by the previous state government after protests by local people, social workers and environmentalists, was taken up anew by the next government. At stake is the safety of the inhabitants, and the destruction of flora and fauna due to water pollution. The risks are high: the population around the reactor should be far less than it is, and should an accident occur, it would be impossible to evacuate the people in a short time.¹

forests we make baskets and cots, ploughs and hoes, and many other useful things... We greet various kinds of grasses; and when the grasses become dry in summer, we still get leaves... If there is a famine we survive by eating roots and tubers. When we fall sick, our medicine men bring us back to health by giving us leaves, roots, bark from the forest. We collect and sell gum, tendu leaves, bahera, chironji and mahua. The forest is like our mother; we have grown up in its lap. We know how to live suckling at her breast. We know the name of each and every tree, shrub and herb; we know their uses. If we were made to live in a land without forests, then all this knowledge that we have cherished for generations will be useless and slowly we will forget it all.

... The river too is our sustenance. The Narmada has many kinds of fish in her belly. Fish is our stand-by when we have unexpected guests. The river brings us silt from upstream which is deposited on the banks so that we can grow maize and jowar in the winter, as well as many kinds of melons. Our children play on the river's banks, swim and bathe there. Our cattle drink there throughout the year, for the river never dries up. In the belly of the river, we live contented lives. We have lived here for many generations; do we have a right to the mighty river and to our forests or don't we?

... After the forests and the river, how can we live in the plains or in the cities? You city people live in separate houses. You ignore each other's joys and sadness. We live with our clan, our relatives, our kin. All of us pool together our labor and build a house in a single day, weed our fields, and do any small task as it comes along. Who will come to lend a hand and make our work lighter in Gujarat? Will the big Patidars come to weed our fields or to construct our houses?... In Gujarat, if any sorrow or evil befalls, to whom can we go to tell of our troubles?

... You tell us to take land in Gujarat. You tell us to take compensation. For losing our lands, our fields, for the trees along our fields... But how are you going to compensate us for our forest?... How will you compensate us for our river — for the joy of living beside her? What is the price for this? ... Our gods, and the support of our kin — what price do you put on that? Our adivasi life — what price do you put on that?

... The land in Gujarat is not acceptable to us. Your compensation is not acceptable to us. We were born from the belly of the Narmada, and we are not afraid to die in her lap... In the summer before the monsoons, our village will be filled with water and we will drown.

We will drown but will not move.

Bava Mahalia." [*Frontline* (June 4, 1999)].

¹ Cf. Narender (1991) 9. Expert opinion is divided. Those with concern for nature warn about the consequences of such projects. As Prof. T. Shivaji Rao of the Center for Environmental Planning and Management Studies,

Let me cite one more instance, among so many, of 'development', which sheds different light on the issue. In Kodagu (Coorg) the authorities, apparently with good intention of stopping erosion, promoting production and creating jobs, decided to introduce a tea plantation in the coffee-growing region. This has led to a confrontation with the local population and several state organizations. Their main objections are not only ecological but also socio-cultural: tea gardens will attract many workers from outside. The result will be crowded living quarters with the predictable disturbances, while the Kodavas and their culture will be submerged.¹

The protest of the villagers belongs to the passive resistance we described in the previous section.

vii) The Cry of Bonded Labor and Child Workforce

That after half a century of Indian Independence the country tolerates this slavery, in spite of all the supposedly good will to solve this national shame, should be a matter of serious concern. There is a subtle way of justifying ourselves by lashing out an outright condemnation — and leaving it at that. Let me be clear: I am not referring to isolated cases.. Crores of the work force of the country suffer this type of slavery. Their voices are hardly heard, because if they complain, then their situation worsens. Nevertheless, these bonded laborers — many of them dalits, some ādivāsīs — are gradually making their protest. About 100,000 organized a rally in Patna (October 25, 1989). There was a huge, silent procession in which participants had a sort of bandage on their mouth to express their state of slavery.²

explains in his book *Nuclear Plants — The Silent Killers*, that the experience of Size-Well reactor of United Kingdom shows that in Nagarjunsagar, people as far away as Vijayawada will have to be evacuated during the monsoon season in case of an accident. Evacuation must be completed in six hours within the radius of 2-5 km and in 48 hours for a distance beyond 75 km down-wind from Nagarjunsagar. Cf. *The Hindu* (Dec. 25, 1994 and Jan. 29, 1995).

¹ The project is to have tea gardens on the 2000 hectares of a grassy hill area, which has no trees due to the impact of the monsoon heavy rain and high wind. The Forest Department's officers maintain that tea plantations will be a boom for the region. Cf. Ramachandra (1988/1) 89 ff.

² Bihar is known for its high percentage of bonded laborers. The West Champara district has 10,000 of them. Cf. R.R. Lal (1989) 36 ff. Swami Agnivesh, founder of the Bandhua Mukti Morcha (Bonded Liberation Front) and the KR Education Association of the Jesuits are working for their liberation and rehabilitation. Cf. *The Hindu* (Apr. 10, 1988). This slavery exists in other states. In 1987, 2.14 lakhs of such persons were identified by the Planning Commission. Cf. *The Hindu* (March 23, 1987). There is a strong unit of the Indian People's Front

The living conditions of the landless laborers is only slightly better.¹

Domestic workers are another highly exploited and ill-treated group. In big cities they have more possibilities to organize themselves, struggle for their rights, and present their demands to the State government and their employers.²

But among all those millions of exploited, the working children sufferer the most. They are too young, too weak to protest. But their abominable exploitation is becoming more and more known. There is growing indignation, and some positive measures, still very limited, have been taken to alleviate the burden of their inhuman life. According to the National Sample Survey, there are 20.5 millions of them (7.12% of total labor force).³ Tamil Nadu, with its well-known match and fireworks factories in Sivakasi, Sattur, and Vembakottai, which employ more than one lakh of children between the ages of 5 and 12 have the largest number.⁴ In other states, they work in the slate pencil, glass and glass bangles, lock making, brassware, and tile industries. In Badohi-Mirzapur (near Varanasi) about 75,000 children are employed in the hand-woven carpet industry.⁵ All those children are from extremely poor families, in which their salary is nonetheless an asset. In 1988 the National Child Labor Project seemed to offer a ray of hope in Sivakasi and the surrounding

(IPF) even in Bihar. The IPF, active in 16 states, gathers people from different groups: extreme left, social activists, environmentalists. It is a growing force, a challenge to traditional political parties including the Left. Most of the members are from a poor rural background. Cf. Prasannan (1991) 9-10.

¹ Besides heartless treatment by the landlords and police, there is a surplus of laborers. Cf. Ela Bhatt's efforts, with her SEWA workers, to increase employment opportunities of the landless laborers of Bihar. Cf. Tully & Masani (1988) 62-63.

² In Bangalore, the Griha Karmikara Sangha (Domestic Workers' Union) started in 1985. Through it, the members have succeeded to be recognized as a work force and to obtain better living and working conditions.

³ Cf. Chandrasekhar (1991) 92.

⁴ Cf. Balasubramaniam (1991). A documentary film on the Sivakasi child labor *Kutti Japanin kuzhandaigal* (Children of mini Japan) was screened at the international film festival, Chennai. "R.V. Ramani's camera follows the daily routine of the children — from their homes to dingy workplaces, which are full of sulfur fumes. Jolted out of bed at five in the morning, the children are herded into factory buses and ferried to hundreds of small and medium match and fireworks units in and around Sivakasi. Many pairs of tiny hands are soon at work chopping wood, waxing sticks, dipping them in burning phosphorous, pasting boxes, packing sticks into boxes. By 7 p.m. the children are herded back to their villages with Rs 3 or Rs 5 thrust into their palms." Chandramouli (1991) 61. Cf. also "Holding out hope" in *Frontline* (Jan. 27, 1995).

⁵ Cf. *The Hindu* (Oct. 15, 1989). Cf. also Kaul (1989) 26 ff. Cf. Sunil (1991) 30-31, on the plight of the children in general in the country. In Agra, 50% of the work force of the glass industry are children. Cf. Tully & Masani (1988) 65 ff.

area,¹ but free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14 as recommended by the Constitution (Article 45 of the Directive Principle of State Policy) remains a dream.² In fact, by 1993 the situation was worse. We need to dig deeper into the causes.³

The answer one sometimes hears from thoughtful people, who regret the situation, is that if those children did not work their families would fare even worse. Social workers constantly hear from the same thing: parents who receive a miserable salary need to improve their income through the children's labor. But this also shows to what extent the minds of some intellectuals and social activists have accepted the untouchability of the present techno-scientific-economic system, and cannot any other alternative thinkable.

When will the children of the world be free to live as children?

viii) Artists' Revolution

It is a trait of *homo sapiens* and an empirical fact of history that artists pierce deeply into the individual and collective recesses of human reality than so-called pure intellectuals.

The artistic production of India reflects present day uneasiness.⁵ Theatre, poetry, painting, sculpture and specially literature and cinema represent this mood. In general, music and architecture have perhaps most limited themselves to copying the old or imitating the West, although western influence is also noticeable in the other arts.⁶

¹ The implementation of the National Child Labor Project.

² The political scientist, M. Weiner (1991), shows how school attendance and child labor are linked. The author investigated the reasons for the government apathy regarding the promotion of children's education and the banning of child labor. The reasons are not economic — other countries with a low average income like China, Tanzania, or Kerala, to give a national example, have a high rate of primary school attendance — rather, the roots are sociological. Cf. Gouridasan (1991) 95 ff. The prevailing attitude among a large part of the middle class is that children's education would upset the existing social setting. Cf. by the same professor, "An open letter to Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Ms. Jayalalita" with suggestions about "how to solve child labor in Sivakasi" in *Frontline* (March 12, 1993) 92-93. Cf. also "Getting children into school" in *Frontline* (Apr. 27, 1991, part I) 52-60 and (May 11, 1991, part II) 87-91; cf. also (Jan. 24, 1997) 81-82.

³ Cf. the perceptive analyses of V. Das (1989).

⁵ Cf. Chopra (1999) 78-79 "Sharing the agony".

⁶ Cf. the articles in *Daedalus* (1989) dedicated to Indian painting, fiction, poetry and theatre. Cf. also the moving selection of poems from modern marathi dalit literature in Dangle (1992).

A review of the vernacular literature shows that there is a strong tendency in novels, stories, dramas and poetry to bring into the open those fundamental issues which have always existed and are even more acute in our times.¹

While much in the cinema remains mediocre and unrealistic, striving for popular success more than for quality, there are genuine film artists in several regions, particularly Kerala,² Assam,³ West Bengal,⁴ Karnataka⁵.

Some of these directors are already renowned,⁶ others belong to a younger generation.⁷ They are producing films of a high caliber, realistic, with a deep social insight and concern.⁸ As for the *dūrdarshan* serials, one of the most realistic and challenging was

¹ Mallika Sarabhai, the well known classical dancer, is an outstanding example. Her performance as Draupadī in Peter Brook's *Mahābhārata* made a strong case for women and how they are exploited by society. Cf. Habib Tanvir, the theatre producer, has been working mainly with the folk artists of his native area, Chattishgarh, using their own dialect. Inspired by Brecht, he is in search of a new idiom. Cf. P. Ramaswamy (1990). Cf. Desai (1989) for a short survey of fiction literature.

² Adoor Gopalakrishnan and G. Aravindan. Cf. Aravindakshan (1984) 46-47; Mohamed (1987) 44-45; Kumar (1989) 96 ff.

³ The young Jahnu Barua, about his *Halodhiya Choraye Baodhan Khai* (Yellow birds eating the crop away), which won the national film award (1988), says that it is an appeal to change a system "entrenched in sadistic approach and heavily tilted toward the rich and influential." Cf. Sastry (1988).

⁴ Among the young generation: Buddhadev Dasgupta, is highly committed to dealing with life in a realistic way, cf. Geetha (1989) 118 ff; for the fiery marxist Upalendu Chakravarti, films are "the most effective instruments to depict the poignant realities of the hypocritical society we live in today." Cf. Shankar (1989). As for the established directors: Mrinal Sen whose films look seriously at poverty now thinks "that it is important to concentrate on the individual and his problems." Cf. *The Hindu* (Oct. 27, 1989). Tapan Sinha also shows a social concern: "I based this story (his film "Ek Doctor Ki Maut") on the suicide of a young scientist of Delhi." Cf. Kanaala (1991) 132-133. Satyajit Ray's film *Shakha Proshakha* (Roots and Branches), says: "you cannot deny the fact that at every stage in life, every day, in everything you do, you hear of corruption at every level of society. And I thought that this was an inevitable theme to be treated in at least one of my films." Cf. *The Hindu* (Jan. 13, 1991).

⁵ G.V. Iyer, known for the high quality of his films on Adishankaracarya, Madhvacarya, and Ramanuja, has a wide range of interests. In 1988, while preparing *Wall Poster*, he asked, "What is a 'Wall Poster'? It is a mask of human behavior. It is our life. We are nothing but wall posters." Cf. his interview with K.Venkatash in *The Hindu* (June 17, 1988).

⁶ Like Shyam Benegal, who has a deep perception of human psychology, particularly of women, of socio-economic situations and a latent concern for the rural poor. Cf. Bhaskaran (1991).

⁷ C.f. Krishnakumar & Ganguly (1985) 16 ff, for a brief survey.

⁸ We may cite Mira Nair's *Salaam Bombay* on the street children of the metropolis. Cf. Rajendran (1988).

Tamas, on the tragedy of Partition. It provided considerable controversy, but for the director, "*Tamas* is much more than a mere film. It is an act of faith."¹

A double commentary is called for. On the one hand novels and cinema are powerful means of raising the level of people's consciousness. Unsurprisingly, artists are in general sensitive to the real situation of the people and the trends of the times. On the other hand, the western style of imported democracy brings with it an implicit nominalism which takes the sting out of the possibly revolutionary character of film and literature. By nominalism I mean the belief that words, including images and pictures, are just external labels for things. In such a case, one can say anything one wants, as long as nothing is changed. Literature and film arouse pity, admiration or irritation. Their impact is great, but so diffuse that one can hardly venture a general prognosis.

The so-called "New Television dispensation" since the mid 80's has had a great and on the whole deleterious influence, mainly on the rural population.²

It may be appropriate to report here that India is the third largest english publishing country in the world, and not only in quantity. Vernacular literature is also flourishing, especially in Kerala. The general trend is of rebellion and confrontation.

The "Indira Gandhi National Center for the Arts" (IGNCA) in New Delhi, which fosters an immense variety of artistic creations in different regions and sponsors a series of publications on a high intellectual level deserves special mention.³

I could cite many more examples of socio-cultural awareness, of quiet but effective steps taken at the local level and without any publicity. Many articles in the daily newspapers, weekly journals, and particularly on the "Letters to the Editor" pages, reveal the widespread indignation and frustration, and some offer important suggestions.

ix) Dalits' Rebellion

There are periodic reports from all over the country of massacres of dalits by high caste people. Up to now, the government officials and the local police have been ineffective

¹ The film is based on Bhishan Sahni's novel *Tamas*. Cf. Nihalani's (the film maker) personal account of *Tamas* (1988) 30-31 where he says: "My aim is to emphasize the *human* tragedy caused by politicians' manipulations of the religious sentiments of various communities. *Tamas* highlights the trauma befalling the common man, what he has to suffer for no fault of his own."

² Cf. Kumar (2000).

³ Cf. for instance the series *Kalātattvakośa* (1988 sq.).

in helping dalits assert their rights and achieve their implementation. In the case of such massacres, the press usually alarms the nation with its reports, some politicians go to the scene and provide some temporary relief, but nothing substantive is achieved. Until the dalits gain confidence and organize themselves to protest the terrible discrimination to which they are subjected, nothing will happen.¹ From time to time, one learns of some positive initiatives on their part.²

Predictably, the dalits have the highest unemployment rate in the country.³ The government job reservations policy has certainly helped some of them but does not go to the root of the evil nor does it restore the human dignity that has been denied to the dalits for centuries. In some regions upper caste landlords have used extreme violence against dalits, even organizing private armies to attack them if they upset the *status quo*.⁴ Even a center of higher studies of the dalit students was attacked.⁵ On the other hand, there has been a growing awareness among the people and some gestures of genuine solidarity.⁶

Recently, a private initiative originating in Tamil Nadu began offering to educated dalits the possibility of acquiring self-confidence, self-awareness and social awareness through counseling, guidance, training programs and camps designed in terms of their needs.⁷

¹ Cf. Rajagopalachari's words: "A bold plan is what the Harijan community needs, a plan of equality and virile competition", not "an extension of reservation." Cf. R. Gandhi (1984) 354. Cf. the recent study on the dalit movement, especially in Karnataka, in Nagaraj (1993) Bidwai (1999/2) 90-91, "The terrible reality of the 160 millions".

² After a massacre in Andhra Pradesh triggered by a trivial dispute between a high caste boy and a harijan girl, the whole community (about 1000 persons) fell under attack, and finally left the small town of Karamchedu for Chirala. Forming a victims' relief committee to purchase land in Chirala, they started a colony named "Vijayanagar" from scratch as an expression of their victory in settling the dispute themselves without any government assistance. They have refused ex-gratia payments until the culprits were arrested. Cf. M.V. Rao (1985) 101-102.

³ According a recent survey there were 34.4 million job seekers by the end of September 1990, an increase of 6.1% in a year. Cf. A. Mukherjee (1991) 30.

⁴ Cf. Chaudhuri (1999) 42-43 about the Ranvir Sena (army) in central Bihar.

⁵ Cf. Rajalakshmi (1999/1) 118.

⁶ In Kozhikode, Arundhati Roy offered the royalties of the malayalam translation of her best-seller book (*The God of small things*) to the Dalit Sahitya Academy. Cf. Nair (1999) 81-83.

⁷ This is the first and most important phase taken by "The Facilitation Center" in Chennai. In the second phase, the Center, while taking advantage of the benefits provided by the government will strive to take concrete steps in securing loans from banks, it will conduct coaching classes for appearing in all India government services, banking, etc. It will provide legal aid to investigate cases of discrimination and injustice. And it will keep in

While recognizing the positive aspects of this type of organization, I cannot refrain from pointing out that betterment on the micro-level also has the negative effect of prolonging the agony of the system on the macro-level.

If even freudian psychoanalysis has been detected as a way to reincorporate the lost sheep into the mainstream of 'bourgeois' society, how much more sensitive should we be to the danger of fitting dalits and aboriginals into the main-stream of a civilization which is becoming increasingly automatized, destroying other cultures and ways of life.

The desperate hunt for jobs is symptomatic. A technologically structured society will need fewer and fewer people to run the economy and provide for the 'needs' of the whole country. Automation will do the job. Is our intention to increase the number of the jobless? Doesn't the present plan make competition tougher and crueller? If the prevalent vision of Man is that of an animal anthropology, then the law of the jungle will prevail.

A major restructuring of society is needed, which in turn calls for a change in kosmology. A salary and job-oriented society cannot be overcome unless our understanding of the nature of the human activity also changes. It is important to distinguish between *work*, a creative human activity aiming at personal fulfillment and communal cooperation in sustaining the universe (the *loka-samgraha* of the Gītā), from *labor*, which is the lending of one's capacities to a generally anonymous concern (and a bureaucracy with million of employees, as the administration of a state is bound to be) in order to get a salary not only to get his/her salt (*pace* etymology) and to pay the cost of his/her livelihood.

But the plight of the dalits has existed for centuries¹. The Indra of the R̥g Veda is the enemy of the *dāsyus* and protector of the *āryans*.² This is yet another paradoxical reason to justify our title. Among the many horrible actions that Indra perpetrated was to kill the "noseless *dāsyus*".³

Until Independence the condition of the dalits was 'officially' and 'religiously' justified,⁴ and put in practice.¹ This sentiment is so ingrained in the indian soul that even the

contact with similar organizations in India and abroad.

¹ This is the name they prefer, and which has begun to displace other names that have been used mainly by outsiders: untouchables, Scheduled Castes, Depressed Classes, Harijan, *candāla*, *acuta*, *asura*, *dāsa*, *dāsyas*, *dāsyas-kula*...

² Cf. RV I, 7, 9 (He [Indra] killed the *dāsyus* and defended the *āryan varṇa*); RV I, 33, 4; RV II, 20, 8; RV VII, 83, 1. We do not enter here into the historical discussion of whether the dravidians were the autochthonous people of the subcontinent. The fact is that contemporary dalits feel they are the successors of the defeated and subjugated peoples. They begin to be conscious that their history goes back to 3500 years ago.

³ Cf. RV V, 38, 10.

⁴ Suffice to mention the Manavadharmaśāstra (VII century AD, most probably): "Candalas and Caupacas should "

Mahātmā, when there were long and heated discussions about dalits abandoning the hindu fold made disparagingly remarks about them². He thought untouchability was about to disappear and sincerely believed that their embrace by the hindus would purify hinduism.³ One can still read in the report of the first Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes that their distinguishing criteria are:

- “1- Tribal origin.
- 2- Primitive way of life and habitation in remote and less easily accessible areas.
- 3- General backwardness in all respects”⁴.

At the 1986 conference on “Dalit Theology”⁵, there was a plea that theology come out of its latin and sanskritic captivity.⁶

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar once remembered the well-known fact “that political revolutions have always been preceded by social and religious revolutions”⁷. After fifty years of struggle

dwelt outside the village, be without utensils, (for) their property is dogs and asses, be clothed with the garments of the dead, with (only) iron ornaments...” *Manu*, X, 38.

¹ In 1930 the kallar caste in Ramanathapuram issued 8 prohibitions: 1. the adi-dravidas shall not wear ornament of gold or silver; 2/3/8. the males should not wear their clothes below their knees or above the hips, nor coats, shirts or banians, nor sandals, nor umbrellas; 5. only earthen vessels shall be used; 6/7. women shall not cover their upper body nor use flowers or saffron paste. Cf. K. Wilson (1993) 82.

² “Would you preach the Gospel to a cow? — Gandhi said in an interview (whose context is important so as not to misinterpret his statement) — well, some of the untouchables are worse than cows in understanding. I mean they can no more distinguish between the relative merits of Islām and Hinduism and Christianity than a cow”. M.K. Gandhi, *Christian Missions: Their Place in India*, Allahabad (1941) 98 (apud Webster (1992) 114 with further details).

³ Cf. Webster (1992) 107-128 for this fascinating and dramatic story.

⁴ And this was printed after receiving comments from the States (because his draft was still more colonialistically ethnocentric). Cf. Massey (1991) 66.

⁵ Published in a book of the same title, Prabhakar (1988).

⁶ Cf. Ayrookuzhiel (1988/1) 83-103. In the same line, the CISRS has published an issue of *Religion on Society* on “Emerging Dalit Consciousness and Ideological Perceptions”, XXXV, 2, (June 1988). Cf. also Ayrookuzhiel (1990). The study contains pertinent analyses, e.g. by Chirakkarode (1990) 52 ff. After the centenary of Dr. Ambedkar’s birth, we should remember his thoughts, his struggles and his achievements, and that he advocated a separate electorate for the scheduled castes. Cf. P. Radhakrishnan (1991); Ram (1991) 114 ff.

⁷ *Annihilation of Caste*, 69 quoted by Ayrookuzhiel (1990) 101. He refers to the Presidential Address of a Conference in Lahore which was cancelled because the organizers found Ambedkar’s views objectionable. *Annihilation of Caste with a Reply to Mahatma Gandhi and Caste in India — Their Mechanism, Genesis and*

the dalits have become tired of calls for just social action to better their conditions. The old idea of Ambedkar that the oppressed must struggle for their own nationality, *mardhita desiyata*, has begun to gain momentum. The dalits have rejected hindu culture, which they feel is the cause of their predicament. While some have become christians and others muslims or neo-buddhists, the majority are trying to recover their suffocated culture and religion. Already in 1935 Dr. Ambedkar announced in Yeola (Mumbai Presidency) that he would not die a hindu, and his position has now become far more widespread.

In sum, the dalit people, in spite of many internal differences, and even quarrels are beginning to realize that social uplift is not enough, and that they must take their destiny in their hands. They hope to build a political movement that will make it possible to organize their own society.¹ Many of these groups advocate a "total revolution", but although marxist ideology is still alive, they do not seem to have a clear program, except for their legitimate insistence on full human dignity and political freedom. What is being questioned here, ultimately, is the myth of the Nation-State.

x) Students' Unrest

The role played by students in India is a triple sign of vitality, intellectual poverty and political instability.

It is obvious that the non-working population, since they do not have to earn their livelihood has the opportunity of developing a greater consciousness of the unresolved problems of the country. Students form the natural group for any kind of agitation. The case of Assam is paradigmatic, but not unique.

It has been said that they are the unruly mass exploited by political parties; but this is not always the case, for students themselves often take the lead — even apart from the

Development, Jullundur (1968). Cf. Webster (1992) 110 ff, for details.

¹ Cf. the Bahujan party mentioned before.

³ Professor Amartya Sen summarized his appraisal on the government policies since the independence thus: "Before the 1991 reforms on economic liberalization I had consistently taken the view than that there were two major deficiencies in the Indian economy: a massive under activity in the fields of education, land reform, health care and social security in general, and a vast over activity of the government in running a license raj. My main criticism of the policies that followed in 1991 concern errors of omission rather than commission, namely that they addressed only the second issue... There was a need for a big initiative from the government of expanding the social basis of economic development in terms of education, health care, land reform, social security and so on.

problems of the higher education in India and the world at large.

It is not my purpose here to analyze the causes of student unrest, or their leading role in such disturbed regions as Punjab, Kashmir, and Assam, as well as in several others. What I wish to emphasize is the utter failure of the present system of education, as seen both in the poor academic level achieved and in its failure to offer proper motivation.

We need to look into deeper causes of such behavior.

The moment that the universities have abdicated their traditional role of the pursuit and cultivation of authentic knowledge, the moment that they ceased to be that guild of teachers and students passionately committed to discovering and realizing truth, it became more than legitimate for students to throw themselves into the burning and unresolved issues of the country.

Those who are familiar with traditional university life since the European Middle Ages over nine hundred years ago tell us of small groups of intellectually gifted people thinking, discussing, searching, challenging, projecting, and even dreaming, who gathered together "to save the world and themselves", while trying to penetrate into the Mystery of Life. But once human life came under the grip of economic totalitarianism, because subsistence economies had been practically dismantled, most universities of the modern world have turned into institutions that seek to provide the skills and disclose the necessary information so that the younger generation could earn a livelihood. This techno-scientific know-how is not a salvific knowledge, and, except for the few inventors who create the system, does not arouse any passion nor enthusiasm. Universities have become technical trade high schools which raise expectations of a "higher standard of living" for those who have spent long years in such training. The consequences are well-known. At least political and social action is an outlet to the vitality of young people whose idealism is unsatisfied by the teachings of today's university curricula. It is no accident that the "brain drain" of the "best" students to the West continues by the thousands.

xi) Intellectuals' Critique

There is neither lack of numbers nor of quality among Indian intellectuals; not only in universities and other centers of higher learning, but also in scores of other private institutions. India does not lack scientists, sociologists, historians and philosophers. Books and studies abound, which cannot be analyzed here. Let it only be said that many modern

indian intellectuals are critical of India, acute in their diagnoses and clear in their studies.³ There is also an excessive preoccupation regarding the image that India projects abroad, and many of the studies written in english have the foreign reader as an invisible partner.

I restrict myself to describing three main gaps.

The first has recently been officially taken up by the "Indian Council of Philosophical Research". It is the gap between all those thinkers whose medium of expression is mainly english and the traditional pundits, who still exist, although in decreasing numbers, throughout the country. These latter do not give different answers to the problems of the so-called indian *intelligentsia*; they simply ask different questions. These are the questions of traditional India, which often ignore the dominant historical consciousness of modern official India. Living in an intellectual and spiritual life of their own, the *pundita* are immersed in their old traditions and accept modernity simply as a given fact to which they accommodate without much criticism. For them modernity means technical gadgets and a certain superficiality of life.

There is also a second gap. It is the hiatus between the *intelligentsia*, the politicians and the people. This hiatus is perhaps best bridged by literature, cinema, and the arts, as I have already suggested. Philosophers and intellectuals are generally respected, and they feel free to express their opinions and write about them. But with few and honorable exceptions, they have little influence on the political life of the country. When philosophers like S. Radhakrishna, Humayun Kabir and others held important political positions, they obviously raised the standard of political style, but they hardly changed the overall state of affairs. In general, people did not expect this from them. In spite of the effort of marxist thinkers, there is still a great dichotomy between matters of the spirit and concrete day-to-day political and economic problems.

But there is still another more formidable gap, which is seldom noticed by intellectuals in general or philosophers in particular — despite a few, mostly modern, exceptions. For lack of a better word, I call it the *cultural gap*. We know that "indian philosophy" does not mean only Vedānta; philosophy also includes social philosophy and metaphysics has many names; but the almost exclusive feature of indian thinking (pundits included), is theoretical thinking. Almost only the exception is marxist thinking, which has gone to the other extreme of being almost exclusively practical and pragmatic.

Let me offer a glaring example. One third of the indian population (being generous with the second third, which lies somewhat within the field of influence of the remaining third) is simply non-existent as the subject-matter of indian reflection. It is left to sociologists and anthropologists as a field of study. I refer, of course, to the dalits in general. Reading the works of the thinkers of the subcontinent through the ages, not only of hindu

writers, but buddhists, jainas, parsis, christians, muslims and others as well, one would never realize that there exists an entire marginalized population that also thinks. Classical western philosophy is not much better off, and one marvels at the opinions of great minds and even saints regarding slavery, for instance. If women have been also neglected, they were nevertheless necessary for the survival of the species, like the throngs of the lower castes for the well-being of the elites. Intellectual reflection on Man and even about reality has only been that of the self-appointed cultural Man, generally male, about himself — as if Man meant only upper caste males. Cross-cultural awareness, in this deepest sense of the word, has been conspicuously inexistent, and, what is more revealing, unconsciously absent: a monocultural vision of Man and reality, as if *homo sapiens* were not also a fully sentient animal, i.e. a living soul (animal) capable of tasting, feeling, knowing, enjoying and sensibly, i.e. consciously, living — which is what the word *sapientia* entails. This is the cultural gap. No wonder that the first outbursts against this state of affairs have not been mature or insightful enough.¹ In a word, most intellectuals use, and profoundly, the *logos*, but they have practically ignored the *mythos*.

All in all, the rules of the game for philosophical activity have been mainly western — with the separation between metaphysics and epistemology, philosophy and theology, philosophy and religion and the like.²

xii) Religious Counteractions

India cannot be understood without taking religion into account. In the midst of all sorts of protest and activism showing different sociological, cultural or political tendencies, there is a more or less conscious longing for the spiritual dimension inherent in all human beings. This longing is both fascinating and disquieting. Fascinating, because besides some indications of renewal in traditional *dharma* (in its broader meaning), there is a variety of new shoots; disquieting because the overall chaotic situation, marked by an accelerated implementation of technology, may wash away a great many of the old trees and trigger

¹ Only recently a dalit worldview, a philosophy (or theology) of liberation, and a more mature thinking of marxist influence has begun to appear. It is interesting and timely to note that “The CPI (M) [Communist Party India (Marxist)] launches a publishing venture, with a view to enlarging the domain of socialist theory and restoring some of the traditional concern of Left-wing politics to their earlier centrality”. Cf. Muralidharan (1999/2) 80-81.

² Cf. Panikkar (1997/XXXIX).

extremist reactions.

Let me begin mentioning this analysis by looking at the popular forms of religiosity which are often overlooked even though widely practiced by the people.¹ More and more religious movements are abandoning a strictly religious framework and are entering into the social and political fields. People today are looking for an anchor that will prevent them from being swallowed up by the currents of the modern age. Here are a few examples.

In Rajasthan, a new festival has been added to the many that already exist at Khejarli village (near Jodhpur), which is also a pilgrimage center with a special relevance in our time.²

Among the swamis and religious people of all *dharmas*, a few are acutely aware of the utter neglect of the destitute and of the disintegrating effects of the present trends in society. They try to deal with the situation by helping people to realize personal fullness rooted in the best of the indic tradition while remaining citizens of our time.³

The urgent need to revive spiritual values, to cooperate in the proper training of the youth through a healthy education on the ancient *gurukula* pattern — but with a wider vision — has been felt by a number of religious leaders. There are the well-known institutions of the Sri Ramakrishna Mission, of Sri Satya Sai Baba, Narayana Guru, and some lesser known education centers directed by hindus, muslims, christians and others.⁴

Educational efforts rooted in the *dharma* deal mostly with youth and are oriented towards the future. We may give some less known examples: Even outside the monastic orders, we find people who out of spiritual motives are highly dedicated to some cause. More and more, which is a rather recent development among the hindus, they offer social or medical services for the poor and the oppressed as a dimension of the *dharma*.⁵

¹ Cf. "Deities of the people" (Seminar, Tamil Nadu) where it is said that more than 60% of popular worship belongs to folk culture. Cf. Vishwanathan (1999) 95-96.

² People gather here around the temple dedicated to Swami Jameshvar, founder of the Bishnoi community 500 years ago to venerate his memory and that of the 363 Bishnoi martyrs. The members of the community pledge themselves to protect trees and animals, domestic and wild, even at the cost of their own lives. Cf. Vijapurkar (1985) 80-82.

³ One example is Swami Raghavendra, in Karnataka: an ayurveda doctor and pharmacologist, a yoga teacher, a beggar, a writer, a musician, and even a wrestler. His Sevashram started as a modest village orphanage in 1943 and since then has developed other programs for the welfare of the poor local villagers. Cf. Murthy (1984) 16 ff.

⁴ There are some institutions, known only in their region which, in a unassuming fashion, greatly contribute to a healthy education, e.g. the Sarada Vidyalaya in Salem (Tamil Nadu), founded in 1956. Cf. *The Hindu* (May 1, 1987).

⁵ The Sankaracarya of Kancipuram sponsored a number of those endeavors. For instance, the Kumbakonam

In 1972, the Vivekananda Rock Memorial Project, inaugurated a society of activists of a special type: a non-sannyāsi order of life dedicated workers.¹

The educational efforts of christian institutions deserve special mention . This is so much the case that many people almost identify christianity with schools and other social institutions — sometimes with the unfounded suspicion that their purpose is simply to increase proselytism.²

Among some social reformers and activists, who keep away from religion and spirituality as “obscurantism” and are equally dissatisfied with the marxism and radical humanism, a new category is emerging. In their struggle for social justice and human liberation, they are searching for a form of spirituality independent of any organizational structure, plunging to the roots of the theandric reality of Man, which can strengthen both themselves and those they are trying to help.³

Although there are many other organizations that could be mentioned, nothing is more important than the neo-buddhist movement.⁴ B.R. Ambedkar's plea at the end of his life is especially revealing:

“My final words of advice to you is Educate, Agitate, and Organize. Have faith in yourself. With justice on your side. I do not see how we can lose our battle. The battle to me is a matter of joy. The battle is in the fullest sense spiritual. There is nothing material or social in it. For, ours is a battle not for wealth or for power, it is a battle for freedom. It is a

Hindu Mission Hospital has been doing leprosy relief work since 1981, and runs 43 sub-centers. Cf. *The Hindu* (Jan. 30, 1987). The Sankaracarya has recently, launched a national movement, Jana Kalyan. “It will not be limited to religion, meaning it is not just for one religion. It will have to embrace the whole of the nation and involve all religions.” Cf. Jayanth (1987) 98 ff; *The Hindu* (Feb. 29, 1988; March 6, 1988).

¹ “Whether married or single, the worker will combine dedicated service of the people (without) with spiritual life (within), thus breaking the long-standing barrier between life and religion, between work and worship, in the spirit of the yoga of the *jñāna-karma-bhakti* synthesis of the *Gītā*”, Ranganathananda (1972) 12 ff.

² The christian literature on the subject is enormous; see Amalorpavadass (1973), *Evangelizzazione e cultura* (1976), Karokaran (1978) and Motte & Lang (1982).

³ “Pipal Tree is a movement which creatively explores the relationship between spirituality and social action. It primarily aims to knit together people who fight against social, economic and political exploitation on the basis of shared spiritual values.” Among its main objectives, Pipal Tree puts the accent on “whatever is liberative within every religion in India” and on “fostering a spirituality of social action”, in *Pipal Tree, A Project Proposal*, Bangalore, for private circulation; cf. also “A Pipal Tree Workshop” 15-17 Jan. 1999, Bangalore.

⁴ “Since 1956 an estimated three and a half million of the former Untouchable Castes in India have become Buddhists.” Babasaheb Ambedkar has inspired the whole movement. The neo-buddhists had such a veneration for him that they called him a “bodhisattva”. Cf. Fiske (1969) 123; 130.

battle for the reclamation of human personality.”¹

Even in this hasty survey, attention must be given to the three main religious groups of India: hindus, ādivāsīs and muslims.

As I have said, hinduism is a bundle of religious traditions, the name coined simply to distinguish it from more compact or homogeneous forms of religiousness. The same applies for the “tribals”, called ādivāsīs. Because of the polymorphic character of hinduism there is a neo-hindu tendency to assimilate the tribal religions to hinduism, even when not integrating them within the hindu fold — not without tensions and problems.

Recent political developments, which have culminated in the two ‘democratic’ victories of the more militant hindu parties, have brought to the fore one aspect of the complex political situation of the country. It is important to remember that the renascent *hindutva* movement has ancient origins. The name was coined in 1923 in a pamphlet by V.D. Savarkar, the belligerent, anti-muslim president of the Hindu Mahasabha (great assembly of the hindus), as a motto for hindu nationalism. The pamphlet focused on the revival of the hindu heritage and defended the creation of a new religio-political entity, a “hindudom”. It had a lasting influence on the RSS (Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sang: national assembly of volunteers founded in 1925), a well organized religious society emphasizing selfless service to the country under a strict discipline.²

Islām, too, is an indian religion, implanted in indian soil since the end of the Xth century and dominating the country for several centuries.³ The muslim population is often called a minority, but one can hardly call over 110 million people a minority. The formal statistics that declare hindus make up 82% of the country as against the 11% of muslims is not an accurate reflection of the real situation. Hinduism is polymorphous, while islām is more compact. After Partition muslims kept relatively low profile.⁴ Disoriented, they felt that they had to prove to themselves and others that they were as good indians as any other citizens of the Republic. To be sure, flares of communalism ravage the country now and then. Partition was a historical trauma and such wounds take long to heal,⁵ but it would be wrong to emphasize only the hostility and threats from both sides. There are also genuine

¹ Speech in All India Department Classes Conference, Nagpur, July 18, 1954.

² During the last decades the RSS has inspired: the Jan Sang, right wing political party, later called BJP (indian people party, 1951; 1979), and strengthened the “hinduness” of the Vishva Hindu Parishad (all hindu council, 1964), a cultural association. Associations based on the same ideology succeeded in defeating the Congress Party which, except for a short period, had been presiding over the destiny of the country since Independence.

³ Cf. R.C. Mazumdar (1940) 61-66.

⁴ Cf. A.S. Ahmed (1990) for an overall assessment with special reference to South Asia.

⁵ Cf. Seervai (1990) for a demythologizing account of those events.

movements for peace.¹

A community of such proportions and of centuries-long existence in the country cannot be treated as a minority without hurting the legitimate feelings of people. To begin with, *indic islām* has features of its own, not only psychological and cultural, but also theological. Not surprisingly, there is muslim participation both in all present-day movements of protest in India, as well as in islamic ferment, as the more recent events at Ayodhya have shown.²

Muslim philosophers, religious leaders, and sociologists have tried to analyze the impact of what is called 'modernity' on their own people, on the country at large, and to propose ways of facing it.³ The common conclusion is that muslims cannot remain isolated in a ghetto to preserve the purity of their culture and spirituality; they have to be open to change, to be contemporary while preserving the core of the essential values and particularities of the tradition. How to succeed in an atmosphere of suspicion? That is the challenge.

Many people who are not associated with any movement or institution, who are professionals, who have to face the fast changing situation with their families, and who feel their identities threatened, are looking more and more for spiritual guides wherever they can find them. When the guides are genuine "spirituals" of our time, their influence can be immense.⁴

The mutual fecundation of religions is also visible. For the past thirty years traditional hindu ashrams, dedicated to purely individual realization have turned to social service. At the same time, some christians, who in an earlier generation would have

¹ Cf. the Peace Conference, in Karachi (February 1999) with 500 delegates from different ethnic and social groups, including participants from Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Cf. Bidwai (1999/1) 109-110.

² At the supposed birth place of Lord Rama — Rama Janmabhumi — a temple is supposed to have existed, which during the reign of Babar (who established the Mughal dynasty in India in 1526) had been supplanted by a mosque known as Babri Masjid. A controversy between hindus and muslims took on increasing political overtones, and the masjid was demolished by hindu fundamentalists in December 6, 1992. The furor caused by the destruction represents a turning point in modern indian history. Cf. Gopal (1991), a serious study that appeared before the destruction of the masjid. Cf. a brief account in Larson (1995) 266-277.

³ Cf. Khan (1988) for a sociological analysis in depth. Though the survey has been conducted in a big city among people of different social and occupational background, it gives an insight into the general attitude of muslims in our time. Cf. Ravindra (1978) for a more philosophical analysis, and Ramswarup (1986) and (1990/1/2/3) for a more extremist and negative view.

⁴ J. Krishnamurti could be cited here.

dedicated themselves to education and social uplift, have begun contemplative ashrams.¹ In the same line, one should mention the strong attraction of the pentecostal movement.

What emerges from all these examples is twofold: First the appeal of the transcendent remains strong; this visible and temporal 'world' is not all that there is. This does not mean that there has to be *another* world, but that there is more in reality than what meets the eye. Second, this world matters, suffering is a reality, and the social structures are important.

The whole picture would be lopsided if one were to reduce this analysis to the few data I have referred to and rush to some hasty conclusions. India is much more than all this. India has a soul, and this is indic culture, not the indian political nation. India is many nations.

To begin with, the soul of India does not accept the problematic, as the first part of this study may seem to suggest, that reality is just the sum of the social, economic, political and human factors that can be measured and objectively observed. The indic soul has another scale of values. Power is the power of the spirit, happiness is the inner peace of the person, life is the cosmic unfolding of a relative reality which is evolving, transforming and undergoing a series of metamorphoses in order to culminate in a jump to another shore. The latter is invisible and hence indescribable, while we wander on this side, except for those sages who have a glimpse of that transhistorical reality.

A correction has to be immediately made, in order to avoid the frequent mistake of identifying indic culture with hinduism, even when understanding this word in its widest possible application. The recent violent attacks on christians in different parts of the country, and the latent intimidations in the name of hinduism in other areas are "undermining India" and contrary to the expression of indic pluralist culture.²

Islām, sikkhism, buddhism, jainism, christianity, zoroastrianism, and especially the tribal religiousness of India cannot be ignored. I use sanskrit vocabulary just to give examples, which are certainly very important but not unique. But the hindu reaction, mainly

¹ Cf. Griffiths (1985) 46 ff; Sahi (1985) 22 ff. *Religion and Society*, XXXIII, 3 (Sept. 1986), and Joshi (1986) 39 ff. Cf. a critique of the christian ashram in "An International Bi-Monthly Fostering Hindu Solidarity Among 650 Million Members of a Global Religion", in *Hinduism Today*, 8, n.6 (Nov/Dec. 1986) 1, 23, 25, 27. Of particular interest is a survey-study of the Ashram-schools initially started by gandhian workers for the ādivāsīs in the jungle belt in Surat and is now run by private organizations.

² Cf. P. Menon (1999) 114-115 "A campaign of intimidation" in Karnataka; Swami (1999) 113 "A deadline in Maharashtra (1999) 113; Venkatesan (1999/1) 107-112 "A hate campaign in Gujarat"; Muralidharan and Ramakrishnan in *Frontline* cover story (Jan. 30-Febr. 12, 1999) 4-21: "The politics of hate", "A catalogue of crimes (1998-1999)", "Towards a hindu nation".

in the South, against sanskritization should not be ignored either.¹ Hinduism is not a monolithic block.²

The traditional indian attitude, much more extended and deeply rooted than political officialdom may tend to assume, would not make much fuss over the first part of this study. Yes, it may be true, it would say, but life in one way or another has always been like that. People have struggled and exploited one another: man-made catastrophes and natural calamities have intertwined with the fate of this world. Wisdom means to know how to cope with them, not to allow oneself to be choked by them, not to lose sight of, i.e., to continue to have faith in, the overall meaning of existence, not to place all one's cards on history, to keep oneself free for more important and lasting adventures, to soar unto spaces about which Newton and companions had not the vaguest idea, to smile at all those people who seem to worry about us more than we do about ourselves, and contaminate us a sense of despair we did not previously know.

Political conscientization alone leads to despair. It makes people conscious of an impasse which cannot be overcome with the tools offered by religious or political officialdom. But most of the new elites are not ready for a dialogue with another worldview, because neither one side nor the other has a language in which they can understand each other. For such a dialogue, one has to enter into the realm of the other and accept its parameters, but then, obviously, people are not only disoriented, they are lost — if a synthesis is not achieved.

The voice of the tradition addressing the western world is clear:

“We are not saying to leave us alone, for we are a mixed bag of people and a great many are already not only curious, but also envious of all those advantages of the western culture now so eagerly imitated by our “educated classes”. But we implore you, do not weaken our identities, do not preach, and we even dare to say, do not teach us how we should do it better, or even dictate to us how we should help ourselves. We have genuine gurus, in spite of today's and perhaps also yesteryear's inflation of holy ones, but we do not have messiahs, we have rājas but not presidents. We do not know what to say. We are as disoriented as your writers have pointed out. We do not want isolation but we love solitude,

¹ Cf. Ryerson (1988) on the tamil renaissance and popular hinduism.

² There has been uproar among the tamilian members at the conference of State education ministers in New Delhi when the present government proposed the singing of “Sarasvatī Vandana” (Salutation to Sarasvatī Goddess of learning, in the hindu tradition) in the schools. The tamilians have their “Tamizhtlai razhtu” (Praise of Mother Tamil) honoring the language and its rich culture. Cf. Ramaswamy (1999) 92-93. Another song expressing hindu nationalism “vande Mataram” (Salutation to Mother India), which was going to be imposed in government schools, has been ruled out by the Supreme Court (so has Sarasvatī Vandana). Cf. Noorani (1999) 94-97.

we would like to learn, but at our own rhythm and in our own ways. We fear indoctrination and the kind of collective bribery that our best sages tell us we are being offered by the West, because we realize that our youth is restless and dazzled by the indisputable achievements of western civilization on the only level that civilization seems to recognize.”

* * *

I call this second part of my study *Interludes* because I am convinced that none of the described reactions is sufficient to face successfully the indic predicament.

Technology alone cannot solve the problem, not only because technology itself is part of the problem, but also because the problem of India is not a technological problem — unless we beg the question by making such an assumption.

Withdrawal and non-cooperation may give peace of mind to some, but India has so many glaring socio-economic injustices that no denial of them will satisfy the people.

Protest may be a necessary ingredient for a healthy society, but it is successful only within certain limits, within the rules of the game imposed by others. Protest and rebellion may improve a system, but will not really change it unless the very foundations of society are challenged, and not even the most perfect democratic society will ever tolerate such a challenge.

Is a radical alternative possible? That is the excruciating question.

III.- *The Radical Query*

As the facts and statistics I have adduced tell us, and beyond what reforms and rebellions reveal, there is a deeper cause for the indic malaise. Since the beginning of history slave revolts, mass upheavals, and revolutions of the have-nots have been ruthlessly put down by the machinery of the powerful institutions. And let us not forget what Gandhi said about "democracy as machinery".¹ The two preceding parts ultimately have only one purpose: to underline the sense of urgency, to help us realize that while "we" intellectuals and well-to-do, who write and think about the present situation, can wait and speculate, the people can wait no longer. The burden is intolerable, the injustice rampant, the System not viable. The "Wretched of the Earth" (Fanon) exist; they are increasing in numbers and becoming more and more "conscientized". They will be annihilated if they cry too loud, but the resulting bloodshed would be unparalleled in world history.

This sense of *urgency* should not, however, impel us into blind, desperate or violent action. In addition to the urgency of the situation, we should also realize its *importance*. And to deal with important issues requires time, maturation, perspective, reflection, even patience and serenity. Reality is rhythmic, and to know and respect the rhythms of things is a condition for a sound theory and a requisite of an effective praxis. The third part of this study would like to underscore the importance of the problematic without minimizing its urgency.

There are already a number of perceptive studies on the indic situation, and we should profit from them. The specific place of my study may be described by saying that:

- a) although the topic is India, I consider it as a point in case of the overall situation of the world;
- b) the approach is cross-cultural; and
- c) fundamentally religious or metaphysical.

¹ Cf. *Harijan* (July 13, 1940) and Chandy (1990) 387.

This study deals with what I call the *metapolitical* aspect of the problem. India represents an urgent and important problematic not only for herself, but for the world at large.

The malaise of the Indian scene is also an expression of the world situation.¹ Today, the crisis is the culmination of at least the last half millennium of western civilization. It extends over the whole planet because this civilization has spread all over the world, even more than during the era of western colonization. Contact with other cultures has produced what could be termed a *conflict of kosmologies*, as I shall explain.

We are assisting at the *End of History*.² By this I mean the end of historical Man, the end of the dominion of historical consciousness, the end of the temporal future as paradigm for human life on earth. The Indian experiment discloses to us that what is at stake is no less than the last 6,000 years of the human adventure. We should, accordingly, distinguish two levels: that of Modernity and that of Historicity. I shall concentrate on the first level, while remaining conscious of the second level as a background.

Let me stress once again that I see the Indian adventure as a major event in the History of Being. Either Indian Man is swallowed by the forgetfulness of Being (Heidegger), and increases the ranks of the soldiers defending the onto-theological frontiers of reality, or he allows for a new disclosure of Being itself opening a new avenue for human life, or rather for Life as such. Although the Indian problem cannot be isolated from the world situation, I shall abstain from general considerations and limit myself to the concrete Indian problematic.

An underlying assumption behind "scientific and technological modernization" is the belief in the linear cultural evolutionism of humankind. India today is modernizing in the

¹ Cf. an Indian assessment of the situation: "The global trends are clear: increasing of poverty, inequity and exploitation; global economic crisis, threatening the life chances, even physical survival of millions of human beings; militarization of global economy, technology and industrial R&D; growing militarization of major polities and regimes the world over; accentuation of the repression of, and atrocities on the poor and the deprived; brutalization of the wielders of power at the local level, aided and abated by both national and international elites and by a defensive and hardening world capitalism." Sheth (1983) 2 ff. This is what we read in a more diplomatic and softer language in practically all the official documents of the United Nations, although sometimes the figures are alarming. It has been widely publicized that during the 90s 1,200 million people earned no more than 1 US dollar per day. At the end of the millennium the figures are worse. The Secretary General of the UN, Kofi Annan, affirmed that as of October 24th 1999 almost half the world population lives on less than 3 US dollars per day. In 1999 there were still 36 on-going armed conflicts in the world. In 1979 the WHO pledged an acceptable level of human health for the year 2000. Now the year 2000 is being regularly postponed. The documents of the UNDP are still more pessimistic — to say nothing of the ecological declaration of the Geo-2000 of the UN (UNEP).

² Cf. Panikkar (1983/11), using this phrase with a different meaning than later popularized by Fukuyama.

direction of science and technology not because she consciously condemns her three millennia of indic culture, but because she tacitly assumes that this very culture, well steered, leads to the adoption and recognition of the "universal values" of the technological society.

My submission, on the contrary, in agreement with an increasing number of voices, is that if we take indic culture seriously, and do not reduce it to mere folklore and window-dressing, it will show itself incompatible with the so-called modern culture, and will disappear from the continent if human life becomes computerized. A corollary of this is the prediction of increasing discontent, resistance, and bloodshed all over the world.¹ This is particularly acute in India.²

Further, I maintain that the destiny of indic culture has a paradigmatic function to perform in the world scene, because many other nations have already succumbed to that type of modernization, are too small to resist the avalanche of technocratic colonialism or have our so strong cultural roots. Of course, I am not minimizing the role and importance of other world cultures (chinese, african, amerindian, etc.). They have an important part to play, but there is a special feature to take into account regarding the indic vocation. The redemption, transformation, or even peaceful, though painful, dismantlement of the System can be lastingly effective only if it is an endogenous movement, although perhaps triggered from outside, capable of forging a new style of life for the conviviality of the whole world and of the subcontinent in particular. Otherwise, there would only be the victory of one ideology, and victory never leads to lasting peace. India is certainly a mosaic of cultures and religions. Her two oldest strata, however, are the aryan or indo-european and the autochthonous or dravidian — without entering into the necessary qualifications that modern scholarship and

¹ "...since 1958, 87% of the *very poor nations*, 69% of the *poor nations* and 48% of the *middle income nations* suffered serious violence. Out of 120 armed conflicts which took place after the Second World War, not less than 115 occurred in the developing Third World." Poulouse (1986) 23. In addition to local conflicts, the poor nations have been constrained to join the arms race, which is detrimental both to their economy and the quality of life of their citizens. "Thus while the poor nations are already overburdened by external debts and stricken by grinding poverty, they are also running an arms race and ruining their poor economy which is already on the verge of collapse. "The total value of international arms transfer to the Third World (during the peak period 1970-78) was \$54.537 billion. The annual arms sales to developing nations cost about \$20 billion which has since then risen to about \$34 billion (around 1978)." Poulouse (1986) 24-25. The world has about 30 million soldiers under arms and military death casualties have averaged 1.500 people every day since World War II.

² Here we have to underline that in an increasing number of regions of the subcontinent revolts and violence are the outcome of an acute identity crisis. Cf. Vidyadharan (1988) 8-17. To quote the author: "The roots of this violence lie in our own past. In Indian history. And, while the issues in each case may be different, every movement is, in some way or other, the obsession of an ethnic group to preserve its distinct cultural and political identity against a perceived assault on it." (1988) 8.

present day political awareness have introduced. In spite of her partial indo-european roots, India has remained conspicuously outside western cultural history.¹ It is enough to recall her many languages. But India did not undergo the process of transformation that Europe did in the first centuries or did she experience the technological revolution of four centuries ago. By remaining outside this process, she has retained in her myths and traditions what in the industrial West has been almost swept away. This fact makes the indic culture both more liable to fall into temptation and better prepared to overcome it than many other world cultures. The indic world has a medial position between the "Far-west" and the "Far-east".

After formulating my thesis as succinctly as possible, I shall offer an utopian ideal, while suggesting some possible avenues of approaching it. Finally, I will give a description of the same scenario by returning to Indra, the symbol of our title. This is not simply a rhetorical device. It is because I believe in the power of myths.

1. *Incompatible Kosmologies*

Under the name *kosmology* I do not understand what is generally understood under the spelling *cosmology*. This latter word stands for a theory about the world, for a reflection of our *logos* about the *cosmos*, for a conscious worldview according to the paradigm of the modern 'scientific' cosmology. Kosmology, on the other hand, is not a cosmology in the scientific objectifiable sense of the word, but a *kosmos-legein*, a reading of the cosmos as the cosmos manifests itself to us, more passive onlookers and hearers than active calculators and shapers. Kosmology is the world-myth of a particular culture or religion, not a doctrine or a rationally articulated vision of the universe. There is a parallel with the double meaning of the word mythology. Mythology can mean a theory or doctrine about myths: our *logos* about the *mythoi* — of other cultures, of course, since we cannot detect our own myths in the sense in which we interpret the myths of others. The myths of others are seen by us as inadequate

¹ I would substantially qualify the late Nirad Chaudhuri's thesis that India is Europe, although corrupted by the tropical environment. Cf. Chaudhuri (1978).

expressions of what we take to be the case when evaluating them over against the horizon of our own understanding, i.e. our own myth. But there is another meaning of mythology. It can mean, not our reflection on and rational explanation of the myth, but the telling of the myth itself, which entails our listening to it, and letting it be heard by our ears, so as to be guided and instructed by it: *mythos-legein*.¹ Similarly, kosmology is not a rational doctrine about the world, but the primal awareness of how the cosmos discloses itself to us when we open ourselves up to its self-manifestation. It is the primary experience of reality underlying our reflection upon it. It is our reception of the cosmos revealing itself to us. It is that sense of reality which we take for granted, the myth of the cosmos in which we live and have our existence. It is not incompatible with cosmology, but underlies any given or elaborated cosmology. Even more, the relation is unbreakable. There is no cosmology without the raw material, as it were, of a kosmology. And correspondingly, there is no possible talk about kosmology without emphasizing, if only minimally, a cosmology.

In this way, we can deepen the basis for sociology of knowledge. Knowledge is not only the function of the sociological status of our mind through time; it is also dependent of our kosmological myth.²

In our particular case I detect the radical incapacity of technological civilization to satisfy the aspirations of the indic *psychê*. Here is not the place to elaborate on a general critique of *techniculture*.³ I shall limit myself to the indic context.

Perhaps I could put it like this: India's *karma* is not in harmony with the genius of the technological vision of the world. Technology is far from being as universal as the new elites claim.⁴

¹ Cf. Panikkar (1979/XXVII).

² *The Conflict of Kosmologies* is the title of a forthcoming study.

³ Agriculture can be the basis of human culture i.e. of the *cultura animi* (as Cicero describes "philosophy"), because it is the cultivation of something alive, which can enter into symbiosis with Man. *Techniculture* suggests the cultivation of the machine, which being inanimate can only be the object of human exploitation for human benefit, or rather, profit. While *homo faber* (*technê*) is the first sign of *homo sapiens*, *homo technologicus* is a hybrid between reason and machine. Cf. Panikkar (1964/1).

⁴ "So many of us fail to realize that — whatever its origins, and they are spread over many continents and centuries — the modern industrial culture is a world culture", Moddie (1968) 3. Quite consistently the author asserts without realizing how right he is if we interpret his own words in the opposite direction: "At present, the economic revolution seems to loom largest, but it must be preceded and accompanied by a modernizing mental revolution which alone will make the economic one possible.", 132. This "mental revolution" obviously means the abandonment of indic cultures in order to enter that industrialized "mainstream", which makes the author dream that "the breath of our rich past may then blow refreshing notes through new conch shells of glass, aluminum and concrete, canvass, wood, bronze an fabric" (ibid).

It is not difficult to realize why western-born techno-civilization does not fit every culture.¹ There is certainly enough intelligence among the races of the world to understand the "know-how" of mechanical processes.² It is not a question of non-western peoples being too stupid to master modern technologies.³ The question is whether there is a basic incompatibility between the kosmology of traditional India (including all *dharmas* which have flourished in the subcontinent) and the kosmology underlying technological civilization.⁴

Let me cite only one instance. Traditional Man considers the world as a holistic though hierarchical and living reality. All is interconnected: the realm of the Gods with the world of Man and the field of Nature. Everything is alive. There is a cosmotheandric solidarity.⁵ Nothing is purely objective, nor exclusively subjective. This entails a fundamentally different attitude from the one in which modern scientific civilization can thrive.

I would call it a *transcendental attitude*, which does not mean an openness to or an explicit belief in transcendence. It means an awareness accompanying every action that life on earth is only a kind of 'comedy', 'divine' or not,⁶ a sort of *līlā* (play), a re-enactment of something bigger than ourselves and yet taking place within ourselves.⁷ Rebirth and transmigration, heaven and moral responsibility, whatever religious underpinnings they may have, entail a firm sentiment that we are not private proprietors of our life, but actors and spectators of it. We live as if we were performing a role which is greater than us, transmitting the very life that we have received a little better or little worse.

¹ Cf. the issue n.95 (April 1987) of *Interculture*: "No to development?" with its series of articles denouncing the hidden or explicit colonialism of all developments. Yet, the New Economic International Order of the United Nations still claims to make accessible to the "developing countries" "the advantages of modern science and technology" (Resolution 3201 (S-VI) #4, letter (p)) apud Rist (1987). Cf. also Sachs (1992).

² One often hears that the successful modernization of Japan disproves our affirmation. After her pride-effacing defeat to the West in the Second World War, Japan seems to have taken on the entire mindset of its 'conquerors'. But this can also be seen as a kind of 'hidden revenge', for, as is well known, it has beaten the West in its own game. According to many serious studies Japan is suffering from a cultural schizophrenia which will explode some day. For an overall survey, cf. the 3 vols. Barloewen & Werhahn-Mees (1986).

³ To brag that "we too have great scientists", which is hardly convincing if we look at the number of science graduates in the country, especially since many of them don't feel comfortable in their own land and wish to emigrate, would only prove that indians are capable of being westernized.

⁴ Cf. Nandy (1988).

⁵ Cf. Panikkar (1993/XXXIII).

⁶ Dante's original title was simply *Commedia*.

⁷ Cf. Bäumer (1969).

The most common way of explaining this transcendental attitude is by pointing out that the Sacred (in whatever form) is an essential ingredient not only of the World, but of Man and all human actions. In contrast, modern cosmology, while respecting private beliefs in God, Gods or Sacredness, functions with total independence of such convictions. God is a scientifically superfluous hypothesis, and the Sacred a hindrance to clear and precise scientific thinking. It is not necessary here to criticize either the modern science or the old conception of the sacred. Probably both require transformation, and to some degree, therefore, in this sense the scientific interlude may be a healthy *intermezzo*, although if we get stuck in it, the result could be lethal to the human species.

Let me try to spell out the traditional implicit kosmology of India as lived by the common people, without indulging in extraneous philosophical analysis.

This fundamental attitude reveals itself in many ways, of which I will mention only three. *First*, a certain indifference, lack of seriousness, playfulness, carelessness, diminished sense of responsibility, even a childishness regarding the world of labor and machines.¹ Traditional Man does not want to dedicate his most important creative forces to the pursuit of earthly comforts, especially in a defensive fashion. The danger of a future atomic disaster is a powerful deterrent for a western mentality, but is not specially frightening for a typically indic mind — making allowances for the over-generalization of 'eastern' and 'western'. What I want to emphasize that what counts for Indians is the present. "For it is another person who dies / and another that will be reborn".² The linear temporal future is not a main concern.³

This leads to the *second* aspect of this attitude: Real human activity is experienced not so much as a *means* to produce something but as an *end* in itself — inasmuch as any single action is directly related to *mokṣa* via the modification of *karma*. In this way any human activity has a repercussion on the ultimate meaning of life — in whatever sense one interprets it. This attitude is at loggerheads with the modern obsession with production, which is how practically all activity in modern life is measured, even by those who do not subscribe to a marxist or a pragmatist ideology. Traditional Man, on the other hand, is not 'efficient', not obsessed with making the future better than the past. He thinks the modern fad of progress and production causes the fateful neglect of the present, and thus the

¹ It is enough to hear typical comments on indian workers in the world of industry, commerce and politics from a western perspective — even without quoting Naipaul (1977), N.C. Chaudhuri (1978) and others — to realize how uncongenial the indic genius is to the technological world.

² Śāntideva, *Bodh VIII*, 98.

³ Cf. Panikkar (1975/2), (1975/7).

incapacity of actually enjoying anything.¹ This also explains the often heard complaint that modern "indian goods" are not well-finished, in sharp contrast with the classical Śilpaśāstra.² The moment that a "product" is considered only a means, it no longer matters that much how well it is finished.

It is a matter of a *technê* mentality versus a technological one.³ Technology is conceived in view of production. This is why quantity, efficiency and acceleration matter: the more and the quicker the better; the effort and toil will be taken care of by means of machinery. On the other hand, *technê* aims at the integrity of the relation between the doer, the doing and the done. Otherwise it is not worth the effort.⁴

Technê, or art, wit, *ingenium*, ingenuity, craft, manu-facture, is not technology. The difference is specific, not just of degree. Technology intends the most efficient way to reach the end product, the multiplication of the items produced and the acceleration of the process, because time is an economic commodity.⁵ *Technê*, on the other hand, is concerned with immediate use, inherent beauty, and the intrinsic relationship between Man and the thing made. One cannot separate the ends from the means. No total objectification is possible. "May I be the doctor and the medicine", Śāntideva wrote, an existential expression of the advaitic vision of reality and of overcoming the dichotomy between ends and means. The doctor cures not as an expert who gives medicines, but because the person herself is the medicine. And I say person, not the individual, because the material remedy or the medical intervention of the medico is still part of the person when the holistic relationship has not been broken. *Technê* is a human invariant. Every culture has *technê*, ways and means to transform things for the benefit of Man and the welfare of society, not excluding the profit of the artisan. The value of the artifact is dependent on its beauty, the joy or suffering of the artisan, the usefulness and meaningfulness of the product, its scarcity in the area, etc. No fixed price possible. Pottery could be a common example, as well as house building, forging, weaving, and carpentry. The manufacturing of instruments of first degree belongs equally to this field. Windmills, watermills, clocks, carts, ponds are examples. In a traditional civilization, the relation of Man with things and the earth is both on the human and the

¹ Cf. the shallow and common foreign tourists' observation that "those poor creatures seem to be happier than ourselves". They are happy not because they are poor (prolonged unaccepted poverty degrades) but because they live in another less reductionistic kosmology.

² Cf. Boner (1962).

³ Cf. Panikkar (1984/23) & (1984/26) 33-36.

⁴ Śāntideva distinguishes between people who "work in order to be happy" and those "whose work itself is joy", *Bodh VII*, 64.

⁵ Cf. the old saying: *omnis festinatio a diabolo* ("every hurry [comes] from the devil") and the modern cliché: "time is money".

earthly scale — in spite of the colossal buildings of tyrants, which are the exceptions that confirm the rule.

On the other hand, only one culture has developed technology as the application of a measuring, deductive reason in order to accelerate and multiply products and thereby control events, i.e., the future. This demands a very specific mentality, which after a long period of gestation, was born in sixteenth century Europe. Without Galileo, Descartes is unthinkable, and without Descartes no Newton and no modern science.

Just as there is a fundamental distinction between *technê* and technology, I would like to stress the difference between technology and technocracy. Technology, in fact, has two main meanings. The first, and more literal one, is the science, the knowledge about those human constructs which we call technological achievements. This already leads to the second meaning, technological civilization, connoting the set of values manifested by the dominion of technology over the people's minds and lives. To avoid this ambiguity, I propose to use the word technocracy as indicating the actual 'power' of the technological worldview.¹

The *third* difference could be expressed in the telling simile of | āntideva:

“Where would I possibly find enough
leather with which to cover the
surface of the earth?
But (wearing) leather just on the
soles of my shoes is equivalent to
covering the earth with it.”²

Likewise, he goes on to say, we cannot change the external course of things, but we can control our minds — and in doing this perhaps we can be more capable of contributing to the overall welfare of the world, not just because of inwardness but also because we will have eliminated all fear and cowardice.³

The technocratic mentality dreams of covering the whole earth with roads, frigidares, air-conditioners, videos and electronic waves beamed from satellites and the like.⁴ This view of the world is bound up with objectivity, and will search for external

¹ Interestingly enough the Greek *krátos* has a double meaning: power and hardness (software and hardware?). And even more symptomatically, the sanskrit *kratuh* besides meaning power and force, also denotes understanding, judgment, will, shrewdness. Technocracy, therefore, would then suggest the hard power acquired by the will to might triggered by the force of a certain type of shrewd skillfulness (intelligence?).

² Bodh V, 13.

³ Bodh V, 14.

⁴ The launching of the Indian Remote Sensing Satellite, from a Soviet cosmodrome, on March 17, 1988 has

solutions to any problem. The traditional mind is bound up with subjectivity, and will first look inside and realistically consider ways to dissolve the problem that lie in its power. This look inward is not only methodological, but corresponds to an altogether different kosmology. The real world is the world discovered by a total human awareness — not by calculus. If we put leather on the soles of our minds, we will be able to walk comfortably on any way of life, and in that way we will be able to go to places without harm and help to improve circumstances. Modern cosmology experiences the world as a great mechanism, and the human task then consists in oiling it when rusty, and in devising new machineries which may be more comfortably used by human beings.

Traditional cultures have a vitalistic kosmology. The universe appears and is experienced as a living organism.¹ Technological civilization has an underlying mechanistic kosmology. The universe appears and is experimented with as a sophisticated mechanism. Of course, the traditional universe does not need to be 'animalistic' in the pejorative sense any more than the scientific world needs to be atheistic in the pejorative sense, but they certainly are basically different ways of experiencing reality and thus of being in the world. Can the two be combined?

The compromise going first to the 'sorcerer' and if that does not work to the allotropic medical doctor, or the opposite, to call on the western-science expert and if it does not work to appeal to the indigenous guru, medicine man, or *āchārya*, may suffice for a while, but in the long run it will not do, just as a megalopolis cannot be run by traditional *technê*. A big city is not an agglomeration of villages, or even of cities.²

Let it be conceded that one attitude may be as religious as the other. Both have an ultimate concern, both present a set of rituals, use a world of symbols and have a system of beliefs that allow them to be called religions. The difference is not one of being more or less religious, but lies in a radically different experience of reality. More concretely, it could be formulated as a different temporal experience of the real. The experience of time is paramount.

Present-day modernity, in the western-scientific sense of the term, represents a mutation in human consciousness. Historically speaking, however, no mutation appears as such until a few generations have elapsed. The transition comes about imperceptibly in the very struggle for coexistence. A growing number of thinkers and artists today are convinced

generated much legitimate pride and the hope that this "new eye in space" will contribute to a better 'development'. Cf. e.g. R. Ramachandran (1988) 13-14; Sachitanand (1988) 17-18. It is easy to flatter national pride.

¹ Cf. *The Hymn to the Earth*, AV XII, 1.

² It is known that the infrastructure and services for a city of 10 lakhs is about 12 times more expensive than for 10 cities of 1 lakh each. The whole is more than the sum total of its parts.

that we are witnessing at a fundamental change in the human being. The importance of Modern Science should not be minimized. The consequence is that no patch-work reform can save the present-day system; it is beyond repair. This does not justify violence against it, but makes it imperative that a peaceful, though not painless, dismantling come about by allowing all sorts of alternatives to challenge the System, and eventually transform it.

Looking specifically at India, it may well be that we have reached a point of no return, that the technological inroads are already so advanced that the entire social fabric would collapse if we took another direction. One of the features of the technocratic complex is that it offers would-be solutions for the problems it has itself contributed to aggravate, provided the accepted myth is 'respected'. There is then no end to the proliferation of measures and countermeasures. For example, an unbalanced use of antibiotics has produced the population explosion, which in turn requires another type of 'anti-biotic' to control it. The passage from agriculture to agribusiness is then seen as necessary in order to provide food for the multitude, who thereby become more and more dependent on the System, which in turn cannot subsist without exploiting natural resources in a non-recuperable way. One thing leads to the other. All is interconnected.

Let me stress one point, if we proceed in this way there is no place for traditional cultures and religions. The fabric of the last three thousand years (or six thousand years if include the ādivāsīs and ādīdravidians) are being called into question and forced into collapse.

To advocate compatibility may show good intentions, but implies a very superficial idea of both traditional and technocratic cultures. They are not just two ways of doing things, rather, they represent different worlds, different basic experiences of reality, and as such, different ways of thinking, feeling, and living. To assume, for instance, that *real* space is what Newton (modified by Einstein and others), has told us, is as provincial and untenable as to imagine that it is the body of God, or is constituted by the ten directions of classical indic culture. A truly crosscultural approach to reality is not the triumph of one culture over another. To assume, for instance, that reality is *per se* 'over there', and that we simply have different interpretations of it already entails the absolutization of one notion of reality (a kind of noumenic objectivism "à la Kant") over the others, judging them from the perspective of one particular culture — generally the dominating one.¹

The conclusion is unambiguous. Either we prepare a dignified burial for the ancient cultures of India and proceed with the adoption and adaptation of technological civilization without offering false expectations to "romantic indianists and ignorant peasants", or we

¹ This is what has led me to advocate a cultural disarmament along with the efforts at military disarmament. Cf. Panikkar (1993/XXXV).

need to work out basic alternatives as a positive symbiosis between the different cultures operating in the Subcontinent. We cannot have it both ways.¹

Talking about a "pluralistic culture" is not a solution but a camouflage of the question and already constitutes compliance with of the *status quo*. That any culture needs to be open, flexible, non-fanatical, and allow for variegated expressions of the life of its citizens is quite different than defending a truly "pluralistic culture". Strictly speaking, the latter is a contradiction in terms — unless we degrade the notion of pluralism to a mere tactical tolerance of a plurality of (ultimately irrelevant) opinions, and the notion of culture to entertainment and leisure. We cannot at the same time have left-hand and right-hand traffic on the same roads. We cannot simultaneously have a capitalistic monetary economy and an economy of subsistence and barter in the same society. We cannot organize life on the basis of computer operations while keeping autochthonous and independent units. We cannot have a centralized and a truly decentralized economy. We cannot live simultaneously both in a newtonian space and in upanishadic *ākāśa*, and so on. Pluralism is a human attitude not a philosophical system. It represents the awareness of a non-rationalizable coexistence of mutually incompatible systems of life, thought and action which have relative explanations as human phenomena.² In sum, we cannot have an industrialized and computerized society within a world economy and at the same time keep traditional indic institutions with their ways of feeling, thinking and experiencing the world.³ Perhaps it is sheer sentimentalism to hope to retain the traditional world, and it is inevitable that indic cultures simply disappear and yield their place to the technocratic complex. After all, it would not be the first time that once flourishing cultures have disappeared under the invasion of a foreign civilization.⁴ Perhaps the function of submerged cultures is simply to contribute, as irritants and stimulants, to the victorious civilizations. Perhaps they persist as human archetypes and subterraneous forces, but by themselves are only hidden obstacles for the flourishing of the

¹ Time and again the highest authorities of the country ask the people to have a harmonious blend between tradition and modernity, which is fine as far as it does not identify modernity with western technology, but which is unrealistic when technology comes in. "Blend modern farming with traditional wisdom," R. Venkataraman, the President of India said on February 15, 1988 inaugurating the International Congress of Plant Physiology in New Delhi. Cf. *The Hindu* (Feb. 16, 1988). President K.R. Narayanam was speaking of a "technology of hope" in inaugurating an "Ecotechnology Center" in July 29, 1998. Cf. Krishnakumar (1998) 89-92.

² Cf. Panikkar (1979/2) and (1996/50) 247-257.

³ Cf. Panikkar (1977/13) for the two basic attitudes towards death that build two different societies around themselves.

⁴ Cf. Viola (1990) on "The Heroic Ordeal and Victory of American Indian Culture"; Neihardt (1988) relating the history of Black Elk, the Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux, and Deloria (1973), a challenging call for a return to the amerindian religiousness.

victorious culture.

I insist on the mortality of cultures in order to emphasize the importance and difficulty of the problem.

2. Alternatives

I have been saying that the technocratic mentality, with its *problem-solving* (instead of problem-dissolving) and *mechanistic approach*, seems incapable of finding a solution to the world problems. An increasing number of people on every continent are not ready to wait for an uncertain future that looms darker and darker. The myth of progress has collapsed. To devise *more* technocracy, *more* energy, *more* sophisticated gadgets, a further projection into the linear *future*, oblivious of other dimensions of reality, is no longer convincing. We cannot develop indefinitely. Since the world is finite, a cross-cultural approach is imperative.

Such an approach means resisting the trend of attempting to solve present-day problems while uncritically accepting the parameters of the premises. The technocratic mentality is ready to recognize that there are unresolved problems, but never questions the very basis on which it stands. It tolerates, and even encourages a search for better solutions, but never reexamines its premises. It has become a myth, and the power of myth is that it has no place for doubt, since the myth always appears as an immediate truth.

One can understand the cries of urgency. If we suffer from acute headache and have a pain-killer available, we will apt to take the pill and neglect a more natural, deeper, but slower therapy. Alarmingly enough, alcoholics and drug addicts show the same syndrome.

I have insisted time and again that to ask for an alternative amounts to falling into the same technocratic mentality. There is no one alternative, but there may be alternatives. Most alleged alternatives, however, are only reforms. They are different modes of solving a particular problem, accepting by and large the vision of the technocratic world, and forming part of it. The real question is not the solution of the problem, but the problem itself. On the other hand, a radical alternative has the danger of being incomprehensible within the parameters of the so-called "real world", or of being immediately discarded, since it would destroy the very foundations for a possible change as seen from the point of view of the *status quo*. Democracy, for instance, may accept a democratic change, but does not tolerate a modification of its ground rules. The problem is delicate.

I repeat: to accept one possible alternative is already to fall into the trap of the technocratic view of monistic thinking. Sheer dialectical opposition, much less violence are not solutions. Even if the other party could overpower technocracy, the remedy could turn out to be worse than the malady. After all, not everything in technocracy is negative; indeed,

it has already pursued a process of adjustment to human conditions.

In point of fact the proper use of the word "alternative" reveals the gravity of the problem. We can interpret the *alter* as a negation of *idem* (the same, the self) and thus as a negation of our *identity*, or we can take the *alter* as that which it really means. Alternative derives its meaning not from *aliud*, "other" but from *alter* which strictly speaking means "the other" of both the sides, i.e., the one of the two, we and the other. The other is other for me, as much as I am also the other for him. We both are other to each other. The *alter* is not the non-other, the another, but the intrinsic polarity of the other. Any *alter* implies the 'other' (side). An *alter* means the other side, eventually another possibility of solving the *same* problem(s) in a dialectical opposition. But the situation of our world does not allow for any alternative of this type. The authentic alternative is not dialectical, but dialogical or rather dialogal. In an idealistic system the opposition is the logical opposition between A and non-A: it is the contradiction. But the nature of reality does not need to be idealistic and thus dialectical. The non-dialectical alternative is not pure otherness (*aliud*) but the "alterity" of the given. We do not need to destroy the *idem*, the identity of the thing, but to discover the other side of reality. This other side does not need to present the same problems. It is not a question of answers, or more satisfactory 'solutions'. It is rather a 'question' of both dissolving the questions and overcoming the problematic, i.e. of not throwing in front of ourselves (*pro-blemata*) the very obstacles we are supposed to conquer. The dialectical method is not the only possibility of exercising that specifically human activity we call thinking. Technological thinking is only one way of calculating the behavior of detectable phenomena. The real challenge of interculturality is the awareness of a kosmological pluralism.

"Why are embodied creatures not regarded as limbs of life?", asks a buddhist saint echoing the voice of a different kosmology.¹

I said that there could be alternatives. And the reason for this is deeper than the obvious strategic observation that, since we cannot solve everything, it is better that some groups tackle the ecological problems, others the political, and still others the economic. This is to believe that, by cutting the problem up into smaller portions, following the well-known (and fallacious) cartesian rule, we may come to a solution. To want to make things easy, so as not to discourage people, is wrong in itself as well as bad policy. The human predicament today can be neither minimized nor compartmentalized. Reality is not the great machine that a mechanistic worldview would have us believe. Reality is a whole, and as a whole, is not equal to the sum of its parts. There may be alternatives which pave the way for a transformation by means of a provisional emphasis and complementarity of another side,

¹ Bodh VIII, 114.

not of the problem (which does not need to be the same) but of the overall state of affairs. Any alternative which is not capable of discovering the other side is not an alternative.

This being the case, I have to stress the *naïveté* of any total destruction (improperly called an absolute alternative), not only because it is *de facto* impossible to ignore the existence of technocracy, but also because it is *de jure* not proper. We are living in a world which does not allow us to ignore technocracy, which is not absolute evil either.

This by no means prevents us from struggling against the technocratic complex, but puts us on a different track, perhaps more difficult, but certainly more fruitful. Perhaps we can absorb the lessons of history. *In eadem es navi*, wrote Cicero millennia ago: "You are in the same boat." Today, we are all in the same "spaceship", in the same human condition, sharing the same destiny. Manicheisms, puritanisms and absolutisms of any kind ("we are right, you are wrong"), even when victorious for a while, have never led to lasting peace.

In fact, there are innumerable movements calling themselves alternatives.

I understand the word 'alternatives' in the plural as another name for *pluralism*, i.e., the recognized co-existence of mutually exclusive styles of life, views of the real, opinions about things and systems of thought. Not *aliud* (in the sense of the other), but *alter* (in the proper meaning of the alterity inherent in any experience of otherness — which is reciprocal). Ultimately what is at stake here is the ontological status given to the epistemological *reductio ad unum*, as if what is necessary for the intellect were also a necessary axiom for reality. We cannot understand without reducing the known thing to a certain unity, but this does not prove that reality should be intelligible.¹ To play the game fairly without recognizing the rules of the game is a more ironical way of putting it.

An important notion to introduce here is that of *cultural relativity*, which should not be mistaken for *cultural relativism*. The latter, besides defeating its own purpose (if there are no criteria of truth whatsoever, the very affirmation undermines its own credibility), would not help in a situation in which recent generations have witnessed Auschwitz, Hiroshima, as well as Partitions and civil wars of all sorts. We need unambiguous criteria to condemn such monstrosities. *Cultural relativity*, on the other hand, stands for at least three basic insights.

First, each culture segregates its own criteria of truth according to its own constitutive myth. *Second*, although these criteria seem valid within the mythic horizon of the given culture, they are not absolute even there, inasmuch as each culture is always unfinished, not closed. *Third*, cross-cultural criteria can only be elaborated in the meeting of two cultures, once such an encounter has created the field where a meaningful interaction

¹ Cf. Panikkar (1990/33).

can take place.¹

Cultural Relativity is based on the insight that any perception, experience, or knowledge is related to the horizon and dependent on the myth that makes the perception, experience, or knowledge possible.² The shadow of our own reflection cannot eliminate the body of which it is a reflection. The power of our own thinking cannot overstep the limits of what appears to it as thinkable. The challenge, danger and beauty of a truly cross-cultural encounter is that it somehow makes us aware of the otherwise invisible horizon of our respective myths, and thus we relativize our absolutes.

I unambiguously condemn concentration camps, torture and dictatorships, but I also realize that from other perspectives people may try to justify such measures, even if as exceptions or minor evils. I shall struggle against those who defend what I consider aberrations like these, but refuse to establish other concentration camps or dropping atom bombs against those who defend them. Pacifism does not require killing those who defend the death penalty.

I shall give here only one example of cultural relativism that pertains to our overall topic. "All Men are equal" seems to be a general truism of modernity, at least since the *égalité* of the French Revolution became common currency. And, undoubtedly, within the context of modernity, the sentence is not only meaningful, it is also a principle of justice, social order and even human dignity.³

Outside that context, however, the sentence does not make much sense, but seems a reductionistic and lifeless abstraction. One would rather affirm that "all Men are different", that every person is unique and thus incommensurable with any other because there is no '*tertium comparationis*'. Since human equality is not an anthropological category, it is not applicable to that being which claims to have a non-transferable, and thus non-quantifiable dignity. To apply equality to Men would seem to be an equalitarianism against human dignity because it chops off any personal identity. It assumes that there can be general and abstract rules to deal with truly human problems. Personal conflicts are more than superficially objectifiable quarrels: in such a framework, equality is seen as a reification in human relations; there is no place for the personal; individuals are reduced to numerical "identity cards", just numbers. Human beings cannot be treated as peanuts — or as classical atoms.⁴ Of course, any system attempting to establish a certain order and harmony in a

¹ Cf. Panikkar (1992/32).

² Cf. Panikkar (1984/19).

³ The preamble of the Indian Constitution states: "equality of status and of opportunity".

⁴ Tellingly enough, contemporary Physics begins to realize that not even elementary particles present strict singularity.

community whose size defies personal knowledge, say of over a lakh of people, requires a kind of objectification which is incompatible with the more qualitative life-experience of Man. It calls for a sort of mechanistic and mathematical calculus which leaves no place for a more vitalistic and qualitative approach to the real. Here we have two different notions of what reality is and the place of Man in it. Do we sacrifice the human person to the idea or adapt the idea to the human person?

We should therefore avoid three pitfalls when tackling this truly formidable quest for alternatives.

First, *fatalism*. "Whether we like it or not, technology is here to stay; we cannot put back the clock of history", are expressions one hears from all corners of the Establishment and outside it as well.

No doubt dismantling the technocratic complex would be a harder task than it was for Vietnam to take on the military power of the United States.. Nor is there any doubt that not too long ago in United States, one advocating the abolishment of slavery as an institution would have encountered a similar fatalistic reaction: "We have to treat slaves humanly but we should not destroy our economic fabric; the remedy would be worse than the disease". Not too long ago we were told that: "The Soviet System is unbreakable" and we still hear today that "the supremacy of the United States cannot be contested". People also say, "We have to humanize technology but we cannot allow our economic empires to collapse. The world would die of hunger and disease". But none of these things are inevitable.

All the lessons of recent history should make us humble, tentative, and more farsighted in proposing alternatives. There is a holistic relationship which cannot be ignored without creating more harm than good with remedies that are too drastic. But Aristoteles classical political prudence should not be confused with mere *Realpolitik*.

In short, I do not subscribe to fatalism simply because an enterprise appears difficult. Most independence movements have been long and difficult undertakings,. The overthrowing of dictatorships was often seen as insurmountable. Everything depends on personal courage, on one hand, and the ripeness of time, on the other. Without minimizing the value and need of prophets, I would stress the importance of raising people's awareness so that what may seem an unattainable utopia may become an habitable place. Utopia becomes more feasible if everyone is acutely aware of the dire consequences of not changing the *status quo*. There already exists a significant consensus among thinkers of the most disparate tendencies affirming that the technocratic route leads to catastrophe.¹ Fatalism is

¹ To quote an indian source: in the paper delivered at the International Congress of Philosophy at Harvard University in 1926, S. Radhakrishnan warned the world of the dangerous path of Science, Technology and Behaviorism: "electrons and protons do not clear up the mystery of reality... God and soul cannot be treated as mathematical

easier to overcome once we are aware that the other horn of the dilemma is simply total disaster.

The second pitfall one has to overcome is *paternalism*. Many discussions regarding these issues remind me of the unequal meeting of religions and cultures in the colonialist age. One side is clothed with power, money, prestige, and dominion; they own the language and control the rules of the encounter. What can the peasant, the non-english speaker, the poor and unclad do when confronting the ruler, the refined urbanite, the native english speaker, the rich and well dressed? The situation has not changed much. What can protesters, trespassers on private property (atomic enclosures), hippies, idealists, "terrorists", the new-age people, the women activists, pacifists, ecologists, and 'greens' of all sorts do in the face of those who have all the data on hand, and control the power, the media, the political strings, and the legislature? No authentic dialogue can be held under such conditions. It is a positive sign of our times that not all those protest movements have been crushed. The conscientization of the peoples of the world is on the increase.

David and Goliath could not talk, they could only insult each other. The formidable state machinery today often only puts riot police in front of the demonstrators: but they are not to look into the eyes of the peaceful protesters lest they show weakness when 'Law and Order' is transgressed. My contention is that David should not start the fight. Let us not forget that David won the battle but lost the war, a war that is still going on. Furthermore, for one victorious David we have hundreds of triumphant Goliaths.

Another way of exposing the same pitfall is to recognize that paternalism tacitly menaces all those who dare to contest the sacrosanct principles proclaimed by the Establishment: "It is dangerous to contest, one should be fearful of disturbing the powers that be. You have everything to gain if you abide by the established order".¹ Many First World institutions provide examples of this subtle invitation to abandon resistance because everyone is given individual freedom in theory. The price of academic freedom, for instance, is often political irrelevance.

Third, *conservativism*. The alternative to modern culture is not the romantic ideal of going back to the idealized "primitive life" of a "good savage". The struggle is not on behalf of the preservation of the ancient patrimony, or worse, its one-sided interpretations by fundamentalist reactions. If we have no other 'models' than those of the past and the present, this is due to a lack of creative imagination. The alternative to the present is not the past, but a new 'future', the fruit of our creative work and not the result of the inertia of vested

equations", in *The Hindu* (Feb. 11, 1988), on the occasion of Dr. Radhakrishnan's birth centenary celebration.

¹ Cf. the message of the Nobel Peace laureate (1991) Aung San Suu Kyi in house arrest since 1989 in Myanmar (Burma) in *The Hindu* (Feb. 28, 1993).

interests or the reaction of repressed feelings.

Conservatism should not be confused with respect and even admiration for tradition. To "conserve" a tradition is to suffocate it. A tradition is such not when it is conserved, but when it is transmitted (as the word says) — and transmission entails change, critique, "aggiornamento", passing it on in an appropriate manner.

Furthermore, alternatives do not require 'new' models. This is part of the pitfall: 'thinking' in models. This procedure imprisons thinking, and tries to fit real life into the straitjacket of modern scientific method, or any method. Creative and real thinking does not proceed with paradigms like scientific hypotheses, which are put forward in order to see them verified or falsified by the experiment. Authentic thinking does not assume an "idealistic" belief in the primacy of "ideas" and their dominion over reality. "Creative thinking" as the academic and wishful phrase goes, is actually creating reality, and is as much action as theory. It is true contemplation. It listens to the language of Being and lets it speak through us. Through *vāc* (the Word) all has been made, say the Veda as well as other Sacred Scriptures.¹ An alternative is not a reform. It is not an absolutely new thing either. It is the other side of the other. Identity and difference are related notions.

* * *

It is now time to examine three different fields relevant to our indian situation: a) cultural, b) political, c) religious. For heuristic reasons I make this tripartite division, although I am well aware that the three fields are intrinsically connected and cannot be completely separated.

I insist again that the following *considerations* are not full-fledged alternatives. The latter would require both a degree of praxis and of theory which I cannot claim and perhaps nobody can boast of. True to the word just used I would like to put together some flickering stars in the firmament of our universe today. To 'consider' is a delicate astrological endeavour of discovering the harmony of the sidereal universe, which forms also the warp and the woof of our human and historical reality.

a) *The Cultural Conversion*

The problem of modernization has been widely investigated both in India and

¹ Cf. vgr. BU I, 2, 5; Jo I, 3; etc.

abroad. Most of the studies, however, accept the 'realistic' position that "there is no way back" and try to find solutions within the *status quo* of the the technocratic complex of the prevailing socio-politico-economic system of qualified capitalism and reformed socialism. Needless to say, they accept the scientific technological kosmology.

The only voices one hears speaking against the *status quo* are, quite often, revivalist fundamentalisms. I would like to look more deeply into both tradition and modernity in order to discover a middle way, and perhaps find the roots of the problematic. This does not mean that more immediate remedies should be overlooked. What needs to be questioned, however, is the very notion of health that the prepared remedies wish to restore.¹ If the System has a terminal illness, small remedies only prolong the agony. On the other hand, we should not despise micro-solutions (for individuals and groups) only because they are at loggerheads with the projected macro-solutions.

It has been rightly pointed out by many sociologists "that the dichotomous nature of tradition and modernity is really untenable in the light of reality."² For the sake of linguistic clarity, I propose to introduce the notion of *innovation*. One could then claim both that every living *tradition* contains a thrust towards *innovation*, and all forms of *modernization* have *traditional* roots. Furthermore, each tradition, inasmuch as it is not stagnant, tends to innovate itself not only from within but also by accepting inspiration from outside. At the same time, modernization has an exogenous element which is successful only inasmuch as it finds resonance and acceptance in the heart of the very situation it attempts to modernize.

For India, however, instead of representing innovation, modernity has mostly meant imitating the model of western technocratic society. The official 'modernization' of India does not follow a symbiotic pattern, but rather the model of an electronic civilization.

Let us try to describe some features of this cultural conversion. We use the rich word "conversion" to express the original meaning of the word: to turn around (latin *vertere*, sanskrit *varitate*), to change, to convert by the most diverse transpositions.

What Indic culture needs, however, is a conversion into the deep recesses of her soul while simultaneously turning towards the spirit of the new situation of humanity. Needless to say, I am using this word in its classical meaning and not in the polemic context in which one speaks about "conversion" to some established religion as a kind of shifting from one allegiance to another. Paradoxically enough, the first moment of this conversion is an

¹ The metaphor is intended. For allotropic medicine health is the proper functioning of the organs and the criterion is to be fit for labor (as institutional medicine says). For ayurvedic medicine health is measured by the joy and well-being that the person experiences.

² Damle (1983) 7. The author quotes M. Singer, E. Shils, the Rudolfs, P.N. Mital, and, of course, Max Weber, among others.

inversion — as we are going to explain.

India is proud of having achieved its political independence without a formal war with the colonial power, which speaks highly for both sides. But this accomplishment also has its dark side. Partition produced lakhs of victims and other unsolved plagues like communalism itself, the predicament of the dalits, and the dire poverty of the masses. Besides, in the absence of a founding 'revolution', a native government became the successor of the colonial ruler. Practically everything that makes India a modern nation was inherited from Britain. The *rājās*, *rānas*, and *mahārājās*, for all their anachronism and perhaps corruption, represented a certain autochthonous way. Unfortunately, they were stripped not only of their power, but also of their authority and symbolism.¹ They were considered beyond redemption. This did not happen, however, with the symbols of the british *rāj*.² Our parliamentary democracy, the legislature, judiciary, and military, administration, economy, commerce, industry, and education, the entire machinery of the modern state, is a replica of the western, or rather, of the anglo-saxon paradigm.³

This has had a rather important consequence. The 'natives' of India, mainly the villagers, who are the overwhelming majority of the people, feel like strangers in their own country. When the british *rāj* was in power the indian peasant knew that it was a foreign domination. Once the 'colonialists' left, however, their successors behaved in the same way as the former rulers. Nevertheless, there is one difference. The british were paternalistic but distant. "Educated" Indians, with some exceptions, treat their "less educated" co-nationals

¹ This symbolism was even enshrined in the Constitution. An amendment was needed in order to abolish the last remnant of the symbolism, the privy purses. Cf. the outspoken negative reaction of C.R. Rajagopalachari when in 1968 the government decided to deprive the ex-rulers of their purses: "Sri Jawaharlal Nehru, Sri Vallabhbhai Patel and myself stand to be dishonoured ... the negotiations regarding the privy purses and privileges of the Princes were concluded when I was Governor General and not a mere figurehead. Jawaharlal Nehru and Vallabhbhai Patel are gone. But I share in the responsibility of maintaining honour in this affair and it is my particular and personal duty to protest most strongly." R. Gandhi (1984) 335 (16/ XI/68). When in 1969 the amendment did not muster the majority in the Lok Sabha, and President Giri signed an executive order abolishing all princely rights, Rajaji commented sadly: "The union government has gone berserk.", 367.

² Architecture offers an interesting illustration. Most of the palaces of the 'princes' of India are now in ruins, others became private mansions or, more tellingly, hotels for tourism. Yet most of the buildings of the *rāj* are now Government mansions.

³ The present writer, in collaboration with the ambassadors of two spanish-speaking countries, developed a project for an Indo-latin Institute of Culture to be established in Goa, drawing on the portuguese heritage of that State, when Pandit Nehru was still the Prime Minister. Apart from technical problems, Nehru could not see any point in having any other cultural bridge with the West than the british-american one. We were given to understand, "Beyond some literary achievements, what else has the rest of the West contributed to "world-civilization"?".

with fewer compliments, or to speak plainly in a rougher and cruder way.

In other words, the majority of our people feel estranged, almost out of place, since they are unfamiliar with the official language, manners, and customs. Just observe the behavior of petty bureaucrats, and often enough that of the members of the higher echelons. When dealing with the 'public', the lowest government employee feels more or less unconsciously that he is representing the Viceroy of New India; and when fearfully approaching a *sarkari* (official) behind a window, a simple peasant or citizen feels the same way. Who is even aware that "minister" means servant and not the opposite? In a word, our native culture has become the tolerated culture. The culture of independent India was the imported one.¹ The english-speaking elite dictated the rules, and imposed the 'democracy' to be followed.² The Congress Party, perhaps out of inertia as well as strategic policy, kept some externals of indigenization, but the dynamics of most political parties were certainly not endogenous to indic culture.³ The Parliament, allegedly representing the people, speaks mainly a language which the majority does not understand. Of course, it does not matter much in a technocratic system because technocracy also speaks a language that the majority cannot grasp. Technocratic society requires an overspecialization and a technicism which only specialized experts can master. Here again technocracy betrays its particular ideological basis by organizing the rational government of a country on the basis of the sum total of the conclusions of experts.

To be sure, once the independence movement set into motion with the Nehru, Patel, Jinnah and others on the top, Gandhi at the bottom, C.R. Rajagopalachari in the shadows, the British on the front, and the deepest problems left in the background, there was almost no other way open, and a secular republic was the only workable solution. My point here is not technical, but cultural, underlining the enormous power of cultural assumptions. Once the problem was approached and perceived on those lines, there was no other alternative. More astonishing than British tolerance of Gandhiji was the patient acceptance of him by the Congress Party leaders and those who created the political independence of India and Pakistan. All had an Indian heart, but the minds of most of the leaders were already

¹ It has been said with irony and truth that "the end of the British rule ... and the birth of the new sovereign state, India, constitute a political version of the metempsychosis by which the old British soul has transmigrated into the new Indian body politic." Balasundaram (1968) 9.

² R. Kothari (1976) points out that immediately after Independence India developed a "typically Indian response" to handle political issues which had been prepared during the struggle for Independence. But he also describes how "an imported institutional framework" which he calls "the Westminster model of Government and politics" took the upper hand, and especially after 1967 developed the "administrative state" according to the "Anglo-Saxon model".

³ "The superimposition of a unified system of foreign values over a system of conflicting native values is our way of achieving national unity", Balasundaram (1968) 10.

functioning in terms of western categories.

This state of affairs is prevalent not only on the political field, education, too, shows an amazing forgetfulness of traditional schemes. In spite of a few token symbols here and there, indigenous values have been consistently downgraded. The elite have become more and more westernized, while most people feel more and more displaced. Administrative services run according to technocratic patterns because there is no other way to run them once the western model is adopted, but the minds of the managers do not run along those lines, leading to bureaucratic chaos.

In general, the indic indigenous cultures are strangers, often cajoled guests at television and when elections are approaching, but nevertheless strangers in their own land; grafted, as it were, onto the main culture of the future: technocracy. Ordinary people often have an unconfessed but patent inferiority complex. Told that they are uneducated, illiterate, and uncultured, they internalize this judgment.¹

Native values, if acknowledged at all, are justified because they are at the service of the "national goals" which are measured in terms of modern western set of values. Sanskrit, urdu, ayurvedic medicine, indigenous arts and crafts, dance, idioms, tribal customs are extolled — when they are remembered! — because they are at the service of technocratic civilization; they help our GNP, they give us prestige abroad, attract tourism, give us a distinctive color, make us different because we Lakshmi presides over our commercial deals, we invoke Sarasvatī at our university functions, and we write 'Indyan Aerlains' in *devanāgarī*.² The basic framework is technological and scientific, the accidental adjuncts are indigenous colors. The Republic Day and the New Delhi Parade could serve as symbols of what I am saying.³ The daily newspapers, whether in english or the vernaculars, are another symbol of the same. Indigenous culture is valued inasmuch as it is at the service of the technological scale of values. Except for some private recent initiatives ayurvedic and unani medicines, for instance, are revalued because allotropic science now affirms that they may help in certain cases and complement its weak points. India is proud of her engineers and medical doctors who are present all over the world, but not in her villages! Since they earn too little there, they prefer to emigrate.

¹ Over three decades ago I remember an ironic article in *Encounter* (London) pointing out that in all the rhetoric of the independent political nations, none of them wanted to go back to their old traditional methods, but adopted the western manners and patterns of the often insulted colonial powers. Africa is a more tragic example than India, but this is no consolation.

² A paper from South India, which I prefer not to mention, regretted the Ayodhya incident of December 6, 1992 also because it was detrimental to foreign tourism.

³ Cf. the brilliant and ironical description of "Republic Day" in Larson (1995) 1-8.

This estrangement in our native country is more than the psychological awareness we have when going to any bazaar and speaking in english, or observing how the masters speak in english among themselves when they don't want to be understood by servants. It is more than the sociological observation that english is a requisite for higher jobs, research and foreign travel. Modern India, we are told, is trying to acquire a "superior culture", ie., that of the new elites which absorb and propagate it, and trying to jettison those "inferior cultures" to which the majority of the people with their "superstitions", "primitive ways" and lack of know-how still cling. When Presidents, Prime Ministers or Supreme Court Justices address the indian masses they adopt the paternalistic, condescending and benevolent tone adopted by the teachers, preachers and 'educated' leaders when speaking to the ignorant.

In a country as vast as India, of course, there are always important exceptions. I may single out Kerala as an example. Malayalam has not been suffocated by english, vernacular literature is flourishing, and some vernacular newspapers and magazines have a wider circulation than those of any other language including english. All in all, the culture and life-style are still local and the keralites are trying to create the symbiosis I spoke about. Yet the impact of the quick money that can be earned by emigration into the "Gulf Countries" is upsetting the delicate balance.

By and large, India is officially following the model of the western civilization, presented as a universal paradigm, thus creating the myth that "progress" means to get rid of the "backwardness" of traditional ways, while modernization demands the "hard labor" of a modern (technocratic) society. Culture is reduced to arts and crafts, cosmetic aids, harmless anachronistic customs, folklore and amusement, making culture little more than entertainment.

* * *

This is the prevailing myth that pervades the entire world, not just India. My unabated hope is that India would make a substantial contribution to the already visible reaction.

It would be hypocritical, narcissistic and shallow to blame everything on the 'onslaught' of western culture. Are the people of South Asia ready to perform their role? This is the question.

To change the present state of affairs does not mean substituting one System for another, but something much more radical. We are in need of cultural alternatives, not aesthetic surgery.

We distinguish four moments.

i) Inversion of roles

I am calling for a different framework from the one that was adopted in post-independence India. Village life, traditional values, indigenous arts, crafts, sciences and laws, in a word indic wisdom, should offer the pattern in which to insert those aspects of western culture that can be integrated into the traditional framework. At the same time, traditional cultures should be prepared to be complemented, enhanced, criticized and corrected by the modern scientific outlook. In other words, I am proposing that the substance be indic but that this substance should be ready to receive those accidents capable of adhering to that substance. Changing the metaphor, the trunk should be the indic tree, onto which western contributions may be grafted.

This proposal is far from being simply sociological, it refers mainly to ways of thinking and living.

It will not be easy to put into practice. How can it be done if the entire infrastructure of modern society represented by urban life is simply a copy of the western style? This is a situation in which praxis has primacy over theory. If the praxis of modern life is the one imposed by the technocratic complex there is little hope for the autochthonous cultures to be more than exotic escapes from the strains of "modern living"! How can it be otherwise if our roads are invaded by cars and trucks, our cities growing cancerously into megalopolis destroying not only nature but also the human societal fabric, creating pollutions of all sorts, our houses just garages for privacy according to the worst western patterns, business conditioned by the world market and international economy?

The *first step* of the alternative I am advocating is the conversion of our traditional cultures to their pristine inspiration, purifying them in the light of centuries-old experience. Paradoxically enough this conversion demands an inversion of the relationship between the two cultures with the traditional cultures having enough self-confidence to play the hose, convinced that they discernment to receive whatever is good from the West without being superseded. In other words, the traditional cultures of the country should regain their independence and play host to western culture, and not just become the lackeys of modernity. India is a (relatively) independent State, but she is not (yet) an independent Nation, certainly not an independent Culture — keeping in mind that true independence is an *inter-in-dependence* (which I have tried to describe with the notion of *ontonomy* as a dynamic balance between heteronomy and autonomy).

Traditional India should set up her rules and determine the pace of the change, and offer a substructure that is not one that newspapers editors and business people are

constantly talking about. It has become almost a cliché that indians have a special capacity of absorbing every culture that has come into the lap of "Mother India". This was somewhat true, but after Independence it seems that exactly the opposite took place. India as a whole is being absorbed, almost swallowed by western civilization. It is a fact that much of indian history is written with the categories of western historiography. We should say in passing that western culture has equally such power of absorbing and assimilating foreign values. Each culture, when alive, shows this syncretistic osmosis.

* * *

Part of the hindu fundamentalist reaction today is surely due to the awareness that India at large and hindu India in particular is losing her identity. Hindu India fears that its vaunted power of absorption and tolerance is being utilized to undermine the A militant reaction has come more recently to the fore and irrupted into the national scene after the Ayodhya incident. Hindutva has become the flag for a certain type of political chauvinism which has wide national audience as shown by the two recent elections which have given a democratic victory to the BJP and its allies.

Instead of the conventional slogans of party politics, the symbol of hindutva offers a unifying myth, which in turn raises suspicions among the other components of indian society. Paradoxically enough, the idea of hindutva is not the traditionally indic pluralistic attitude, but represents a contagion of western and ancient ideas of empire. As is well-known, "hinduism" is a foreign name for the bundle of religions that are more or less artificially collected under this name. Realizing that the majority of "hindu India" is slipping away from its traditional roots, a voice of alarm has been skillfully utilized for immediate political purposes. Muslims were the first target; more recently christians have also been subject to attack. The very name of Pakistan has become an irritant for many.

I will not linger on the present-day political situation, but make only one commentary. People differ as to whether the threat comes from islām, christianity, foreigners, or the secularized political parties,¹ but the technocratic system itself goes unchallenged.

¹ Cf. among others, Goel (1983); Ramswarup & Goel (1982) for a belligerent defense of hindutva ideology before the name became politically popular.

³ Cf. Panikkar (1971/3) and (1978/5) where, in a more academic tone I described the stages of indological studies and suggested that the third one consists precisely in offering avenues for a radical restructuring of society. If 'space' and 'time' are also *ākāśa* and *kāla* we cannot leave it to the scientific concepts to shape our spatial and temporal existence.

Here is a formidable challenge for intellectuals. If contemporary intellectual activity is to be more than an alibi for doing nothing, all those apparently theoretical speculations about the nature of time, space, human relations, matter, the nature of the Ultimate, or the holistic approach to reality must be shown to have a bearing on the practical transformation of Man and society, and even a direct influence in reforming our political structures.³ In other words, if traditional indic cultures cannot offer a pattern into which to integrate the insights of other cultures, let us not waste our time on it. Let us take respectful leave of the Coomaraswamys, Aurobindos and Kanes of our times, and place them in the gallery of the gloriously deceased ancestors together with the Śankaras, Abhinavaguptas, Rāmānujas, Kautilyas, wise dravidian sages, and the galaxy of poets and mystics.

ii) Overcoming Narcissism

The *second* moment, is to overcome all narcissistic complexes, to become aware of our many limitations and to examine all things indian with a critical regard. The glorification of the past was often just a cloak to hide the cowardice and impotence, if not degeneration, of our culture. Although indic culture has extended its influence to the whole of South Asia, the 'Golden Age' (if it was one) has been succeeded by decay on almost all levels. Without this examination of conscience and a realistic appraisal of the past, there will be no preparation for the alternatives I am proposing. The narcissistic character of the indic *psyché* has been frequently noted.

As it is well-known, narcissism is intimately related to a complex of inferiority: I am satisfied with myself and turn inward because I do not dare to expose myself to the criticism of others.

There is no denying the obvious fact that indic cultures today do not possess the vitality and power they had in times past. We should be equally aware that keeping to ourselves and simply criticizing the others is often a symptom of weakness and lack of self-confidence. To accuse Pakistan with or without sufficient reason, to make indian muslims responsible for many ills which have more complex causes, or to shift all responsibility to the british *rāj* may be politically expedient, but the fact that those arguments have convincing force for the masses provides an example of how the indic *psyché* is susceptible to political

maneuvering.

The lack of congeniality between India and Modernity makes it clear that there are significant differences between the indic *psychê* and the typical western mentality.

iii) Symbiosis: a third moment

What I have said applies to muslim India, christian India and most other traditions of the subcontinent. Traditional religions are all in crisis when facing modernity. They do not carry convincing authority. The common people look to them for solace of the soul, peace of mind or eternal salvation, but by and large they look somewhere else for inspiration regarding their daily lives. Old wineskins seem unsuitable for the new wine. The impact of secularity, which is different from secularization and should not be identified with desecralization, cannot be ignored and has not yet formed a positive response. There is no need to subscribe to the ideas of Karl Marx or Auguste Comte, but unless traditional cultures and religions awaken to the present challenges there is not much scope for the *symbiosis* with modernity I am proposing.

This third moment does not stand in flat contradiction with our main argument. I said that reality does not need to be dialectical — recognizing at the same time that since Platon and Aristoteles the meaning of “dialectics” has not been univocal.

In spite of my sharp criticism of technocracy, two facts cannot be denied. The first is that technocracy exists, that it has already struck deep roots in the country as well as in the world. Second, that not everything about it is wrong. In fact, it is perhaps due to the failures or weaknesses of other cultures that it has the upper hand today, while bringing great benefits to a considerable group of people. There is no point in making modernity a straw man; nor in hiding the weakness of traditional cultures and religions.

We cannot avoid the hard questions. Can we live in a non-scientific space? Are we prepared to dwell in non-cartesian houses? Can we eat without agribusiness? Are we able to think without giving priority to differences or following ‘models’? Do we know how to live not in linear time, but in qualitative temporality, without hankering for a linear future? Are we going to be happy and have fulfilled lives living in smaller social units? Are we capable of diverting human inventiveness from objective science to the cultivation of ourselves and the discovery of the spiritual world? Can there be for us stimulus and innovation without competition? Do we agree with the answer of Apolonios of Tiana to Vardanes, the babylonian king: “Any luxury afflicts the sage more than scarcity harms you.”¹

¹ Philostratos, *Life of Apolonios of Tiana* I, 33. Incidentally, Apolonios was on his way to India.

These and many other questions would need to be worked out for the alternatives I am suggesting to be incorporated into the *sangam* (confluence) of indic society. It should also be kept in mind that nobody can give satisfactory answers if experiments are not allowed. Such efforts will not be allowed, however, if they are considered a direct challenge to the System. Of course, a genuine alternative does not mean a hasty destruction of the technological complex. It is not by waging war against the enemy that peace is obtained, nor can we achieve a more just and human life by eliminating the 'other', as if 'we' were totally right and the 'other' absolutely wrong. A true alternative represents a more mature and complete awareness of the many facets of reality — discovering the *alter* and not forging an *aliud*.

A certain interpretation of dialectics could be lethal on tjos case, as should have been learned from the many revolutions in history. Although the alternatives are in opposition, they are not in contradiction with the present System; they commune pm a deeper level of reality that opens up to what I would call the mystical insight.

What I mean is that the transformation of society and the metamorphosis of human consciousness must be undertaken by small groups, which should not completely exclude those holding opposed positions. There is something wrong with compromises, Exclusivism and rigid positions only produce something worse. The interlude of technology may be, and *de facto* is, an intermediary moment for something new. I spoke of the necessity of confidence to allow for self-criticism and innovation. Now we add *sybiosis*.

To change the metaphor, the indic subcontinent could be a crucible for such a transformation, provided the spiritual and/or cultural temperature is high enough. We could then profit from the stimulus and criticism from outside, transforming our ways of living and thinking, but not by a flat negation of traditional cultures and replacing them with everything foreign. Alternative is not substitution. The dream of an earthy paradise may be the quickest way to hell.

Some may respond that what has happened until now is the general historical pattern. The āryans imposed their ways of living and thinking on the indigenous populations of the country, and something new emerged out of those clashes. The muslims did something similar, and so did the british. Now western civilization is repeating this process through the contemporary indic ruling class.

But there is a twofold difference. The first difference is that today it is done in the name of the same people and by the rulers of the same nation. The indian Constitution may be a leading example of the liberal, anglo-saxon, somewhat 'protestant' ideology that prevailed in the 19th century, with touches of indigenization and foreign socialism. The second difference is that the government is not imposing its own style for its own benefit,

notwithstanding abuses and corruption. It calls itself the government of the people and by the people. There is certainly the danger that what was for the British the protection of Manchester and Lancaster has become for the officials in power now the protection of their caste, class or economic group, producing the same estrangement.¹ In addition to the principled morality of many in government, there is no denying that all Indians are now in the same boat and that in the long run we are defeating our own purpose by defending a particular class. Today we are not just favoring the victors, the colonizers, and the rich, but installing an anonymous and faceless style in the name of world culture and universal values. Today, the elites are not the masters that the Āryans, Muslims, and to some extent, the British were. They are the instruments of a supranational ideology called modernity and christened by nice names like World Democracy, World Market, Human Equality, United Nations, and so on.

We have already commented upon the objection that I am just dreaming an utopia. Certainly it is an utopia seen with the glasses of modernity. Our problem is not strictly political or sociological. Our problem is anthropological and metaphysical. With a merely rationalistic idea of Man and a dualistic conception of reality there is little hope, even to be understood.

I insist that our problem is of cosmic proportions — which obviously only makes sense if Man is more than an evolved monkey and reality more than what the eye sees. This is the change of myth we referred to. But myths cannot be manipulated at will. The destiny of the human race is something that transcends will-power. By itself religion does not help, but without the awareness of the third dimension of reality there is no hope. This leads us to the *fourth* moment.

iv) Inadequacy

the fourth moment, therefore, consists in the *inadequacy* of both traditional Indic patterns and the modern western models. The *innovation* I propose is more than renovation, let alone restoration. The newness required may be frightening or utopian, but we need the courage of authentic thinking. I would emphasize the mutual fecundation among cultures and

¹ There is a feeling among many officials and politicians today that money given to the poor is wasted; it goes down the drain, while economic help to the 'improving' middle class pays back. I would tend to agree with this cruel and sarcastic remark, but draw the conclusion that this precisely proves that the change needs to be much more radical: a change of structures — and not of the reallocation of money.

religions because the modern predicament should make us realize that no single human construct is sufficient to deal successfully with the human situation.

Cultural alternatives need an element of newness that implies rupture, continuation and fecundation all in one. We may not be able to even imagine how things may look like and may share the anxiety of young parents expecting their first child after the wife has suffered a great trauma.

What is needed is *intellectual courage*. If the first of these two words suggests the power of the mind, the second connotes the value of the heart. This means overcoming the dichotomy of theory and praxis as well as that of knowledge and love (*jñāna* and *bhakti*). We will remain far from an efficient praxis if our intellect has not thought out the theory. At the same time we will be incapable of forging a valid theory unless our praxis has not provided the ground for it. This does not mean that intellectuals should necessarily become guerrilla activists, but I am advocating a much closer contact and symbiosis between action and contemplation. The counterpart of praxis is theory (*theoreia*). Contemplation is the synthesis of the two, the action that flows immediately from the vision (*theoreia*) and the vision which is present in the action.¹

I have called this fourth moment the awareness of our inadequacy, in more philosophical words, our contingency. The inadequacy is not only of the tradition and of the present, as I indicated, but also of our own individual and collective inadequacy. Paradoxically enough, only a sincere conviction of this double inadequacy will liberate the creative forces needed to produce the required innovation. Only a *new innocence* has creative power. A perfect order does not exist.

I am certainly not offering a panacea. The alternatives are always imperfect and provisional. But let us fulfill our human vocation by striving to use our thinking powers to come closer to an ever asymptotic solution.

To reverse cultural trends without political support is impossible. And vice versa, to dream of cultural transformation without a political conversion is equally impossible. Both belong together. This constitutes a *vital circle* once again. I will spell it out more in the next section.

b) The Political Tryst

India and Pakistan became two politically independent States half a century ago. In

¹ Cicero's translation of *theoreia* by *contemplatio* has shaped an important part of western spiritual (and christian) history [*De natura deorum*, II, 14, 37].

the words of one of the heroes of Independence, voicing the unarticulated aspirations of millions, that event was an act of transcendent significance for the whole world.¹

For those who reflect on the history of South Asia down the centuries, the independence of the subcontinent in 1947, after the trauma of the Second World War, represents something more than two new seats in the United Nations.² It was meant to be a "tryst" with history, not just a continuation of the relatively modern 'Nation-State' ideology.³

The independence of the subcontinent was both an auspicious and an unsatisfactory *muhūrta* (a special moment of time); auspicious.⁴ Something happened in the world when the representatives of an ancient culture asserted themselves as independent continuators of a human project which claimed to be not just the overthrowing of a foreign burden, but the beginning of a new era. South Asia, after all, was at the crossroads of autochthonous Wisdoms: the hindu insight of *dharma*, the jaina utter respect for life, the buddhist boundless compassion, the parsi uncompromising choice for the good, the muslim dedication to God, the sikh straightforwardness for truth, the christian ideal of love, along with the secular thrust for Justice, the tribal communion with Nature, and many other values cultivated for millennia... An auspicious *kairos* indeed, as one of the oldest and richest human experiences looked at the possibility of a new human project, steering its own course in an encounter with modernity.

An inauspicious *muhūrta*, too, for it seems we were carried away by the enthusiasm of circumstances and the march of events, while unprepared to exploit the extraordinary possibilities open to that moment.

¹ It is significant that Pandit Nehru used the rather scottish and almost obsolete word *tryst* to stress the importance of that night of the 15th of August 1947. If he was too overwhelmed to deliver a prepared speech, the symbolism of the unconscious is still more telling: "Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time has come when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially." Cf. for a vivid account of the facts Collins & Lapierre (1980) 251. Nehru's acute sense of history led him to add: "At the dawn of history India started on her unending quest and trackless centuries are filled with her striving,... Through good and ill fortunes alike, she has never lost sight of that quest or forgotten the ideal which gave her strength.India discovers herself again."

² We should not play down the meaning of Pakistan either, which had the unique opportunity of coming to a new understanding of the relationship between Religion and Politics within the islamic tradition. If Pakistan or Bangla Desh have failed to establish a truly sacred order, India has hardly been successful in installing a genuinely secular *res publica*.

³ Pandit Nehru admitted near the end of his life that he had lived "in an artificial world of our own creation." Cf. R. Gandhi (1984) 323.

⁴ *Muhūrta*, a moment of time which some consider to be a thirtieth part of the day, i.e. 48 minutes for the 'devotees' of chronological time.

Nevertheless, the indic experience can still become a momentous tryst with the destiny of the human race. To be sure, our post-Independence experience does not seem to support this claim. We may need some more patience — the strongest of all virtues. This past half century should perhaps been seen as a preliminary 'run in' (*en rodage*) before the dawning of a *new* self-identity in one of the greatest adventures of the human spirit. There have been similar examples in history. When Hellenic culture was politically defeated, her 'revenge' was to so impregnate the civilization of its conquerors that its influence remains visible in the West. Surely, the almost four thousand years of human civilization in this part of the world is a venture of comparable magnitude. It should be recalled that these millennia represent not hindu India alone, but the mosaic of cultures and religions that have lived in war and peace, harmony and tension in the southern part of this continent.² Just as sophists, learned slaves and a great deal of hellenic literature spread over the roman world, indian gurus, learned professors and significant works of indic literature are now spreading over the western world. But there is an important and often overlooked difference.

If the oriental impact on the West is great, the occidental influence on the East is much greater — especially since this influence is taken for granted. In many ways the West is still conquering the East. Nevertheless, it is worth reflecting on the unique case of tibetan Buddhism, which is suffocated in its own country and yet is spreading all over the world.

In sum, the independence of the peoples of the indic continent can or should be considered a turning point in the future of humankind only if we do something more than pay lip service to the indic civilizations. It could represent the necessary mutation for the survival of the human race, a recognition that a mere continuation and imitation of post-Renaissance western culture, can no longer be justified³. The western Modern Age may have been a good paradigm to make a particular civilization powerful, but for it to become a paradigm for the whole world would represent an impoverishment of the bountiful human

² We may quote the names of Nag (1941), Harrison (1957) and B.N. Nair (1974, 1975) as a random introduction of the width and depth of the indic civilization in the asian and african world. The influence of the so-called hinduism in many parts of the world is a known although relatively little studied fact. The hindu-muslim syncretism is another important fact. The eight hundred years of muslim influence have made a lasting impact on the culture, and so has christianity.

³ Cf. N. Berdiaev's (1924) insightful dream of a New Middle Ages — which he considers to be the vocation of the peoples of Russia.

experience. The stakes are high. The technocratic complex, represents much more than washing-machines or space travel; it implies a radically different anthropological notion: Man, independent not only from the Divine, but also from Nature. This techno-scientific Man believes himself to be independent and supreme, capable of breaking the rhythms of Nature, taming the Will of the Gods, and building not just a Tower of Babel, but a Fourth World independent from and above the First World of the Sacred, the Second World of the Humans, and the Third World of Nature. It is a fascinating but luciferian project.

These introductory words situate our meditation between immediate political concerns and an historical anthropological perspectives. I am dealing neither with 'party-politics' nor the 'evolution of Man'. I am interpreting the indic phenomenon as a realistic challenge to the world history of the last half millennium when the christian *Imperium* was replaced by Nation-States.¹ We shall come back to this.

No cultural alternatives can be achieved if we do not envisage equally radical political ones. Politics is perhaps the foremost manifestation of the culture of the people: the art and science of living together in a *polis*.

The first thing to note here is the gap between theory and praxis, between the theoretical utopias of academics and the practical framework in which politicians move. It is not unusual today for political scientists to express the need to overcome the ideology of the nation-state, and even of the sovereign state.² Many point to the contradiction between economico-techno-science, which transcends national boundaries, and the sacrosanct aura that still clings to borders.³ But the praxis is rather difficult to change. The entire *status quo* of world politics, in spite of blocs and superpowers, of veto rights and a democratic façade is still arranged in terms of supreme and sovereign nation-states. International organizations are supported by the nations only as long as the former support the interests of the latter.⁴ Truly

¹ Collins & Lapierre (1980) 252 describe that night when India became independence as a breakthrough to a new age: "That age had begun on a soft summer day in a little Spanish port in 1492 when Christopher Columbus sailed off across the endless green seas to the edge of the world in search of India and found America by mistake. Four and a half centuries of human history bore the *imprimatur* of that discovery and its consequences." I want to know whether this sentence should be seen as mere rhetoric, or as historical ontology.

² Cf. Nandy (1988, 1989)

³ One could foresee the meager results of the U.N. Ecological Conference of Rio de Janeiro (1992) just by remarking the inadequate methodological approach: sovereign nation-states and the economic factor were non negotiable premises.

⁴ The withdrawal of USA and later Britain (reincorporated in 1997) from UNESCO in recent years, is a flagrant proof of it, not to mention the benign neglect of resolutions of the United Nations or the International Court of Justice at The Hague when they are not convenient to the various Nation States: ex-South Africa, Israel, USA, and ex-USSR provide us with sufficient examples. Another good example is the delay of states in paying their annual

supranational institutions are hardly of a strictly political nature¹. But there are economic, cultural, and religious supranational institutions, like multinationals, universities (theoretically), and churches whose role in overcoming the nation-state *status quo* could be significant.

This leads me to recall the main supranational institution that gave birth and meaning to the nation-states in that Europe which was the cradle of modern science and technology: Christendom, the *Sacrum Imperium Romanum Germanicum*.² It was not the Church as people understand it today, nor just christianity as religion, but the sacralized ideal of the Roman Empire as the *plenitudo potestatis* invested as the 'successor' of Christ.³

Let us look at the independence of India from this perspective.

In spite of the shock and cruel eye-opener of the First and Second World Wars — which showed the world that the West was not 'divine', i.e., the *Sacrum Imperium* — most of the *intelligentsia* of the colonies, and certainly the leading personalities of India, were imbued with the idea of european, especially british, superiority, not perhaps of race and metaphysical acumen, but certainly of civilized values. There were exceptions, but they were mainly men of an earlier generation or among poets.⁴ The political climate, of course, was

dues to U.N. programs.

¹ The present writer, as one of the judges of the *Permanent People's Tribunal* (for the Liberation of Peoples), which acquired juridical status after the so-called Russell Tribunal, has observed the freedom and impotency of its deliberations. The Nüremberg Tribunal against war crimes was a tribunal of the victors. This People's Tribunal does not have 'political' power because the Nation-States do not have control over it and do not recognize any higher instance than that of the respective States. Modern States are ready to yield some of their rights only for the sake of the demands of other States following the model of individual liberties which are only limited by the liberties of others without the need to recognize any other qualitatively superior code. Morality has been reduced to a private affair — of individuals or States. The "Gulf War", the NATO war against the ex-Yugoslavia, the emerging New-Europe, the case of Pinochet, etc. are all examples of what we are saying.

² Cf. Dawson (1953), especially the chapter "Church and State", Dempf (1929), etc.

³ "Christ left to Peter not only the universal Church, but the whole world to govern" said Pope Innocent III, (1198-1216), Migne, PL 114, 759 (apud Dawson (1953) 86). "The King, like the priest, was an officer in the one Christian society." (ibid.). Jordan of Osnabruck went as far as affirming "that as the Roman Church is the Church of God so the Roman Empire is the kingdom of God.", apud Dawson (1953) 93. For the famous comparison of the sun (pope) and the moon (king), and the famous bull *Unam sanctam* of Boniface VIII (1302) regarding the two swords, the spiritual and temporal, cf. Denzinger (1965) 870-875.

⁴ There is great wisdom in Rabindranath Tagore's *Lectures and Addresses* from the beginning of the century: "We feel the withering fierceness of the spirit of modern civilization all the more because it beats directly against our human sensibility; and it is we the Eastern hemisphere who have the right to say that those who represent this great age of opportunities are furiously building their doom by their renouncement of the divine ideal of personality; for the ultimate truth in man is not in the intellect or in material wealth; it is in his illumination of sympathy, in his

different,¹ it was considered politically improper to modernize the pre-independence Indian nations. The generation of Pandit Nehru did not doubt for a moment that India should be a State just as Great Britain was one. What the elites of that generation never understood was that India was not a State in the western sense of the word; they never realized that the idea of state in which they so reverently believed is a theological and Christian concept.² In fact, the European nation-states were all born as fragments of the empire of Christendom, the Christian successor to the Roman Empire. That is the reason why, seen with historical eyes, Europe appears as a coherent unity.³

The Christian Empire was an ideology; with a common purpose and unifying myth, and took a particular political form.⁴ It represented a complete way of life, embracing all aspects of humans living here and hereafter. Nor was it always a rigid theocratic imperialism. Dante's *De monarchia*, for example, tried to combine the holistic approach with the new insights of the incipient Renaissance in a sort of dialectical communion with the Papacy.

Charles V was the last real emperor of Christendom. From then on, France first, and practically all the rest of Europe later, began to constitute themselves in independent nation-states.⁵ They fought one another, they fought the Papacy, but all of them were united by a strong religious-cultural link.⁶ Not only were all of them declaredly Christian; all of them retained the Christian myth as a unifying force, at least up to the Franco-Prussian war of

illumination of heart, in his activities of self-sacrifice, in his capacity for extending love far and wide across all barriers of caste and color, in his realizing this world not as a storehouse of mechanical power but as a habitation of man's soul with its eternal music of beauty and its inner light of a divine presence." (1980) 75-76. Lecture delivered in Ahmedabad in 1920.

¹ In his lecture "Nationalism in India" Tagore is boldly prophetic: "Nationalism is a great menace. It is this particular thing which for years has been at the bottom of India's troubles. And inasmuch as we have been ruled and dominated by a nation that is strictly political in its attitude, we have tried to develop within ourselves, despite our inheritance from the past, a belief in our eventual political destiny." (1980) 108. That once famous, but long forgotten speech began with the words: "Our real problem in India is not political. It is social." *Ibid.*, 101.

² Cf. just for background, Heer (1953, 1964).

³ India, writes Tagore, "is many countries packed into one geographical receptacle. It is just the opposite of what Europe truly is, namely, one country made into many." He goes on to say in the same famous speech, delivered in the United States, that India which is "naturally many, yet adventitiously one, has all along suffered from the looseness of its diversity and the feebleness of its unity." Tagore (1980) 109.

⁴ Cf. Panikkar (1961/IV) in spite of an obsolete vocabulary.

⁵ After Charles V the Empire was officially fragmented. Phillip II was recognized King of Spain with more power than Emperor Maximilian.

⁶ Practically all peace treaties until well into the XVIII century began: "*In nomine sanctae et indivisae trinitatis.*"

1870. Even now 'post-christian' Europe is precisely that post-christian, which means that it is only understandable in relation to christian values, reflections and reactions.¹ Beyond and behind, when not even above, all the constitutions of modern Europe looms a sort of christianness. It was not only Spain and Portugal which justified their colonial domination in theological terms. In more subtle ways the same mentality governed the expansion of the rest of the european nations.² They shared an unwritten code, a set of common assumptions which were modified through the ages, while preserving the same underlying myth. Even now, instead of one Pope, one Church, one King, or one Empire, we have one Science, one Technology, one Democracy, one World Market, and the ideal of one World Government. It is the same monotheistic archetype. When before it was "*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*" now it runs "*extra scientiam nulla salus*" ("outside [modern] science there is no salvation").

The modern nations were independent and even sovereign parts of an Empire long after emperors and popes had lost their privileges. There remained a link, a community of ideals, a common language, a set of shared values, the bond of a common history, a transcendent destiny. The traditional idea of sovereign governments, for instance, was not at all the modern one of total freedom within the state. A king would be judged by God and his peers, if not by the Supreme Pontiff. All nation-states and their governments knew they were under the disposition of a transcendent Moral Law, a secularized christian code of beliefs and conduct — far above a sovereign democratic Constitution.³ It took the flagrant crimes of the nazis to awaken this latent Christendom, which led to the Nürenberg tribunal for the crimes of lèse humanity. Similar crimes have been committed in history, but the idea of such a tribunal did not occur. The european Union is a secularized effort at regaining the last unity. Myths are stronger and last longer than their logos-contents.

The ritual by which India was declared independent was a ritual in which she was not declared independent *to*, i.e., to do what she wanted, to re-establish a (lost) link with her past, but independent *from* the tutelage of a senior nation-state, because by then she had learnt to do the same by herself. The underlying values, the set of presuppositions, the model remained that of being *also* a nation-state, imitating the centuries of european history, entering into the club of (christian) nations without having been part of the christian ideology. Even today the 'british' Commonwealth is a faded replica of a christian Empire.

¹ Cf. Karl Jaspers' statement that "all we westerners are christian" — not in the narrow confessional sense, of course. Jaspers (1963) 52.

² The Emperor of India and King or Queen of Great Britain are at the same time the supreme Heads of the christian (Anglican) church. *Defensor fidei* is a common title of some european monarchies.

³ It is enough to analyze what we today call the "oath of office" to recognize the remnants of the christian ritual of investiture.

What I am driving at is that the very idea of nation-state, which suffers now its own endogenous crisis, is foreign to India and indic self-identity.¹

One example will substitute here a whole theory: the meaning of history. From Augustinus to Hegel, Karl Löwith and Jean Daniélou, without forgetting thinkers as far apart as Marx and Toynbee, there has been a western preoccupation with History (with roots in Herodotus, Polibius, and what not), which is peculiar to the semitic civilizations: there is a universal history, and it has a meaning. Inherent to almost all western nations is sense of chosenness.² History is an abrahamic category,³ the field of divine human revelation. A nation-state has a mission to fulfill on earth, it is bound to become powerful and secure in order to perform what its sacrosanct duty is. No sacrifice for the State is ever too great. A latent messianism is always present everywhere, even without necessarily aggressive or militaristic undertones. Of course, the idea of the state is always evolving. The idea of USA as a nation began with the sense of a biblical vocation. Most inaugural addresses by the president of USA stress this idea. The "Founding Fathers" wanted to establish a New Israel, but it slowly evolved to resemble a gigantic corporation. The President is the leading salesman for the country's prosperity.⁴ Economy is paramount for other heads of state as well.⁵ What gives cohesion to a modern state is the inertia of the past and the corporate task of economic welfare. "We are headed towards the future, to build a better future" — economically, of course! And for this the whole nation has to be put to toil. Labor is the primary duty and also a right, thereby converting the state into an economic unit.

All this is overstated and ambivalent. But in any case, we are miles apart from the traditional conception of the East. It is into that western model, however, that India entered, in spite of the dream of realizing *Rāmarājya* (Rāma's Kingdom).

India gained her independence either too early, causing the partition between

¹ Cf. Nandy (1988), showing how the idea of the primacy of the state (and culture justified only inasmuch as it fosters the state) began in the middle of the last century as fruit of a hindu self-defense: "These votaries of a Hindu nation-state, thinking that they were pleading for a Hindu polity, were also mostly unaware that the nation-state system was one of the more recent innovations in human civilization"... 5.

² It is not only "Deutschland über alles". U.S. "The most beautiful country of the world", "Todo por la patria", "*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*", "La France éternelle", "Britannia rules the waves", "Right or Wrong, my Country". "AEIOU" (*Austria Erit In Orbe Ultima*), "*ius divinum nationum*", "Israel the Chosen People" and so on.

³ Cf. as single instance Daniélou (1953).

⁴ President Nixon told the nation that he was going to China "as your salesman". And Reagan said the same thing. The American Corporation is in urgent need of expanding its markets.

⁵ When in 1993 John Major (Great Britain), Felipe González (Spain) and Helmut Kohl (Germany) came on official visits to India, apart from some ritual fanfare, they came to talk *business* — and in fact their retinue was mainly executives from the business world.

Hindustan and Pakistan, or too late, thereby missing the ripe historical moment of the bengali renaissance the nineteenth last century. In point of fact, Gandhiji came to the conviction that independence had to precede separation of Hindustan and Pakistan mainly because his views on the separation were different of those of Jinnah. But originally he would not have pressed for independence.¹ Sri Aurobindo also withdrew from politics, and Rabindranath Tagore was extremely critical of pre-independence trends in India.² Vinoba Bhave did not want to have anything to do with the government, and advocated a change in its very structure. Jayaprakash Narayan was pledged to total revolution. Most of these leaders were for decentralization, a return to nature, and a 'modernization' of the indic culture. But by 'updating' of India they certainly did not mean replacing of indic cultures with an alien type of civilization. The modern trends of many indian regions already — although timidly, because of the 'blasphemy' of even doubting the "sacred unity of India" — point towards a much looser confederation and even in secessionist directions.³ It should be clear by now how far we have come from the dream of a unified India fully modern in its own way, yet fully traditional, as her ancient *mythos* would demand. The Indian British Empire broke down, british India was born.

There is no point now in wishful thinking or impotent lamentations. But these are lessons for the present and hints for the future.

¹ "... the Pakistan of the C.R. [Rajagopalachari] — Gandhi conception was to come after independence — «as soon as possible after India is free,» the Mahatma had said to Jinnah —, whereas Jinnah wanted Pakistan before the British left and under British auspices. He did not trust a Congress-ruled India to implement a Pakistan promise... As for total sovereignty, Gandhi said that he and Rajaji both conceded the Muslims right for a separate state 'without the slightest reservation'. But if it meant utterly independent sovereignty, so that there is nothing in common between the two, 'I hold it is an impossible proposition...' Jinnah saw two nations, one Muslim and the other Hindu, and wanted a political recognition of their unbridgeable difference. The Mahatma was prepared to see separation among children of the same family, but to him India was still one family. And it was this different outlook, rather than an intention to deceive, that shaped Gandhi's conviction that independence had to precede separation. Indians, and not the power ruling them, would decide whether they stayed together or separated.", R. Gandhi (1984) 103.

² As early as 1920, he could write: "But now our passion for power and money has no equal in the field. It has not only science for its ally, but also other forces that have some semblance of religion, such as nation worship and the idealizing of self-interest.", (1980) 72. He even speaks of the "demoniacal power of the Nation", 128. He was keenly aware of the problems endemic to the westernization of indian culture: "Freed from the bond of spiritual relationship as the medium of the brotherhood of man, the different sections of society are being continually resolved into their elemental character of forces. Labor is a force, and also capital; so are the Government and the people, the man and the woman... To own the secret of mustering these forces is a proud fact for us, but the power of self-control and self-sacrifice within is a truer subject of exultation for mankind", 73-74.

³ Cf. P.K. Roy (1988) 22 ff and Vidyadharan (1988) 8 ff.

I humbly offer my own interpretation of the current situation, and stand ready for correction, but I hope my views will be seriously considered. The situation of the world and of the subcontinent in particular is so perilous that what at first sight may appear to be a utopian idea should not be casually dismissed.

India is becoming more and more painfully conscious that the Project Indian Nation-State is headed for increasing difficulties. After Partition came Bangladesh, which was not just an internal problem of Pakistan. Since the beginning of Independence there has been unrest in the northeast, now there is agitation for greater autonomy, and movements for full independence are beginning to appear. The moment India understood itself as a nation-state, it was forced to follow the European pattern and to repress its own specific form of conceiving civilized life. She has repressed her unifying myth. India, or "les Indes", "las Indias", as it is still referred to in other European languages, is a mosaic of nations and a bundle of cultures kept together fundamentally by geography and secondarily by history. Breaks begin to (re)appear even within the classical bosom of Hinduism. The proposed singing of the "Sarasvatī Vandana" has re-awakened, in Tamil Nadu, the century-old challenge to Sanskrit Hinduism and re-affirmed the conviction that *āivasiddhānta* does not belong to Hinduism.¹ *At its best*, the very caste system was an effort at maintaining pluralism. The unity of India belongs to the order of the *mythos*, not the *logos*. Its 1,652 languages, in spite of the fact that only some twenty of them are 'official', is already a proof of this.² "National Integration" is doomed to fail.³ The people cannot flourish and be happy in the strait or loose jacket of a foreign world-view.

Whatever one may think about its proposed remedies, modern Hinduism is right in feeling threatened by modernity. India is a plurality of nations, and if we use the classical language she can only have cohesion as an empire, i.e., as a common project of living together in order to realize certain ideals under a unifying myth. From this perspective one can understand the idea of a secular state providing an umbrella for the bewildering variety of the country. But one can also understand the uneasiness of many sectors of the population, since either the secular is only a common denomination at the bottom of society (and then it cannot claim to be a modern State) or it imposes a unification from the top (which may be felt as a threat to the religious self-understanding of many people).

¹ Cf. Ramaswamy (1999) 92-93.

² Without subscribing the joke that the difference between a language and a dialect is that the former has an army and a (royal) academy behind, the main distinction is certainly a power-distinction. Every living language is a dialect. Academicians use their dialect which many people don't understand.

³ Cf. Roy Burman (1975) 131-148. It contains useful bibliography. We underline "Displacement of the Ritual Order by Technological Order", 146-247.

In more political language, the only stable long-run solution for the Indian subcontinent would be a confederation of South Asian Nations in which all nations of the Indian culture could come together with total independence and freedom to follow their own ways. I spoke before of inter-in-dependence. Out of this blanket confederation these nations could form a sort of common market for practical reasons and would need only a minimum of common defense. I am thinking now not only of the North East, Kashmir, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Panjab, for instance, but also of Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal and other countries. I could press my argument by showing how tendencies in many of the present-day regions already point in this direction.¹ But this obviously requires overcoming the western pattern of civilization, along with its technological temptation.

This last proviso is essential. If the smaller nations simply follow the western model, we shall not be much better off, except for the advantage of smaller units and a more homogeneous population in which new experiences are feasible at a human scale. In a country with a billion people, even if they had only one language and culture, a human experience is not possible.² A computerized centralized government might be an efficient corporation; but it is not a nation, nor is it even conducive to "national integration".³

There are attempts being made in this direction, but with a basic difference from what I am suggesting. I propose a confederation of nations, not of states in the modern individualistic sense.⁴ Or, if the word nation no longer connotes what etymology indicates,

¹ For instance SAARC (South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation) which includes the seven countries of the region: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka is a positive attempt. Cf. Katyal (1986) 4 ff; Chakravarty (1986) 10 ff and *The Hindu* (June 24, 1987; April 3, 1988). The association has had its ups and downs in its attempt to establish a genuine cooperation in spite of some political tension caused by events in the region. Cf. Parthasarathy (1989) 17 ff in Islamabad; Katyal (1990) 17 ff in Male, where important decisions were taken as "the signing by the seven Foreign Ministers of the SAARC Convention on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances" and about "the establishment of joint ventures in cottage industries and handicrafts for promoting collective self-reliance", 19.

² An example not far from us in time and space and free from political interpretations is the case of Kodagu (Coorg) which enjoyed after Independence a truly democratic administration and prosperous life before it was merged into bigger Karnataka and was exploited to the point of having lost most of its wealth afterwards. Cf. C.M. Ramachandra (1988/1) 89-91; (1988/2).

³ The Berlin Wall has collapsed, but the U.S.A. has put powerful fences (which eventually can be electrified) along a great part of its Mexican border. And now India has begun putting a 507 km fence with Bangladesh costing an estimated price of Rs. 800 crores. *The Hindu* (March 3, 1993).

⁴ There is a transfer from the European-North-American individualism to the nation-state individualization. Nation-states are nothing but the collective copy of single individuals, and the democracy of individuals is being (theoretically) re-enacted in the democracy of every state one vote. The present set-up of the U.N. shows palpably

one could speak of a confederation of peoples.

This would obviously not solve all the problems. There are deep-rooted tensions between the peoples of the subcontinent, and there are neighboring countries with competing interests. The situation is complex and there are no universal panaceas.

It has been written that "India is a large Switzerland".¹ No! Switzerland is christian and post-christian, whereas India is a mosaic of religious traditions. Switzerland has a common myth, India is an entire mythology. Switzerland has a history of centuries, India of millennia. Switzerland is small, India is large. In this situation, the law of qualitative change through quantitative increase applies. Furthermore, Switzerland has a history within the european community, and St. Nicholas of Flüe is an accepted symbol. Although "the father of the Nation", Gandhi is today rejected by a majority of dalits. Switzerland acquired identity through the dismembering of the christian empire, India has hardly ever been an 'empire', if this word is taken to mean a unifying myth. India never entered into the myth of the british empire, nor the did british rāj want to interfere with the cultures of India. Whether Switzerland could or should be the model is precisely what stands under discussion.²

What I have been saying so far should not minimize the value of many positive initiatives being taken today within the wide frame of the Constitution. I would single out the 'zilla parishads' (district councils) and the 'mandal panchayats' (village assemblies) that came to power again in Karnataka in 1987.³ The panchayati rāj system, which has existed since 1959, aims at decentralization and giving power to the rural people at the grass-root level. But except for a few States (West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra) it remained in slumber.⁴ It has been working well in West Bengal, implementing land reforms. In 1959, during the budget session, a constitutional amendment was introduced in the Lok Sabha for reforming the panchayat rāj. The states run by different parties are afraid that,

how this is not possible.

¹ Cf. Balasundaram (1968) 9-23.

² Interestingly enough Tagore (1980) 116 already dismissed the parallelism with Switzerland, which was already common in his time.

³ There are two pioneering innovations: 30% of the elected members are women, and the voting age has been lowered to 18. There are now 19 'zilla parishads' invested with power, the president of each Parishad has the ranking of a Minister of State. And there are 2.586 Mandal Panchayats. All together, and for the first time, there are 53.000 representatives of the people from the grass-root level. Cf. *The Hindu* (Jan. 26, 1987). This innovation in decentralization has been keenly and regularly reported by the press. Cf. e.g. *The Indian Express* (Feb. 2, 1987); *The Hindu* (Feb. 22, 1987; March 15, 1987; August 2, 1987); the "Advertisement Supplements" in *The Illustrated Weekly of India* (May 3, 1987). Cf. the assessment of Parvathi Menon (1990) after 3 years of experience.

⁴ Cf. Vinayak (1989/1) 23-24; V.K. Rao (1989) 25 ff. We know also of a brave attempt of an "All Women Panel Contests Panchayat Election" in Satara district, Maharashtra. Cf. Pathankar (1984) 2 ff.

through this legislation the center may interfere in the affairs of the local bodies.¹ If well organized and with proper motivation, however, the active participation of the people should lead to healthy changes.²

The complexity of the indian situation makes it impossible to propose an immediate implementation of more radical suggestions. I present them simply as the goal towards which one should strive. A serious economic recession would be enough to make people realize that what I am proposing is more realistic than increasing dependence on a System for all activities of life.³

Many would object to the implementation of this more gandhian life-style. "India cannot isolate herself from the rest of the world" they say, and I agree. But here we have an example of the elitist and biased use of language. To be in communion with 80% of the world population cannot be called isolation unless one assumes that the only possible information is by telex and satellites. "Isolation" is a euphemism for not joining the club of the so-called 'advanced' nations. It is rather the people and governments in power who are isolated from the rest of the world.⁴

It is also worth remembering that 'isolation' is a spatial concept applied metaphorically to our human situation, and most people assume that everybody has to agree on what real space is, namely, the 'scientific' notion of it. For the indic kosmology, however, space is another thing altogether. Each nation, for example, has its proper space in which it can breathe, thrive and live. Outside that space, it suffocates. The space of the indic people is not that of the europeans. To throw them into the same box can only produce confusion, disorder and suffering. I am not so sure that seeing the 'world' on a television screen

¹ Cf. Padmanabhan (1989) 17 ff; Chakravarty (1989) 21-22.

² In Feb. of 1991 the Left Democratic Front, in Kerala, has won a major victory in the newly founded district councils elections. Cf. Isaac (1991) 34 ff.

³ An anecdote is worth recalling because in its *prima facie* interpretation has been utilised to prove the backwardness of the villagers. A development agency was trying to install a pipeline for drinking water in one village. The villagers were not satisfied. They wanted simply wells and more effective ways of getting the water from them. They felt that the pipeline was making them dependent from those who have the power to open or close the key in the far away central station about which they have neither control nor knowlegde of how it worked. We may convert the water pipeline connection into the industrial pipelines and financial and technocratic pipelines which make our bare existence dependent from a world market, an agribusiness decision from the top. The present world economy is not based on inter-depedence, but on dependence. If the computer break down a 'computerized' society collapses.

⁴ Not only psychologically and sociologically, but also literally. The atrocious security measures which most politicians, financial and industrial magnates endure is simply unbelievable and would be unbearable if power were not offering some artificial consolations. The fear of so-called 'terrorism' has become paranoia for the people in power, who cannot even enjoy a stroll on the street.

produces more communion than discussing the situation of humanity in a tea shop or in a *mandapam*. Who is more isolated? I am not taking sides, but I am only saying that a person who has experienced the *buddha-kāya*, the *dharmakāya*, the mystical Body of Christ, or even the universal law of *karma* is not necessarily more isolated than a voracious reader of newspapers or an internet addict.

In sum, the peoples of the world do not live in the same spaces and times, just as we do not live in the same bodies. And yet we can communicate.² Our different kosmologies should be acknowledged. On one hand, to be human means to be conscious of the responsible task of taking this world as the laboratory for making life more comfortable or just. On the other hand, to be human is to participate consciously and responsibly in the "joyous festival of being human", i.e., sharing in the very joy of the unfolding of the universe.³ Religion here 're-links' ('relegates') us to the creative activity of reality (whether or not it is called God) and *dharmā* to the holding together of this universe for its whirling dance of unabated creativity.

The word 'modernity' has an etymological reference to time. We have to be of our time. Certainly, but time is diachronic. A german urbanite is not a 'contemporary' of an indian peasant, for they do not really live in the same time. 'Scientific' time has made the world's westernized elites believe that time is an homogeneous parameter. Slowly we begin to recognize the diachronical nature of both modernity and contemporaneity.

If India were to follow her own original and different way she would all but isolate herself. She might then be an island (*insula*, isolated) but this island would become a challenge to the world, an irritant and an example, a motive of imitation and of contestation, she would establish an extraordinary polarity that would be evaluated differently by different people. She would then really open up the 'third way', the genuinely non-aligned way.

It does not belong to this study to suggest now *how* it could be done. There are already several studies of such 'models'. I prefer to stress the revalorization of the notion of people and an understanding of nation as a reality different from that of a state. The

² A concrete and tragic example of human space versus 'scientific' space is the forced displacement of villages because of 'national needs' whether for a dam, a military base, mining or other technological reasons. Modern civilization is completely unaware that to displace human beings is not just a move in a cartesian space, but amounts to a mutilation of their bodies and inner destruction of their lives.

³ Cf. | āntideva, Bodh VII, 57.

alternative to nation-state is not necessarily feudalism, but most probably confederation of nations, perhaps somewhat in the direction of the greek *politeuma* or confederation of cities, which was not based on the individuality of city-states but on the personality of the citizens and the unity of the bio-regions.

I am not proposing philosopher-kings or dreaming of holy-citizens. I am presenting the need for a new vision of the human project based on a new re-interpretation of the past, a fresh reading of the present, and a creative step towards a new experience of human existence on earth, and also in heaven, to stress the kosmological change. We can no longer isolate the political scene from the human life as a whole and from cosmic solidarity.

c) The Religious Transformation

Cultural and political alternatives cannot be long-lived if the religious factor is absent. And here the difficulty is as great as in the two previous sections. If modern culture needs to be challenged, if the political setup requires change, the religious element also demands also a radical transformation. Religion is ingrained in human society and grafted in the deeper layers of the human being. Without religious change, we shall have only ephemeral and superficial revolutions. The castes of India furnish us with a telling example. Neither the good will of the Constitution nor technological civilization has been able to abolish them. The roots are religious, and religion is the most subtle and powerful drive of the human being, both for good and ill.

Let it be said at the very outset that the notion of *religion*, which contains, of course, a factor of theory as well as praxis, encompasses a threefold aspect. the first is *religiousness*, or the human dimension concerning ultimacy, wherever this ultimacy is believed to reside. *Religiousness* belongs to human nature. Man is a *homo religiosus*, a being aware of the infinite, the mystery, the unknown. The second aspect is *religionism* (generally called religion), the more or less open or closed ideology, or system of ultimate beliefs, of a particular collectivity. *Religionism*, as in buddhism, 'christianism', or hinduism, gives Man a sense of belonging. *Religiology* is the third aspect. As conscious and thinking beings, we try to formulate in a more or less perfect way the meaning of our existential situation. Religiology is doctrinal. Religionism is social. Religiousness is experiential. The three need to be distinguished, but they cannot be severed from one another. Man is neither an isolated individual (satisfied with his religiousness), nor a mere social being (content with mere religionism). Man is also a rational animal (requiring religiology), who articulates his views on the ultimate nature of reality.

The relationship between these three notions is intrinsic and non-dualistic: culture gives religion its language; religion gives culture its ultimate contents. Culture without politics is folklore; politics without culture is an impossibility, since politics offers the first framework for culture. Religion without politics is a hypocritical, alienating force; politics without religion becomes a mere choice of means for unexamined ends. The three belong together.

The role of religion in this search for alternatives is double: it gives the individual the ultimate motivation to plunge into praxis, and offers the ultimate theory of what we are all looking for.

I am conscious of the alien character and inadequacy of the name religion. The word is neither christian, nor muslim, nor hindu in origin. It is not even greek, but a syncretistic latin compromise. But with the word *dharma* we would encounter similar difficulties regarding the point I wish to make.¹ However, the syncretistic origin of the word should help us to enlarge its use beyond the official religions. Humanism, marxism, or anything that Man believes give ultimate meaning to life, can be called religion. Religions do not have the monopoly on religion.

In the indic subcontinent the different traditional religions have lived a life of more or less peaceful co-existence. Over the centuries they have had a , considerable influence on one another and have given birth to new religions. But, by and large, they have remained separated communities, following the pattern of the caste mentality shared by the bulk of the indic mind.² Hinduism, it is worth recalling, is just a foreign label invented to group together a bundle of religions (or religious traditions).³

What is needed, therefore, is not only a cultural symbiosis and a political change, but a religious transformation as well. Just as a single political structure cannot harbor a plurality of cultures, the present day religious traditions cannot adequately deal with the present pluralistic human situation. This does not mean we should abandon them, as the "Enlightenment" intellectuals and their descendents have believed. Instead, we must help create a transformed religious understanding within which will traditional religions will find it possible to achieve something more radical than just a reform.

The climate of our times seems to indicate that a major turning point in human religious consciousness is approaching. It is therefore an historical imperative for the indic continent, cradle of so many religious persuasions, to prepare the next leap— for a leap it is.

¹ Cf. C. Badrinath (1993).

² The difference is clear if we compare the facility with which japanese society, for instance, mingles shinto rituals with buddhist allegiance, neo-confucianist attitudes, and even christian beliefs and secular practices.

³ Cf. e.g. King (1999) 146-185.

Most of the kosmologies of traditional religions are today obsolete — and, thus, the respective creeds need renewal. I am asking for a new religious *ethos* for humankind in which each religion will be seen as a dimension of the other, as a more or less convincing expression of the ultimate meaning of life and of the ways conducive to reaching that goal however it may be conceived. We think of something akin to the christian trinitarian notion of *perichôresis*. We are approaching a pluralistic confederation of belief systems and of ways of experiencing reality. Fundamental differences on doctrinal issues will persist. Religions may remain as irreducible as languages: each expresses a different and irreducible way of being in the world, not just a different manner of saying the same thing. And yet translations are possible, communication is not excluded, and even confrontations could be fruitful once a common field has been established. The transformation of religious consciousness I am espousing does not dream of a single “world religion”, as there would be no gain for humankind in speaking one single language. Reality is multifaceted, polymorphous, pluralistic.

I am not defending a merely transcendent unity of religions, because religions are something more than transcendent realities.¹ Nor am I advocating a mystical union of religions because they are more than a mystical core.² I am pursuing a way of *dharma samanvaya*, the harmony of all *dharmas*,³ but harmony is not synonymous with uniformity nor with absence of contradictions. We should not reduce religions to *religiousness* either, or we will be blind to the historical fact that religions, while representing the loftiest human values, are at the same time, often in an inextricable way, exponents of the darkest layers of the human being both individually and collectively. *Corruptio optimi pessima*, the corruption of the best is the worst. But the peculiarity of the ultimacy of religion is that we cannot separate the two aspects, and insist that religion is only the good side of its ambivalent nature. Where there is heaven, there is also hell.

What I espouse is the *transcendental concurrence* of religions. By the very fact of being religion, each expresses in its own unique way what it believes to be the nature of religion (which does not need to be the same belief). If we agree in calling religion the set of symbols, ideas and practices which people believe are conducive to the realization of the ultimate meaning of life (whatever this may be), each religion will embody this belief in its proper and distinctive way. The nature of religions is like the nature of Man. We do not know exactly what Man *is*, and yet each one of us embodies that nature. Each person realizes

¹ Cf. Schuon (1948) and the pionnering work since 1932 of Bhagavan Das (1955).

² The writings of S. Radhakrishnan are meritorius for having stressed this point ever and anon.

³ This is reference to BS I, 1, 4 applying it to all *dharmas* as suggested by S. Radhakrishnan in his translation (1960) 249.

in its own unique and concrete way the nature of Man. Obviously, the essence of Man cannot be said to be the WASP model or the brahmin archetype. There is a transcendental relation of each individual to the nature of the *humanum*. But this *humanum*, like religion, is not an immutable and superior essence to which individuals or religions approach as a model. This way of thinking has created havoc in human history. To be black or to be white, to be female or male, introverted or extroverted are different ways to be Man, but we cannot say that one of the pairs is the model. the same is true of religions. This does not exclude the probability that there exist deformations and degenerations of religions.

In short, there is an element of mystery in reality, a dimension of transcendence in Man, an ever 'more' in all that 'is': more than the individual, more than society, more than what meets the eye, more than the present, more than all that can be said and thought. There is a space of freedom open to everyone, of which no one has an adequate description or experience because it is pure freedom, and any thought, remembrance, or even re-enactment, is already a secondary act. We have to trust ourselves, each other and that very Mystery. Faith is required for human existence.

This religious transformation I am envisaging calls for the overcoming of exclusivisms and absolutisms, let alone fanaticism,s of all sorts. On the positive side, it means a readiness to cooperate whenever a common endeavor appears. Of course, the best people in human history have always shown this magnanimity, tolerance and, ultimately, intelligence. But today there is an increased awareness of the presence and value of the other, and the urgency of our present predicament obliges every conscious human being to *rearrange* his or her priorities. There is an acute awareness that religions, although generally beginning as factors of reform, innovation, and even revolution, often tend to freeze the growth of human life. Since religions are one of the causes of our present crisis, they have a responsibility to help overcome it.

What is emerging more and more, not without an understandable and often healthy reticence, is *pluralism*. It could be reduced to the human experience of contingency: we are *tangents* (*cum tangere*) to the Absolute, but none of us (and no religion) is the Absolute, or has a monopoly on it. Like the tangent, we touch it only at one point without dimensions.

Returning to our medication on India, and without indulging in facile critique of institutionalized religions, fanaticisms and exclusivism, some preliminary comments are in order.

It would be easy to assert, first, that all religions have failed. There is no doubt that the lofty teachings of Buddha, Moses, Christ, Muhammad as well as Krishna and other great religious figures, all have failed inasmuch as their followers have all too often betrayed, when not deformed their teachings. But one of the traits of the human condition is to cope

with failures, whether it is called sin, *avidyā*, unbelief or whatever. We should be wary of triumphant religions. Religions share in the itinerant and even unfulfilled human condition.

The record of indic religions is also ambivalent. It is known, for instance, that from the VIIth century onwards the jaina *samgha* in Tamil Nadu faced hostility aroused by several factors, as the zeal of the śaivite and vaiṣṇavite Masters, and suffered a progressive decline.¹ In addition persecutions, aberrations and superstitions, what could be considered the intellectually most representative religion of India, hinduism has, at least in some of its branches, rightly or wrongly given the impression of a world denying religion.²

Culture and politics are human constructs for the well-being of Man. Traditional religions have different ideas of what this well-being consists of, and therefore propose different means. Orthopraxis and orthodoxy are linked together. However, a few things stand out. They are fragments of the emerging myth: The gravity of the human predicament, the paramount urgency of *Justice*, the importance of *Ecosophy*, the need to minimize the *greed* of Man; the necessity of *Peace* for survival, the centrality of the human *Metron*, the irreducible human *Dignity* (so as not to condone with the sacrifice of some generations for the problematic success of the successors), the urge of the human race to forge its *Destiny* by tapping the dormant creativity Man feels he is endowed with. I have summarized these trends as *sacred secularity*.³

These and similar values call for a vision of reality more in harmony with those aspirations of Man: The elementary urges of Man are the most fundamental ones. Eating, sleeping, loving, dwelling, talking, walking, thinking, dreaming,... are not just material needs one has to provide for, so that they do not interfere with the main job (of basically 'making money'); they are not accidentals that only "primitive Man" is obsessed with, who has "no time" for a truly civilized activity. From the hindu *soma*-spirituality to the christian eucharist, tantrism and the sacramental vision of reality, from the buddhist search the happiness of all sentient beings, and the muslim surrender to the will of God, to universal love and compassion, religions have stressed the fundamental value of elementary things. There is an urgent need to overcome the modern regression from *homo sapiens*, experiential and savoring Man, to *homo habilis*, engineering Man.⁴ Religion is not know-how, but know-

¹ Cf. Deo (1956) 130-131.

² According to Albert Schweitzer. But this is not only a western perspective. Professor Hu Shih, a chinese historian of the beginning of this century saw Ch'an (or zen) as the final sinification of indian buddhism by secularizing it and purifying it from "the other-worldly and ascetic plague of India" as Lai & Lancaster (1983), state in the preface (xii).

³ Panikkar (1999/XLIII).

⁴ Tellingly enough the original meaning of *sofia*, the *sapientia* of *homo sapiens*, is that of *homo faber*, the *techné* of the hand and of the spirit.

what and also know-when to stop the know-why — because we touch the limits of the question, as Buddha would say.¹

All this requires a religious awakening in order to resist modern temptations to break the natural rhythms and accelerate the cosmic processes, the dream of scientific-technological ideology. It is not a matter of glorifying the past (which is dark enough) or denigrating it by falling prey to a collective alienation. India should rid itself of a certain inferiority complex and of the burden of a foreign model, not because it is foreign, but because, along with the best minds of other latitudes, we have begun to recognize that the present monolithic System is not conducive to peace, whether personal, social or political. We could then begin to create new patterns of human life as an *innovation* of millennia of crystallized human experience in which the contribution of the West should certainly not be minimized.

Here, religion plays another fundamental role. Ultimately, the problem of Man is a religious issue, not just economics or politics. The question is the meaning of human life, the destiny of humanity, the sense of reality. Without a genuinely religious attitude confronting questions of life and death, without a recognition of the seriousness and ultimacy of the issues at stake, we cannot do justice to the present human situation. The very problem of technology is not technological; it is a human problem. The full consecration of Man is needed to deal with these questions. This, by definition, is the area of religion. Otherwise, our talk about religion is not just superficial, but irreligious.

At the threshold of the third millennium, to follow a highly symbolical time-reckoning, it is clear that for the "Glory of God", the attainment of *nirvāṇa*, the reaching of *mokṣa*, heaven, salvation, a better rebirth or no rebirth at all, the survival of the human race and living beings, happiness, the attainment of Justice, Freedom, Peace, and the like, we need to cultivate a more complete *dharma*, acquire a deeper *ethos*, adhere to a more genuine mystical religiousness. A new religious wave is spreading all over the world, but often it is short-sighted, fundamentalist, revivalist, and exclusivist. This only shows the importance of the religious dimension of Man for the overcoming of merely pragmatic and superficial attitudes.

It is worth considering how hinduism could learn from islām, and vice-versa, how the primordial religions might assimilate insights from christianity, and the other way round, how it would not harm jainism to listen to sikhism, or sikhism to listen to jainism, etc. In brief, religious traditions should recognize the obvious: they cannot live in ghettos, and a mutual fecundation is bound to come. this does not imply easy eclecticism or artificial syncretisms, but suggests we all need to lose the fear of meeting the other and become open

¹ Cf. SN III, 189 (*khanda-vagga* II, 1).

to dialogue. This is all I wish to say here. It would be methodologically wrong to make proposals from the outside or offer a priori theories. The issue is not merely objective, but also subjective. It is part of the existential dynamics of human life. We are part of the problem and of the solution.

* * *

I have asked whether indic culture is ready to play host to the innovations coming from exogenous sources. The question is also whether the three and a half millennia of indic political experience do not offer an autonomous formula for a human collective project which, while accepting the uncontestable achievements of modernity, could be more congenial to the people of this part of the earth and avoid the equally undisputable pitfalls of westernization. Can religions grow and accept an inner conversion amounting to a transformation, which would in no way dilute their identity, but enhance it? An honest first response to these three questions is to say that desirable as it may be, it is terrifyingly difficult.

This spontaneous reaction puts us on the track of the new religious answer. I can put it both ways, anthropocentrically or theocentrically. From a humanistic viewpoint, taking into consideration the real situation of the indic peoples, the situation looks rather bleak. After so many centuries of decline, will the people of this part of the world have enough vitality and force to undertake the required measures, let alone grasp the meaning and transcendence of them? From a religious point of view the initiative does not lie with Man but with something beyond and above the human being, whether called Destiny, Fate, God, the Divine, Karma or whatever. To put it more philosophically, is there in reality itself a reservoir of energy as it were, an inner dynamism or another factor to reckon with? Can the unfolding of human consciousness open up to a new 'revelation' of that Ground of Being which will not permit humanity to continue its rush towards a premature self-immolation? Or is the planetary reality, fatalistically condemned to self-annihilation? From an anthropocentric perspective, it surely seems so, but is the homocentric angle the only one to reckon with?

It would only be bypassing the issue to go to the other extreme in a blind and fatalistic 'trust' in superhuman powers. But it would be equally one-sided to exclude, as the *Gītā* would say, that when the *dharmā* is at its lowest a new descent of the Divine may, or rather, will occur. The living religious traditions of South Asia have not lost a deep religious conviction that the "human phenomenon" is more than human, that *avatāras* are real, and God does not forsake his believers. In other words, redemption is mysteriously still taking

place, the forces of Good will ultimately prevail, and *maitreyas*, *imams*, prophets, and grace are not empty words. The religious dimension is alive, but the sectarian or literal sense in which they are often still interpreted all too often make those beliefs ineffective in reshaping the human situation, except perhaps for a few 'elected' groups. Is there any other way of forcefully understanding this eschatological tenet? There are 'fusion reactions' in the sun, just as there is death on earth. But this does not justify producing thermonuclear bombs here, anymore than the fact of human mortality entitles us to kill one another. An apocalyptic attitude does not need to be defeatist and catastrophic.

The religious dimension is here at its central place, without excluding particular traditional languages and concrete interpretations. Religions are concerned with 'salvation', 'liberation', 'freedom', 'joy', and 'transcendence', not to use more specific concepts of different traditions. This is not a mere individualistic affair; it is collective, historical and cosmic. This jump to the other shore is not an exclusively human concern, but a cosmic venture. Prayer and/or meditation are not meaningless activities. History is more than just the struggles of humans with one another, or the field where the Divine uses humans as his puppets. Why not also "so in heaven as it is on earth"? as well as "*samsāra* is *nirvāṇa*" and "*nirvāṇa* is also *samsāra*"? Why not "this is that", and not just "that is this", "*tat tvam asi*" because *aham tvam asmi*, and so on.¹

To recapitulate: the Gods love the impossible, and so do Men. But it has to come before their eyes as a challenge, an invitation, a risk. The urge is there. Man is more than an animal of needs, and more also than a toy of the Divine, or the despot of this planet. The Divine, Human and Cosmos, all three share a common Life. Certainly not democratically, but also not theocratically, let alone materialistically. The three are not equal, nor are they set apart. They are not two realities, nor just one. "All words here recoil, together with the mind".² We are conscious that this reality is ungraspable.

I still want to offer one further reflection of a very general nature that may apply to most religions.

In describing the passive resistance of ordinary people and the political rebellion of dalits and others we have already suggested what appears as the only way out of our technological impasse. A short *excursus* on the history of religions may clarify what I would like to say. From this perspective, the human achievements of the centuries since the european "enlightenment", in spite of the "europeanization of the world", is nothing but an accident of the human species — even an accident of the Occident. Once Man awakens from this technoscientific trance, we will discover again the primordial religiousness that

¹ Cf. Mt. VI, 10; Nāgārjuna, MK XXV, 19; KathU V, 14 and also CU VI, 8, 7 ff.

² TaitU II, 4.

constitutes the *substratum* of practically all the so-called "great religions". What would christianity be without its pre-christian elements? What is living hinduism without its cthonic and dravidian factors? What is, in short, the religiosity of the peoples of the world without its telluric dimension?

We have systematically denigrated "primitive Man" forgetting that if we cut our links to primordial Man we cease to exist as truly human beings. The alternative is not a romantic return to the past. After all, there is much more in contemporary life than computers, acceleration, an anguish to achieve things, the dread of death, and the superficiality of life. At the same time, there is also much more in primordial Man than ignorance, ingenuity, filth, cruelty and 'primitivism'. We should not despise our own flesh, as a hebrew prophet put it.¹

What I am driving at is the transformation of the so-called "World Religions" by learning again from the tribal religions and/or small religions. It is not a matter imitating them, but all religions should certainly recover their cthonic, telluric and mythical values. Man lives neither by bread alone, nor mind alone. I am speaking of the recovery of the *mythos*: the new innocence.

This remark has one important and concrete corollary: the overcoming of the dichotomy between religion and politics. Due to a very particular conception of religion and a very uncritical notion of politics the post-enlightenment period has dogmatically established a total separation between the two. And the reasons are obvious once we accept the premises of individualism (religion is a private affair of the individual) and of rationalism (politics is the rational organization of society). But these two assumptions are no longer convincing. Religion a human dimension permeating all aspects of human life, and having been repressed, religion today explodes with violent fury in fundamentalisms of all kinds. Politics, which was assumed to be a rational handling of possibilities, has proved its inability to handle the human condition (never in human history have there been so many wars, and so many victims as in present times).²

The choice is not between theocracies and dictatorships. The alternatives imply the de-establishment of religions and the dethroning of the *logos*. If primordial religiousness does not offer a model to imitate, it certainly provides an example to learn from. If the very conception of politics is in crisis, the established traditional religions are all the more in dire need of a radical transformation.

But again, all this is neither mere speculation, pure mysticism nor fine poetry. It is part and parcel of human destiny and truly constitutive of our human dignity. This is why my

¹ Cf. Is LVIII, 7.

² Cf. Panikkar (1999/XL).

call to Indra, "the One invoked by both sides in the battle"¹ is more than a literary device. We have to play our part. The stakes are high, nothing less than the destiny of being. Being is *also* in our 'hands', and we should not cede the ball to the God(s). *Fortuna favet audentibus*. This is the cunning.

3. Indra's Divine Cunning

As I said in the beginning, my reflections on the historical role and cosmic responsibility of India do not exclude muslims, jainas, buddhists, sikhs, christians, parsis, secularists and others, above all, ādivāsīs. But I would like to use the ancient vedic tradition and interpret the symbol of Indra from a cross-cultural perspective which may help to understand our present condition. One may regard Indra as a symbol latent in an elusive myth that has not yet emerged. A myth, like the light, is invisible. A myth gives us a language, a point of reference, a horizon, and allows us to see things under a particular light.

My choice of Indra as a symbol has still another reason. Indra is a God. Neither the destiny of India nor of the world at large can be properly understood and dealt with without the divine factor. Further, Indra is not a monotheistic God. A certain narrow understanding of monotheism may be part — only a part — of the modern predicament. Human history, and ultimately Man, cannot be understood without reckoning with that third factor that is called the divine. Democracy is a practical and more or less just technique of government (within an accepted myth), but it fails to take into account that the sovereignty of the people is far from "supreme". Not only because there are also other peoples claiming supremacy, but mainly because, as history shows, there are mysterious forces that move and govern those 'sovereign' powers. There may be no God, but Man is surely not a substitute for God. And yet there is a Mystery besides (I do not say necessarily above) Man and Nature for which a traditional name is Divinity. This third factor may be immanent in Man and the Cosmos, but it is also transcendent. We may walk with our feet on earth, but we breathe with our head in the sky. Indra might well be a symbol for our purpose.²

¹ Cf. RV II, 12, 8.

² Long before my indological studies led me to be fascinated by Indra and to use him as a symbol, R. Tagore wrote prophetically: "In our mythology we have the legend that the man who performs penances for attaining immortality has to meet with temptations sent by Indra [...]. The West has been striving for centuries after its goal of immortality. Indra has sent the temptation to try her [*sic*]. It is the gorgeous temptation of wealth. She has accepted it, and her civilization of humanity has lost its path in the wilderness of machinery." The text goes on:

This much may suffice for us.

a) Indra

We shall not try to unravel the complicated and often contradictory features of the God. The Indra of the Ṛg Veda differs considerably from that of the Brāhmaṇas, and in turn from the Indra of later texts. He presents a polyfaceted personality. It can hardly be said that it is only one single being. Already the Ṛg Veda asserts that he assumes the forms of all things in the universe.¹ Let us not make of him just one fellow, divine or human or both. He is rather a living symbol on another plane, and it is this that encourages me to see 'him' as the symbol of our complex situation. We shall listen to Indra, hear what the *śruti* has to say, take the hints and create our own narrative, or rather chisel our symbol from the polymorphous block of the śrautic and śmritic material.

First of all, as I just said, Indra is a God, indeed, the most prominent of the vedic gods. Our adventure is not solely a human concern, but a divine and cosmic epic as well. I spoke of a *daivāsuram*. His greek counterpart is Zeus, Jove is his roman parallel, as Thor is the eddic, Chac the mayan, and Marduk the babylonian. His heir in hinduism is Viṣṇu. Indra is the God of the cosmic forces who keeps heaven and earth separated, and is the giver of rain and happiness. He liberates the waters and wins light (conquers the sun).² He who makes the sun shine³ is the solar God, hero of some 300 hymns in the Ṛg Veda (one fourth, around 250, of all vedic hymns are dedicated to him).

He who from birth was chief of the Gods, the wise one,
protecting with his might the other Gods,
before whose energy and mighty exploits
the two worlds tremble: he, Men, is Indra!⁴

"Of the Gods I am Indra" sings the Bhagavad Gītā,¹

"The temptation which is fatal for the strong is still more so for the weak. And I do not welcome it in our Indian life, even if it be sent by the lord of immortals. Let our life be simple in its outer aspect and rich in its inner gain. Let our civilization take its firm stand upon its basis of social co-operation and not upon that of economic exploitation and conflict. How to do it in the teeth of the drainage of our life-blood by the economic dragons is the task set before the thinkers of all oriental nations who have faith in the human soul." Tagore (1980) 120-121.

¹ RV VI, 47, 18.

² RV III, 34, 8; VIII, 78, 4.

³ RV III, 44, 2; VIII, 3, 6; VIII, 87, 2.

⁴ RV II, 12, 1. Cf. the whole hymn in Panikkar (1977/XXV) 202-204. *Sa janā sa indra!* "He, people, He (is) Indra!" is the refrain of the entire hymn.

but Indra is an atypical God.² On the one hand, he is the *eka·deva*, the *tad eka·*, the only one, the supreme God, but on the other hand, he takes many forms, tempts people and seduces wives of others. Indra by his *māyā* goes about in many forms”.³ He is the most mischievous and even immoral God. “He is beyond good and evil.”⁴ A most brutal moral criticism is to be found in the Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad citing all the atrocities Indra committed without remorse.⁵ He did not always exist, for he is constantly being born and once born he illumines the sky. “My begetter begot me with nobody as my enemy”.⁶ He goes through indefinite reincarnations, and is also the name for the individual soul. Śiva humiliates him by showing him previous Indras.⁷ In buddhism he begins to be degraded and in the Purāṇas he appears tired, almost “the picture of a retired soldier”.⁸ He, the highest of the vedic Gods, has disappeared from the religious horizon. Or rather, he has made himself invisible and taken the form of modern Science and Technology. At any rate, he is a vanishing God. Not in vain is he the warrior-God “par excellence”, the idealized āryan ‘general’ who conquers the first inhabitants of the Gangetic plains defended by Vṛta. In sum he ‘is’ also a historical figure, viz, historical events form his background,⁹ as in his conquest of the Vāsyus.¹⁰

The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa calls him Viśvakarman, the shaper of everything,¹¹ perhaps taking a hint from the Ṛg Veda.¹² The same Brāhmaṇa identifies Viśvakarman with the creator Prājapati.¹³ The alter ego of Viśvakarman is Tvaṣṭṛ, father of Indra, whose son

¹ BG X, 22.

² “Divenuto il più popolare degli dei, esso ha assorbito in sé elementi di varia origine e provenienza: motivi naturalistici si fondono con elementi di sfondo probabilmente storico.” Tucci (1958) 570.

³ BU II, 5, 19 echoing the cited RV VI, 47, 18. The word *māyā* occurs about thirty times in the Indra hymns of the RV.

⁴ Cf. BG II, 50 and Zaehner (1969) 147-148 (who gives some other texts).

⁵ KausU III, 1. Cf. Panikkar (1977/XXV) 523 & 526.

⁶ RV X, 28, 6.

⁷ MB I, 189.

⁸ Cf. Bhattacharji (1970) 266.

⁹ RV IV, 26, 2; VI, 18, 3; VIII, 24, 27.

¹⁰ Cf. V.S. Agrawala (1963), in his chapter Daivāsura 111-121, defends the mythological and not necessarily the historical character of all such affirmations. “Mythology is a recurrent phenomenon whereas history is fixed in time as an unalterable fact. The one is purpose or a religious idea, the other is the unfolding of the mundane aspect in the lives of men” (113).

¹¹ SB IV, 6, 4, 6.

¹² RV VIII, 87, 2.

¹³ SB VIII, 2, 1, 10; VIII, 2, 3, 13.

Viśvarūpa was killed by Indra without provocation.¹ "The thunder verily is Indra".²

Indra, in sum, is both the compassionate helper,³ friend and brother to Men,⁴ and the destroyer, killer, and the cheating God. He frustrates the tricks of the tricky.⁵ His genealogy is instructive: his father Tvaṣṭr, whom he killed to obtain soma,⁶ is the one who fashioned his famous bolt.⁷ His brothers are, on one side Agni,⁹ and on the other, Vṛta¹⁰ the demon, his mortal enemy. Another brother is Viśvarūpa; his son is Arjuna.

Perhaps one of the most telling vedic myths is that of Śunaḥśepa, in which Indra plays an important role.¹¹ In this myth Śunaḥśepa represents the human condition and Indra is the symbol for both the tempter and the redeemer.

Whatever the nature of the Gods may be and whatever theory one holds regarding ancient mythologies, the figure of Indra is most bewildering and fascinating, full of contradictions and ambiguities. I consider it paradigmatic of the human condition and pregnant with a powerful symbolic force for our situation.

If the ancients were insightful enough so as to convert their military heroes into Gods and the astral bodies into collaborators and symbols of their struggles, if the demon Vṛta holding the waters was a dravidian or proto-indian captain resisting the āryan invasion whose victorious general was Indra, if they saw their conflicts as a *daivāsura* battle because they were conscious of re-enacting something bigger than petty feuds, if Indra, the killer of Vṛta (Vṛtahan), converted into Mahendra after his victory, could become the symbol of unscrupulous behavior because of lust, ambition and conceit, if the twin brother of Agni and father of Arjuna, the *pañcajanya* of the R̥g Veda¹² interpreted by Sāyana as "beneficent to

¹ SB XII, 7, 1, 1.

² BU III, 9, 6.

³ RV I, 84, 19; VIII, 55, 13; VIII, 69, 1.

⁴ RV III, 53, 5.

⁵ RV I, 32, 4.

⁶ RV I, 80, 14; III, 48, 4.

⁷ RV, V, 31, 4. The root *tvakṣ* or more modern *takṣ* means to form, to fashion. Thus the identification with Viśvarūpa (the omniform) — who becomes also his son — and with Visvakarman (the all-fashioner).

⁹ RV VI, 59, 2.

¹⁰ Cf. Prakash (1966) 30 ff & 62 ff for pertinent texts and comments. We could have given all the quotations for each and every statement. The reader will find most of them in Macdonnell (1963) specially 54-66; and in Bhattacharji (1970) 249-283: For the RV alone cf. the perhaps clearest presentation in Griswold (1971) 177-208. The oldest english monograph I know of is by Perry (1880).

¹¹ Cf. Panikkar (1979/XXVII) 98-184.

¹² RV V, 32, 11.

the five races of Mankind",¹ if the chief God of the Vedas and the national hero-God of the āryans could fall from his pedestal, become an ant, for "no one remains an Indra permanently" as the Rāmāyaṇa says,² and redeem himself only by appearing under other forms, if Man has to fight against the Gods and be wise and strong enough so as to discover the power of fate and the importance of destiny, if we could again raise human consciousness to the proper cosmotheandric place in which the actions of Men are experienced as having cosmic repercussions and divine consequences, then we could begin to understand the place and function of Indra in our lives. Indra is the symbol of the demonic and divine forces struggling within Man: Vaiśvānara.³

b) Indrajāla

The "net of Indra"⁴, his magic, power and astuteness, was not employed solely by Arjuna as the *kathās* narrate; it has extended its threads up to the present times. Indra was not born a God, nor was he once divine, the lord of the pantheon. His deeds were so useful and portentous that he was enthroned as the lord of lords. Technology was not born divine, but like the āryans of yore, the indians of today have lifted up Science and Technology to the highest himālayan peak so that from may lord over the whole country and redeem us from our backwardness. Indeed, in more or less conscious or acute forms, many layers of indian society seem to look upon technocracy as the highest God. Sarasvatī, the Goddess of wisdom (in jainism, hinduism and buddhism), presiding over the 64 sciences, has bowed in awe before Lakṣmī, the Goddess of wealth, but the spouse of Viṣṇu has committed adultery, abandoned the natural fields and joined the industrial compounds because they now produce more riches. Another trick of Indra? According to the Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa, Sarasvatī in the form of speech (*vāc*) is the wife of Indra.

In modern times, he, the builder of weapons, holder of the atomic power of the Sun, the lightning and the thunderbolt, the destroyer of walled cities, megalopolis, and the killer of all sort of people has come again. No *asura* seems able to resist him, the mighty one, the holder of the *mahāśakti*, the superpower of weaponry and money, the killer of Viśvarūpa, the astute God who takes the shape of Viśvakarman, in order to blur the difference between the

¹ Cf. Bhattacharji (1970) 278.

² Ram VII, 30, 35.

³ Man, Vaiśvānara, the king of the worlds, RV I, 98, 1.

⁴ Cf. AV VIII, 8, 8.

genuine *technê* of the true Viśvakarman and the technology of his counterfeit. Has he taken now the form of a kāmadhenu-computer? Is that another trick? There is nothing more ambivalent and even ambiguous than divine symbols.

The true Viśvakarman, and especially Tvaṣṭṛ, not only symbolize the cultivation of the earth but also human and divine craftsmanship.

Tvaṣṭṛ is the divine artisan, the carpenter who "hews by the intellect" (*manasā taksati*), "the maker of fair things",¹ the artist who knows how to make from the very beams of the sun instruments for the Gods and booms for the ships of Man. He is the 'omniscient', the maker of all things, the architect of the universe; he is the "Lord of the Arts", as the Mahābhārata still describes him: the ideal artist. He is the symbol for what the Greeks called *technê*, and whose God is Vulcan. Tvaṣṭṛ is the archetype of all forms,² the ancestor of the human race,³ he is the symbol for growth, he shapes male and female, and even forms the human being in the mother's womb.⁴ He stands for a civilization of arts and crafts, of wit and creativity, and especially the freedom to express oneself from the depth of one's own being, and not merely in terms of 'fashion', 'party line', the 'majority' or the exigencies of the megamachine.⁵

Here we glimpse the opportunity of Indic culture: to recognize its *ṛtu* or even auspicious *muhūrta* (*kairos*). The Indic subcontinent, microcosmos in itself, is capable of offering a new model of human civilization. But it would require traditional non-attachment

¹ RV X, 2, 7.

² RV I, 188, 9; VIII, 91, 8; SB XI, 4, 3, 3; TB I, 4, 7, 1.

³ RV X, 17, 1-2.

⁴ RV X, 10, 5; AV VI, 78, 3.

⁵ Without mentioning Tvaṣṭṛ, Tagore gives a description of how he envisages the Indian civilization: "Growth there must be in life. But growth does not mean an enlargement through additions. Things, such as masonry-structure, which have to be constructed by a gradual building up of materials, do not show their perfection until they are completed. But living things start with their wholeness from the beginning of their growth. Life is a continual process of synthesis. A child is complete in itself, it does not wait for the perfection of its lovability till it has come to the end of its childhood. The enjoyment of a song begins from the beginning of the singing and continually follows its course to the end. But the man whose sole concern is the acquisition of power or materials deals with a task which is cursed with eternal incompleteness. For things find no meaning in themselves when their magnitude consists solely of accumulated bulk. They acquire truth only when they are assimilated to a living idea. This assimilation becomes impossible so long as the passion for acquisition occupies all our mind, when there is no large leisure for life force to pursue its own great work of self-creation." Tagore (1980) 65-66. This was, of course, the symbolism of Gandhi's spinning wheel. A return to a village economy and a refocusing upon the arts and crafts were central concerns of Gandhi, and to him, crucial for a successful 'independence'. He opposed indigenization and decentralization to an imported modernization.

(*asakti*) to get rid of the modern western superstructure that India has tried to acquire in order to gain power. Many other nations are too small to withstand the pressure from the rest of the world, or lack an ancient tradition on which to rely,¹ or represent, as in China, what is still an open interrogation. I have already insisted on the fact that to stress the importance and peculiarity of the indic task in creating a new period in humankind does not mean that other cultures and nations do not also have unique contributions. All the peoples of the world are called on today to work together to solve the present crisis.

As for India, in addition to the appeal of the exotic and disgust with the present day state of affairs, a great part of the appeal she exerts on the hearts and minds of so many people from industrialized countries stems from their sense that the real alternative to technocracy may be the reign of Viśvakarman, in collaboration with Hephaistos and Vulcan. Here is where I would speak of a mutual fecundation.

Not without deep meaning everybody is related: Tvaṣṭṛ to Indra, Indra to Viśvakarman and Viśvakarman to Viśvarūpa. The last-named bears all forms and leads to the discovery that the *morphê*, the form, the *rasa*, the quintessence, the quality, and not power, greatness or quantity make the life of mortals like that of the Gods. Viśvarūpa was slain by Indra. There is the danger of technocracy swallowing everything. India is in Indra's grip. Viśvakarman looms on the horizon, perhaps for the healing of the whole world.

The classical indic reaction to the dire world situation is one of the *nara*, the hero who, in vedic times, is both divine and human: the drama of the *kurukṣetra* is resolved in the *dharmakṣetra*. While the former is the vision of the mental, the latter is the integral reality that is visible only to a transformed, divinized eye.² While the former is the world as it appears to the mental body, the *mano-māyā-kośa*, the latter belongs to the universe revealed to the *buddhi*. As in the times of the Mahābhārata, today we face a cosmic conflagration, not reduced to the indic universe this time, but to the entire world. Pure passivity will not do, but the 'fight' must not be waged on the military, economic or political planes. Struggling merely on those planes results in sacrificing entire generations of human beings for a problematic future welfare while ignoring and ultimately despising the millions of our fellow beings sacrificed to the God of Future. But neither is it a question of 'spiritualizing' the conflict and becoming blind to the historical predicament. The pitfall of many religions is the neglect, sometimes even the rejection or denial, of the spacio-temporal structures of material

¹ Cf. Sinha Bhattacharjea (1999) 4-30.

² It is too tempting not to quote Nicholas of Cusa: "Quid ergo est mundus nisi invisibilis Dei apparitio? Quid Deus nisi visibilium invisibilitas?" in *De posset* II (in finem), p. 354 (ed. Gabriel). "What is then the world if not the manifestation of the invisible God? What is God if not the invisible aspect (the invisibility) of all things visible?". The things invisible are not beyond the visible ones, but inside them, like their soul.

reality, when they have forgotten that *secularity* is sacred. Is it possible to keep the equanimity, the "right vision" (*samyak-darśana*) in such a way that the experience is not mere theory, but enlightened praxis?

The new Viśvakarman is not the symbol of a return to a bucolic and primitive life. "Either technocracy or primitivism" is a false dilemma. The new Viśvakarman stands for a new wisdom, which discovers that we do not need sophisticated weapons, or even a specialized caste called the military, to have a peaceful life. Since we do not need to break the natural rhythms in order to enjoy a comfortable existence; that the meaning of human life does not lie in the production of means, but in the cultivation of ends; that human perfection and happiness belong to the sphere of *being* rather than *having*; we need to create a new style of human life. If the old Viśvakarman built the hall (*sabhā*) of heaven (of Yama's heaven), the new Viśvakarman will help us build the hall for a truly humane society: an assembly of people and not an assemblage of machinery.

The chief exploit of Indra in the Vedas is the liberation of the waters held back by the demon Vṛta. If the vedic fantasy could visualize in this way what was probably a military incident involving a dravidian or proto-indian tribe damming waters to keep them from the invading āryans in the plains, there is no reason why we can not see here another living symbol of liberation from all artificial dams that, under the guise of allowing quick profits, destroy human freedom, human life and the very life of the earth. The "waters" here are not just an ecological symbol, they stand for the uncreated primal stuff of the universe as principle of life.¹ To hold back the waters is to hold back life and hamper human existence. All those artificial dams modern Man has created to dominate the earth and to avoid nurturing *nature* in the original sense of *physis* is what Indra could now dismantle in order to liberate Man snared in his own trap.

"Indra is the friend to the wanderer" says the profound story of Śunaḥśepa.² When Indra prevents Rohita from returning to the village, he makes all the Gods angry. When at the end Rohita has found another victim in Śunaḥśepa, who is going to be sacrificed instead of Rohita, it is again Indra who comes to the rescue. Indra is both the tempter and the redeemer. Since life has become unbearable in the villages, the millions flow into the slums of the megalopolis. But one has to return to the village having learnt both the positive lessons of the city and the negative teachings of the cancerous megalopolis. Village here refers to the hamlet (home), the assembly of neighbors, the association with the earth and the sky. The change is not an easy one. Modern economy has become the enemy of traditional economy. One is too large and dehumanizes; the other is too narrow and suffocates. There is

¹ Cf. as a single example, Baarīmans (1990).

² AB VII apud Panikkar (1979/XXVII) 108.

no going back, but there is the injunction to wander onto a new hearth, a new land, to cultivate a new civilization. The exodus may call for crossing a desert, and the masses do not easily follow any prophet. No promised land is in sight. When Indra was disguised as a Brahmin, we were scared. No brahminhood will be convincing today. What is the new disguise of Indra? Keep in mind that Gandhi was killed after he was betrayed by his own people.

“Since we seem to be without hope
O Soma-drinker, truthful Indra,
give us hope, O generous one.”¹

The change from Tradition to Modernity could be expressed in the change in meaning of a single word: *economy*. Economy today refers to the complex rules which govern the impersonal monetary world in which we must earn our ‘livelihood’.² *Homo oeconomicus* is one who is worried about, interested in, and living from the economic conditions of existence. Traditional economy, however, meant the *nomos (tou) oikou*, the “order of the house”, the internal constitution of that outer skin of Man which is the habitat, the greater body of the person, the household. The *homo oeconomicus* was the counterpart of the *homo politicus*, the *oikos* (the house) and the *polis* (the city) being the two anthropological structures of a complete human life — the private and the public in greek life. This *nomos* is not a ‘law’ dictated by the ruler or imposed by the Gods, but the first manifestation of the dynamism of reality itself; it belongs to the very essence of Being, it is the inner injunction of *ṛta*, *tao*, *kosmos*, *ordo* as the very revelation of what reality is. The *oikos* is not a prefabricated house, not a comfortable place to rest, but the incarnation of *ākāśa*, the proper dwelling-space where all things, the Gods and the humans along with the spirits, other living beings and so-called inanimate beings, live together in concord (*samanya, koinônia*), fellowship, and also in struggle.

Here lies Indra’s cunning, i.e. his “cunnande”, his knowing: to secretly invite Man to rise to such a height as once Kṛṣṇa invited Arjuna, son of Indra, to fulfill his historical duty, his *svadharma*, and then abandon him to his own destiny, entangled in the same megamachine he had suggested.³

Indra is a God. The Gods, too, share in the human destiny. The difference between

¹ RV I, 29, 1 sung by Śunaḥśepa in distress.

² A few years ago, the daily monetary transactions world-wide were 50 to 60 times the actual buying and selling of merchandises. Capital, not real work begets money. At the turn of the century the figures have skyrocketed.

³ “If I could start from zero, I would do things quite differently. But I have to be realistic. There is a large technological base in India which I can’t throw away.” said Prime Minister Indira Gandhi three years before her assassination, *Sunday* (April 30-May 6, 1989).

divinely inspired actions and activity triggered by mundane motivations lies in the fact that the Gods whisper from within ourselves while the world allures us from the outside with prospective profits. They live in Transcendence, but their field of action is Immanence. Thus, the temptation of Indra is not the allurements of a beautiful woman (as in male literature), an appetizing plate of lentils (to mention another tradition) or external comfort (to come to our times). The temptation of Indra comes from within, from the most inner recesses not only of ourselves, but of reality itself. It is a God who tempts.

The divine factor should not be overlooked. The situation of humanity today cannot be explained just by making a scapegoat of capitalism, communism, technology, scientism or human greed. If humankind has followed that path, the reasons must lie deeper than just some mistake by somebody somewhere. We may find fault with nominalism, but where does nominalism come from? We may criticize atheism or attack materialism, but what makes them credible? Why did the human spirit proceed in that direction? We cannot avoid looking much farther up in the heavens, which also requires looking deeper into the very constitution of our being. Here we reach the very core of Being. Gods, Man and Cosmos are co-involved in this adventure. The Cunning of Indra renounced becoming an *avatāra* like his heir Viṣṇu did; instead he became invisible, disfigured, having taken the form of the cancerous proliferation of the artifacts of his Father Tvaṣṭṛ.

It is the *Ge-Stell*, in Heidegger's sense, that provokes us to substitute experiment for experience, to scrutinize the womb of matter, to violate every beings we have in front of us because we have converted them into mere objects. We *can* (cunning) split the atom, accelerate all natural processes,... therefore we *do*. This is the cunning: the know-how without the know-why.

It is for this reason that a mere injection of morality, simply preaching ethics, will not stop the technological bulldozing of the world. Even if a 'good' dictator could succeed through coercion in curbing human inventiveness or putting limits to biological or ecological exploitations on humanitarian grounds, somewhere else in the world other people would escape such control. Indra's cunning is not the caprice of a monotheistic God putting Man on trial. His cunning is his own fate, recall how in the Purāṇas he was often ridiculed and punished for adultery and yet he repeated the offence. It is his divine destiny to seduce Men. But it is part of the *daivāsura* tension of reality that we must resist the Gods.

In the same upanishadic passage in which Indra boasts of his atrocities we are given a clue as to how to resist his temptation. If greek wisdom since the Sybille and Heracleitos can be summed up in the famous *know thyself* (*gnôthi seauton*), the human maturity necessary for the fulfillment of our place in the universe is here formulated by Indra: *know*

me (*mām eva vijāni*).¹ Only if we understand that evil is not just our weakness, if we realize that our vocation is a cosmic and divine one, an epic *daivāsuram* and not just a human drama, shall we be able to disentangle ourselves from the net of Indra, the *Indrajāla*.

Let us further explore the contours of the emerging myth. Since Platon in the western world and some Upaniṣads in the East (at least a prevalent interpretation of them), reality concealed itself from the human mind by the very dazzling effect produced on the mind when facing the things themselves. Reality is the truth; no doubt (how could it be otherwise?). But truth was equated with reality. And here lies the human 'sin', *avidyā*, once we lose the sight of the "third eye", the mystical vision. Naked truth is invisible to the mind. But the mind searches for truth. Truth is then identified with what appears to the mind, the idea. It is called not *ṛtam*, the manifestation of the cosmic order, but *satyam* ('beingness', the crystallization of Being, *sat*).² The world of the ideas had a peculiar refulgence and power. It was a world for itself, the world of the mind. Man made the staggering 'discovery' that this mental world 'dominated' the universe. Once reality was reduced to an intelligible, i.e. objective world, this objective world obeyed the mathematics of ideas. The seed of modern science was sown, and with it the germ of technology. You no longer had to listen to the reality of things. You had only to abstract from all that did not fit into your mental construct and manipulate the remnant. The rational animal became intoxicated with its specific feature. If modern science is the dominion of the abstract idea (not the platonic one) over reality, technology is the conversion of things into objects. The uncivilized person is no longer the one who does not know how to speak or knows only one language, but the 'illiterate' who does not distinguish certain conventional signs (letters). The 'uncultivated' is not the one who does not know how things behave, after learning from an inner experience (*educere*), but the Man who ignores the 'laws' of objects. The 'uncultivated' is no longer the person who ignores the names and lives of her fellow-citizens, but she who is not informed of the latest scientific discoveries, which will be superseded the following week.³

One part of the indic tradition developed in a similar way, but with a difference, which on the one hand made its destiny worse (escapism) and on the other better (survival). India, too, discovered the power of *manas*, but at the same time the superiority of *buddhi*,

¹ KausU III, I. We may also translate "understand my Self". This is a revealing feature of Comparative Philosophy. In practically all traditions the true and deepest self-knowledge is knowledge of God.

² The greek *a-letheia* suggests the un-concealment of the essence of things; *idea* is the *morphê*, the shape, the form, the face of the *physis*, nature. The sanskrit *sat* means being in the sense of *esse*, reality, which manifests cosmic order. *Ṛta·ca satyam* says the RV. *Anṛta*, however, means a lie.

³ "Some 52.000 pages of scientific journals are published *daily* in the U.S. alone", Eastham (1992) 8. Even an abstract of abstracts would not do.

and the irreducibility of *prajñā* to “know-how”. to a greater degree than any western idealism, India went through the staggering experience of the absolute reality of *cit*. This discovery is so dazzling that the rest is not considered real. Of course, not all of indic culture went in that direction or as far as that. The tantric side of most indic systems took care not to forget at least the instrumental role of what we call the material elements, or in christian vocabulary, the sacramental structure of the world. In the same way, not the entire West went the nominalistic and scientific route. But in both cases the ‘idealistic’ discovery was paramount. The difference lies in the fact that the West experimented with the compliance of the material world to the structures of thought, while India was not interested in examining this possibility, and since the material world was not conducive to real liberation, it was not considered ultimately real. True liberation was seen as liberation *from* all the miseries and worries of the world so as not to get entangled once more in *samsāra*, the transient flow of the universe. Liberation *to* be free to intervene in the dynamism of the universe was hardly considered — except in the ideal of the *bodhisattva*.

This difference is expressed in a revealing story, whether real or apocryphal. When told that Socrates was interested in the human phenomena, the legendary indian interlocutor wonders how Socrates can inquire into human phenomena when he does not know the divine ones.¹ The story was repeated 2,500 years later when an indian engineer boasted to a group of ‘illiterate’ peasants: “We have put a Man on the moon.” Do you know whom you have sent?” a wise villager promptly replied.

Whatever this oversimplified digression may suggest, Indra’s strategy is to make indians drunk with the soma of technology so that they will overlook the fact that they might have, at least in part, the destiny of the human race in their hands. Not for naught do they belong to the indo-european stock from which the present situation. Perhaps the tradition of this subcontinent may empower modern India to overcome the fiasco of the technological experiment for humanity at large. Nor is it without significance that the deepest strata of India may not belong to the indo-european family. Here another example of the importance of cross-cultural fecundation. At any rate, overcoming technological imperialism may lead to the triumph of Viśvakarman and contribute to passing beyond the technocratic interlude in the destiny of the earth and in the history of Being. Heidegger and many other thinkers were right in recognizing that no mere action will ever reverse the dominance of technologism, no revolution will ever change the ground.²

¹ The story is told by the Church historian Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica*, XI, 3 in the beginning of the IVth century, and he attributes it to Aristoxenus, a disciple of Aristoteles in the first part of the IVth century B.C.

² Cf. the essay by Haar (1983) 331-358 for a brief account of the heideggerian diagnosis. The sub-title of his essay is: *Comment l’époque de la technique peut-elle finir?* I have not followed his analyses, nor does he mention our

A serious cross-cultural approach, however, could become a source of hope. Western culture alone, including christianity, cannot cope with the situation that it has triggered. On the other hand, no other culture in isolation is capable of offering a solution either. Only a symbiosis may elicit the dormant resources in the Life (should I say History?) of Being and begin a turning. It is at this level that the story of Indra becomes relevant. Indra, that divine force which often upset and even disgusted the hindu pantheon is performing his trick, no longer as an exclusively vedic divinity. At loggerheads once again with his vedic colleagues, Indra represents that divine non-conformism, that superhuman irony, which knows that only when all the problems seem insoluble can the cosmotheandric forces come together and overcome the obstacles.

The cunning of Indra, finally, is a complete divine cunning: not only deceit and craftiness; it is also wisdom, ability and power, as the etymology of the word suggests. He knows and he can. This is the force of the myth: the invisible power of something taken for granted, of something which goes without saying, the recovery of a new naturalness.

The radical change in the human situation that I see as urgent and important will not come about by violence, a violation of personhood, which is the irreducible dignity of every being. Dignity entails being an end in itself and not a means for something else. A new degree of awareness will have to dawn upon people. They will have to realize, for instance, that it is natural for human activity to produce riches, but that when money produces money we have a cancer.

Now, how can this change in kosmology come about? What triggers the emergence of a new myth? Generally speaking, nothing less than collective upheavals, popular revolutions, great catastrophes or singular historical feats can bring this about. The collapse of the Roman Empire, the Fall of Constantinople or the ambivalent triumph of the French Revolution would be examples in the western tradition. So is the so-called Copernican Revolution, although this latter is more of a paradigm shift than a transmythicization, which emerged slowly from Galileo up to Newton, to cite only two names. On the other hand, the two world wars have produced traumas and destruction, but not a change in myth. It is not an easy task to convince the peoples of the earth today that a 'better' technology will not deliver the goods, that "trying harder" will not heal the ills of the present. We shall not convince anybody of anything, unless the experience is made from within. It is easier to convince the people of California that the computerization of society is not the solution than to formulate convincingly the same idea among the people of India, who have not yet possessed the products of that collective experience. We need Indra's cunning to awaken us from our easy optimism about technology, which is really a form of slumber.

In almost all traditions genuine knowledge has saving power. But it has to be real *vidyā*, not technical skills. The uncanny situation of India has led her politicians to ask for technological solutions instead of a deeper transformation. The recognition of India's technological weakness, however, could at last trigger the discovery of her inner strength. This is the divine cunning: to lure us with dazzling objects and futuristic projects. Official India has not yet recognized, this and she has considered it just and proper to become engaged in the production of atomic weapons. But the mature reaction of many in India, once the first nationalistic enthusiasms had been expressed, is a sign of hope. The first step towards liberation consists in recognizing that it is all Indra's temptation: the temptation to believe that Man is the king of the universe, that the elites are the masters of history, and that the scientists shape the world. This is his cunning. We do not know it yet and go on thinking in terms of piecemeal reforms. To help remove this veil of *avidyā* was the purpose of this study. The rest is to be done — by us. Who else?

c) The Indic Experiment

What is at stake in India is not just the political adventure of "the largest world's democracy", Nor is it not a private affair of some politicians followed more or less willingly by the people, or the dream of a group of intellectuals. It is a chapter in the destiny of creation, which draws on many different sources: the primordial religiousness of the *ādivāsīs* and the jaina *nirgranthas*, the *ṛṣis* of the Vedas and their buddhist critics, the pre-socratic sages and their sophistic followers, the sages of the forests and their patronizing civilizers, the prophets of Israel, Persia, and Arabia and their christian and secularized challengers, the scientists of the West and their eastern colleagues... All these forces have forged the *karma* of India, and this *sangam* constitutes the indic subcontinent. It should be clear, that though I started with a sociological approach and made political comments, my study takes the worldview of other cultures very seriously and is concerned with the ultimate meaning of life and the cosmic responsibility of human freedom. As a philosophical reflection on the human condition, our study is intrinsically connected with the fate of the entire reality.

I chose *The Indic Experiment* as the subtitle for two reasons.

By "indic", I wanted to express that, although I have mostly concentrated on the Republic of India, the problematic is not constrained by the nation-state frontiers (which have already changed several times), but refers to the entire subcontinent.

By "experiment", I wanted to express a somewhat ambivalent and ironic idea.

On the one hand, I say experiment and not experience. An experiment is a try, and not a solid conviction, it is based on experimentation, not on a search into the depths of one's soul. Thus, the sociological data.

On the other hand, by saying experiment it is easier to assert that the experiment is failing. Since this experiment is a kind of external approach to reality, its failure does not touch the most profound fibers of the people — if we accept soon enough that the experiment is not yielding the expected results.

Here I retrace a specific trait of the indic subcontinent, although it is general to tropical cultures. A cold climate tends to freeze the exogenous input, and keep it isolated. A warm climate tends to absorb the external influence and assimilate it. Coexistence is easier in cold climates. Symbiosis is more natural in tropical cultures. India has received modern western technocratic input. The first reaction has been one of accepting, imitating, embracing, assimilating. But the experiment has lasted long enough for us to see its results. The evaluation of its fruits is now easier to make, since the very culture which has given birth to the technocratization of the world has begun to worry about it and to ask more basic, religious questions.

I have avoided any discussion about "post-modernity", which is fashionable in many western academic circles because what goes under that name is primarily a monocultural reform of modernity when not a mere reaction to it. We are dealing with a genuine crosscultural problem. Nevertheless, the overall phenomenon of "post-modernity" vouches for what I am saying, namely, that the West itself is beginning to be critical of its own modern premises but perhaps does not know how to disentangle itself from its own assumptions.¹

We should no longer blindly accept the propagandistic slogan that because Modernity has worked for quite a few it is going to succeed with all. The world-wide results of the last thirty years and the most diverse analyses of our global situation gives ample evidence that this technocratic civilization has no future.² To tell us that we need patience and Science will solve the problems does not work any longer.

The stereotyped 'religious' discourse that we should patiently accept the present ills because we will be rewarded in an after-life that we ourselves are going to experience is more credible than the technocratic belief that our great-grand-children, whom we are not

¹ Cf. Sherrard (1991) for a more metaphysical diagnosis of the present civilization.

² A single macro example is the unstoppable depletion of world resources. It cannot last forever. Not only does the earth have its limits, but the market will also reach its saturation point. "He who mounts a tiger cannot dismount it" is a relevant bengali saying here.

going to see, will ultimately enjoy the benefits of our present distress.¹ Nevertheless, neither is ultimately convincing. On the one hand, the former ignores who we are and what our world is. Reality is also *now* — a tempiternal now, to be sure. On the other, the latter transplants old traditional religious beliefs onto a more secularized framework.

I am not simply making a pragmatic affirmation that the experiment has not succeeded, but am uncovering the theoretical reasons why the experiment cannot work. If it were solely a matter of pragmatism, we might as well try again, try harder, and wait another fifty years. It is the praxis that has led perceptive thinkers in both East and West to revise the theory. Of course, the Enlightenment and Industrialization have had some positive influence, but with the deepening of its assumptions and more encounters with other cultures, one begins to discover the reductionistic view of *Man*, the simplistic judgment on *Nature*, and the naïve idea of the *Divine* that underlies the modern techno-scientific project.

The indic experiment approaches its end. The end can be a catastrophe brought about by the triumph of technocracy at the cost of most people who will rebel and be crushed, or it can be one of those apparently strange changes that occur more often than it is generally assumed in the history of humanity. Whoever has studied such collective movements cannot doubt of the inexplicable power of myth. Millions of people suddenly fall into a kind of trance and propagate a sort of enthusiasm which seemed impossible before. These movements occur both after a victory or after a defeat, after a major event or after a trifle. *Mai 1968* in the West, the victory of the *Front Populaire* in 1936 in France, the enthusiasm aroused by Gandhi in certain moments of his campaign, and by the fall of the Berlin Wall are examples in our own times. These 'explosions', though generally short-lived, yet they leave lingering effects, but not too deep, unless... and here is the question, unless the people are already prepared for a more stable change. We are speaking of myth, not logos. The myth has the capacity of creating a world, and what did not seem possible or plausible before suddenly appears as almost natural.

This is the power of the myth. Islām conquered almost half of the known world in the span of few generations. Christianity spread over all Europe at an incredible speed, communism seemed to expand over half the nations of the earth in lifetime, though we cannot ignore the immediate, but secondary causes. Indeed, the violence imposed on people to convert to another religion, the abuses of the powerful, the cries of the poor, the invasion

¹ A significant example is the change in the political canvassing of the communist party of Kerala. The communists got their first democratic victory by appealing to urgently needed changes for the immediate future. They could not fulfill all their promises and lost the following elections. They learned the lesson. The propaganda for the new elections (which they won again) was no longer focused on an immediate better future but on more spiritual themes like justice and peace, even making use of religious symbols.

of the conquerors have contributed to those changes, but why did it all take place at one moment in time and not in another? Why were people prone to believe in equality, independence, rights, etc. at a certain juncture of history when other times could have provided the opportunity? There are other forces in human history besides action and reaction, or ideological and economic factors. The *kurukṣetra* of history, I repeat, is the *dharmakṣetra* of the Gods. The christian *perichôrêsis* or trinitarian interpretation of reality, the buddhist *pratītyasamutpāda* or the universal inter-in-dependence of all things are more than pious metaphors.

The indic *psychê* has enough dormant archetypes to be able to awaken to one such miraculous feats. Perhaps Indra is secretly expecting an awakening.

The indic contribution in interpreting the experiment may be important — although not unique.

World history cannot be written in terms of black and white. The indic experiment has failed to create a new culture congenial to the peoples of this part of the world, but it has yielded positive partial results (for the time being, primarily to the indian middle class) and has uncovered the many weaknesses of indic cultures which find themselves today at a low ebb. If the experiment has to stop, the lessons drawn to be from it need to be taken into account for a possible symbiosis. I would again emphasize that the social problems of India would probably not have become so acute without the impact of the West.

In summing up the indian experiment, I would say that India has tried to imitate the West, believing that technoscience was not just western, but a universal culture. In spite of glaring short-term success among a minority, I submit that this experiment has failed and will continue to fail. Western culture or technocratic civilization is not a universal value, and gandhian “passive resistance” is being re-enacted in a more subtle and unconscious way. People will soon discover that techno-science has not made them happier, while the increasing “conscientization” of those not invited to the technological banquet will increasingly lead to violence — as is already happening on a small scale. Recognition of this failure may be the beginning of “conversion”, not only for India, but the entire world.

When we look back at the history of the last half millennium, it becomes clear that it produced the “europeization of the world”. In 1876 Europe and the United States of America possessed 10.8% of the entire african continent and 51.5% of the whole of Asia, plus, of course, 100% of Australia and 56.8% of Polynesia. By 1900, i.e., in less than a quarter of a century they possessed 90.4% of Africa, 56.6% of Asia, and the 98.9% of Polynesia.¹ After the second world war most of the countries in these areas became ‘politically’ independent, but neither economically nor culturally had any real possibility of launching any independent

¹ Cf. Latouche (1989) 87. Significantly enough Lenin quoted these statistics.

alternative to the western model. In point of fact, the dependence is greater now than in colonial times.¹ There is not even the 'excuse' of the struggle against "foreigners" because the new rulers are westernized "natives".

* * *

I have not given a blueprint, or even a hint as of how to bring about such an alternative. The reason is not tactical prudence, but lies in the nature of the problem itself.² The alchemic transformation I am suggesting is not simply a chemical reaction using elements at hand. It belongs to another order, the order of the spirit, the order of creation. We said already that myths grow, change and disappear, but that they cannot be manipulated because they do not depend on our will. We may, however, create the conditions in which a new myth may emerge. I see those conditions in a critical deepening of the older traditions of the subcontinent without neglecting any of them, and certainly not the scientific. The methodology for the task is neither induction nor deduction. *Vox populi vox Dei*, says a latin aphorism. Let us listen to the Gods, I would invert the translation.

To strike a realistic note I add this.

We cannot exterminate the technoscientific-political complex, nor should we. We have to transform it in an alchemic metamorphosis of historical proportions. Even if in a moment of lucidity, the West would like to bring about such a transformation on its own, it would not be capable of the task. The latent energy of the peoples of India could substantially contribute to this process. This is their tryst with the Sacred Secularity of the present.

Cultures and civilizations rise and fall. The last 6000 years of human history have witnessed these processes dozens of times.³ It is astonishing how little contemporary thinkers apply this thought to themselves. We seem to absolutize our worldview while relativizing all the other conceptions of the world. What I am suggesting is that India could well be an important factor in this transhistorical period.

Those who believe in the "global village" and a unified "world order" as well as in a single culture may argue that in earlier times one empire followed another while the earth was not unified, , but we have now reached the extremes of the earth not only geographically

¹ I have already mentioned the economic inequalities. The GDP of the 700 million people of Africa (30,180,808 km²) is less that of the 10 million of Belgium (30,500 km²) (PNUD, 1999). Of course, this is not an accounting of the wealth of the continent, which is in western hands.

² "There is no need for models, what we need are directions"... Kapur (1999) 63.

³ Suffice to name Toynbee (1972) just to indicate what I mean.

but also historically. Even the "Second World Power" has accepted the one System: political, economic and intellectual. But here is where Indra laughs. We are not at the end of a linear evolutionary progress.

Indeed, within the narrow parameters of modernity and post-modernity we cannot "see" how it is possible to transcend linear time and history, to have another experience of matter and space, or to relativize our own conceptions just as we have relativized all other kosmologies. We have been under the influence of what I called "europeanization of the world" for some time. This is precisely the challenge, not because Europe and the West are not great civilizations, but because they too are mortal. The terrifying panic of the modern peoples in the face of individual death is transformed here into the dread of a cultural death, and we are in denial of both.

Perhaps Indra's cunning, as in the case of Śunaḥśepa, is to bring us to the verge of death, and the failure of the indic experiment may help us reach the fullness of Life and not just setting on being a spare-part of a machine.

An Editorial Introduction

Indra's Cunning as a Metaphor for Modernity: Challenging the Indic Experiment

by
Rudolf C. Heredia

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I. A Preamble to the Challenge

The Point of Departure

In 1955 Raimon Panikkar wrote his first *Letter from India* which was published as *La India* in 1960. It was a time when India with Nehru set out to redeem its pledged 'tryst with destiny', a time of promise and compromise, of hope and disappointment, of planning and confusion, and much more. Almost fifty years later Panikkar wrote a second letter *The Indic Experiment*, a monograph that was completed at the end of the last decade, but unpublished till now. The basic scenario of duality and dichotomy, of our dilemmas and anomalies, of our achievements and failures, is still very much the same only more so, except that the stakes are so much higher now, if only because there are today more than a billion stakeholders involved. This cannot but have immense significance for the rest of the world as well.

Perhaps it was an awareness of the enormous risks and ambiguities this *Indic Experiment* involved that may explain the delay in the manuscript's publication. Yet after all these years, the relevance of his approach, the validity of his analysis and the incisiveness of his insights have only become the more compelling. It is certainly a privilege and a joy to introduce this monograph though doing justice to it is a more challenging and difficult task, which in the end, may perhaps fall short of well-meant intentions.

Panikkar is an Indologist whose approach to Indic culture is multidimensional and multicultural. His reflections here are historically contextualized and grounded in contemporary social reality, but he is not a social scientist. He is a theologian whose perspective on religion is pluralist, but not relativist, as he is at pains to clarify. He is a genuine humanist for whom the secular has an essential sacred dimension, a religious person for whom the sacred is necessarily situated within the domain of the secular. He respects tradition but refuses to be imprisoned in it; he is open to modernity but demands a critique of it. This is of crucial importance to the study of Indic civilisation and culture, where religion and society are so intimately intertwined and now so precariously changing, where the past is still alive, and the future has already arrived, where the same people live in very different historical times and cultural spaces across the Subcontinent.

In such a situation, both tradition and modernity are intensely problematic. For the challenge of modernity is never static, it is always ongoing, and any 'experiment' with it needs a corresponding contextualisation. My attempt here is to situate this monograph in the evolving scenario of modernity, and thereby enhance its relevance and impact. However, if my endeavour is found wanting it will be a comment on the introduction, not on the monograph.

Panikkar evocatively uses the myth of Indra, the cunning tempter god, as a metaphor for modernity. For it seems to tempt and trap us in a dilemma: either we resist the temptation of its inducements and lose ourselves in the obscurantism of the past, or we accept it and are condemned to a future that is rushing us to our doom. The way out is to realise that this is a false dilemma, a trick of Indra. Yet this does not make the temptation any the less real, or the dilemma any the less confusing. So to escape between its horns we must first come to terms with the modernity we find so attractive notwithstanding its unsustainability, just as we must with the tradition we so idealise without a critique of its limitations.

This is the essence of a real temptation, where the apparent good conceals the real evil. It is only in realising and resisting the evil that we can reject the false, accept the truly good and carry it forward. We must outsmart Indra's cunning, unravel his trick and transcend the temptation. Hence, before we embark on a renewed Indic experiment we must first consider and critique the failures of the present endeavour and then reorient and launch a new one. To continue with it will merely bring more of the same, only worse.

An Overview

As he indicates in his Preface, Panikkar's argument here takes us through three stages. A *Sociological Introduction* that sketches the contemporary situation to conclude that modernity has failed to deliver on its promise. Our reluctance to acknowledge this further perpetuates and accentuates this failure. For the inadequacy of traditional Indic society and culture to confront and contain the onslaught of modern technocratic civilisation is compounded further by its self-defeating runaway technology driven by an alien worldview.

Next, in the *Interludes* he explores three overlapping responses that contextualise each other: the pursuit of technology and the digital divide it is creating; an inner resistance so typical of our people, and protest movements and rebellions that are gathering momentum. Yet none of these have proven adequate to containing the crises of a failing modernity and its discontents.

Finally, beyond describing these responses Panikkar launches *The Radical Query* that makes the crux of his argument here. His approach is cross-cultural and fundamentally religious, or as he would say, metaphysical, and its implications are for the world beyond Indic civilisation as well. Only such a cutting-edge analysis can adequately address *The Challenge of Modernity*.

All this raises fundamental questions regarding the nature of the change we want, even as we come to the realisation that change we must. A description of such a fluid situation will require continual updating, and responses to it will vary accordingly. An analysis too will need to be situated within the pertinent contemporary discourses if it is to yield a more focused and relevant praxis consequent on this.

My endeavour here is not so much to update the statistics and the references that Panikkar has used to establish the argument of the monograph. These inevitably do change with time, but the incisiveness of Panikkar's analysis is not dependent on such time-bound information, for he uses the data as illustration rather than proof. Hence, I will not so much

complement or complete the illustrative information that has been used in the monograph by bringing the figures and references up to date, but more importantly I will try to situate the overall discussion within the continuing discourse in our rapidly changing society.

Thus in situating the background sketched in his *Introduction*, I try to show how the present scenario, if anything, further emphasises and validates the conclusions reached by him. So too with the responses outlined in his *Interludes*. These have indeed persisted in the present situation and even intensified, but as before they still remain tentative and incomplete, not as yet decisive or conclusive answers to the challenge we must face in our present context. Finally, Panikkar's *Radical Query* and its implications will most usefully engage our attention as we interrogate the modernity he challenges. For here, his *Query* points to a deeper level of analysis and comprehension, and is undoubtedly the most insightful and challenging contribution this monograph makes.

II. Situating the *Introduction*

India Shining?

With this preamble we can turn to the "crippling contradictions" that Panikkar has indicated here in his *Sociological Introduction*, consequent on the developmental model we have pursued. With the most recent liberalisation of our economy and the globalisation of our society, our development is even more riddled with contradictions, which we still refuse to take as seriously as they warrant. The social order is even further skewed in favour of the rich and against the poor. Our upper class and caste elites are ever more cosmopolitan and globally cued in. Undoubtedly the economy is growing: 7.6 percent in the previous two years and likely to reach 8.0 percent this year, according to the official figures, and soon we will be targeting a ten percent growth rate. But so too has the relative divide between the rich and the poor, the powerful and marginalised widened and deepened. This is now threatening to become an unbridgeable chasm as extremisms of various persuasions, Marxists, separatist, casteist, religious, communalist, ... take ever deeper roots in our society.

The haste to modernise India into a strong prosperous nation, commanding a place of respect in the international community, picked up considerable momentum at the beginning of this decade with the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), led by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP). Their "cultural nationalism" further sharpened the differences and divides between religious communities and castes, which have been manipulated into dangerous antagonisms. This was typified by the insensitive projection of an "India Shining", a celebration of consumerism and smugness, by the affluent and secure, in utter disregard of the 'other India', abandoned in the dark, desperate and deprived. It was a cynical attempt to coopt the middle strata of society into an agenda of the elites, leaving behind the masses of the poor to their fate. The contradictions that Panikkar sketched at the end of the 1990s is now further heightened into an even more divisive and disastrous scenario of communal violence and political tensions, class inequalities, religious divisions and caste antagonisms.

In the general election of May 2004 the mass of voters, who were excluded from this shining India, rejected this facile representation and those who propagated what it stood for. If

India was to shine, they wanted their place in the sun. The identity politics of religion and caste have been used to mobilise them to causes that betrayed their real interests. It has not delivered on the development they had hoped for and they cannot anymore be taken for granted in a democratic polity once they find their voice. They have now had their say and once again there has been a change of government at the Centre.

How this new mandate will be effectively executed is still problematic, for as before, this too may lead to Vilferdo Paretos's 'circulation of elites' (1966: 108) rather than any real positional change for the masses. For now, at least a more inclusive agenda in a *Common Minimum Programme* has been set in terms of reconciling religious divisions in a more plural society, and bridging economic divides for a more equitable one. Yet, if not resolutely translated into action, this could remain an expression of good intentions, which would then lead to a cooption of a different kind.

The Poverty of Development

The election campaign of the incumbents in the general election of May 2004, disingenuously claimed the virtual elimination of poverty in their "India shinning" campaign. The election results were an emphatic rejection of what a vast majority of voters perceived as a distorted, overly optimistic projection of middle class prosperity for the country as a whole. It was apparent that the great mass of our people had not benefited by the economic growth of the earlier decade, certainly not to the extent they were led to expect. But were they then actually worse off?

The debate on changing poverty levels in the 1990s remains inconclusive in spite of the mountain of data and the critical analyses by experts on both sides of the eco-political spectrum. The discrepant claims regarding the economic reforms initiated at the time are more politically than statistically grounded. How the new economic policy of the 1990s affected levels of poverty in India has been fiercely debated and as yet conclusions remain controversial. The optimists extrapolate a middleclass success to the virtual elimination of poverty in the country. Skeptics argue that the data shows the reforms benefited the rich, but failed the poor, especially the rural poor. Others in between point to the positive growth rate and the lack of conclusive evidence to support a widening gap in consumption levels between the rich and poor.

A comprehensive review of *The Great Indian Poverty Debate*, by experts representing different points of view, begins with this caution by the editors on the politics involved in an evaluation of the economic reforms of the 1990s:

Given the political divisions that surrounded the reforms, the discrepancy quickly ceased to be a purely statistical issue. Those with a stake in the success of the reforms emphasized the national accounts statistics, as well as the lack of evidence that the distribution of consumption had widened among the poor. According to this view, surveys are inherently unreliable and error prone, and some commentators (although without producing any evidence) went so far as to paint pictures of enumerators filling out the questionnaires in tea-shops, avoiding the time-consuming and repetitive task of actually interviewing respondents. On the other side, reform skeptics argued that the

survey data showed exactly what *they* had expected, that the reforms, while benefiting the better-off groups in society, had failed to reach the poor, particularly the rural poor, and that the distribution of consumption had indeed widened. They also pointed to the differences in definition between the national accounts and survey measures of consumption, arguing that the latter were more relevant for assessing poverty. They also identified many areas where the National Accounts estimates of consumption are weak and prone to error.' (Deaton and Kozel 2005: 2)

The statistical inadequacies were not the result of direct interference by politicians or policymakers, but in a broader sense political compulsions had influenced changes in the survey design. This led to ambiguities and compromised the poverty monitoring system. Hence the debate continues despite the mass of empirical work by eminent researchers who have engaged with each other. More than ideological perspectives are in conflict here, for it is the operational definition of poverty that is involved, i.e., how it is statistically measured on the ground and how far the results are comparable over a period of time.

Thus, if poverty is defined in terms of a minimum consumption of 2400 calories per capita per day in rural areas, then, based on this criterion, 75 per cent of the rural population in India today is poor, compared with 56 per cent in 1973-74. (Patnaik 2004) Inequality and poverty have therefore been exacerbated by liberalisation and globalisation. Others using different estimates of consumption arrive at opposite conclusions of a sharp decline to less than 15 percent below this poverty line in 1990-2000 and a reduction of inequalities in the late 1990s. (Bhalla 2003)

The official figures of the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) are somewhere in between:

"The estimates based on 30-day recall, which were the only ones even nominally comparable with the previous poverty estimates from 1993/94, showed a reduction in poverty rates from 1993/94 to 1999/2000. Among rural households estimated poverty fell from 37 to 27 percent, and among urban ones from 33 to 24 percent, so that all-India poverty fell a full ten points over the 6-year period, from 36 to 26 percent." (Deaton and Kozel 2005: 10)

These figures were accepted by the Government of India but they met with widespread skepticism. But against these official estimates it must be said that the figures in the comparison made across the time span are not statistically comparable, because the survey designs were different. Moreover, there will be no poverty measures comparable with 1993-94 estimates until the 2005-2006 survey, whose results will be available in 2007.

Hence at most such statistical comparisons are suggestive rather than definitive. However, even conceding a measure of credibility to the official estimates, with the present gains in our growing economy it is hardly acceptable for a democracy to have a quarter of its people below the poverty line, which in India means more than 225 million. Moreover, when poverty is here measured not in terms of the minimal standards of health education and security, but mere

survival requirements such as calorific intake, or consumption levels that reflect bare subsistence living, then more realistically, this is a measure of destitution.

If, indeed, the percentages of those below the poverty-line have decreased, the absolute number of the poor have actually increased with our population growth. Because of the size of its population, India still has the largest number of adult illiterates in the world. According to the national Census of 2001, only 65.38 percent of our people were literate, 75.85 males and 54.16 females. With regard to the absolute poor, "India accounts for about 20 percent of the global count of those living on less than \$1 a person per day, so that what happens in India is not only a reflection of the worldwide trend, but is one of its major determinants." (ibid.: 1)

Moreover, the relative distance between those below and those above the poverty line has further increased and become more visible, while the lowest percentiles, poorest of the poor, have plunged further into poverty with no safety net to rescue them when threatened by destitution. The difference between the conspicuous consumption of the super-rich and the dire deprivation of the desperately poor is now grotesque. This disparity gets reflected in unequal exchange relations and asymmetric power equations that tend to become self-perpetuating and dangerously tension-ridden. Fifty-five years after Independence, this is surely a most severe indictment of our society. What does this mean for the Indic experiment? Has it lost its way?

We are now compelled to admit, that while liberalisation has facilitated economic growth and has benefited the privileged who could take advantage of this, it has not correspondingly opened up social opportunities for the disadvantaged. Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen have convincingly argued this in 1995 and further reaffirmed it in 2002. Rather the developmental model pursued has brought with it new patterns of patronage based on money and muscle power. This has displaced the old obligations of loyalty and protection, which have not been effectively replaced by norms of justice and fair play in civil society. Corruption has become endemic in all levels and spheres of our society. Law enforcement seems to be powerless against the wealthy and the well connected, who literally get away with murder. The squalor of our slums against the glittering urban high-rise, the suicide of our debt strapped small farmers, while venture capitalism prospers; this is the disgraceful, despairing other side of "India shinning".

In the final analysis, beyond statistics and politics, what must be questioned is the very model of development that we have so uncritically adopted from the West. "However," as Oswaldo de Rivero rightly insists:

"since the myth of development has nearly religious connotations of hope and salvation from poverty, it remains untouched by the experience of the last forty years, which demonstrates so unequivocally the utter lack of development of the majority of countries. The mythical nature of development leads the politicians of poor societies to continue insisting on 'closing the gap' that separates them from the capitalist industrialized societies – closing it by attempting to reproduce consumer patterns that cannot be financed or sustained environmentally." (De Rivero 2001: 113)

Yet, even when this mythic development arrives, its paradoxical contradictions remain, as happened in affluent countries, which have an unacceptable proportion of their people in a self-perpetuating "underclass". (Wilson 1987) As Ashis Nandy explains:

"It is becoming obvious that all large multi-ethnic societies, after attaining the beatific status of development, lose interest in removing poverty, especially when poverty is associated with ethnic and cultural groups that lack or lose political clout. Particularly in a democracy, numbers matter and, once the number of poor in a society dwindles to a proportion that can be ignored while forging democratic alliances, political parties are left with no incentive to pursue the cause of the poor. Seen thus, the issue of poverty is a paradox of plural democracy when it is wedded to global capitalism. And the paradox is both political-economic and moral. (Nandy 2004: 95)

We still have not found the political will and the moral stamina to confront this paradox.

The New Barbarism

At the end of the Cold War, the mature democracies of the developed world were supposed to have arrived at *The End of History*, (Fukuyama 1992) where others would eventually follow the triumphant their model of progress. Thus, de Rivero perceptively observes:

"politicians, diplomats, economists and experts in international relations never imagined that the world situation would evolve into a sort of modern barbarism. On the contrary, it was thought that, after the collapse of Communism and the success of collective security in the Gulf War, we were poised on the threshold of a new world order based on capitalist democracy and global prosperity." (de Rivero 2001: 33)

Now with globalisation imploding our world, we seem to be witnessing the beginnings of *The Clash of Civilisations* (Huntington 1993), which has precipitated not so much a war on terrorists, but rather a war of state sponsored terror. Extremisms of all kinds are dragging our world into maelstrom of violence and chaos, while affluent consumer societies are no longer willing to compromise their standard of living to make a more just, more peaceful world order, and national leaders are far more sensitive to their electorates, than to creating a level playing field for all.

In such a scenario the least developed countries (LDCs) suffer the most. In a background paper for the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) *Least Developed Countries Report, 2004*, Ignacy Sachs concludes:

"UNCTAD reports on LDCs provide an accurate analysis of their predicament. Whatever their diversity in terms of size, population, demographic density, and natural endowments, geographic and geopolitical locations and history, they are caught in a structural poverty trap due to severe underdevelopment of their productive forces, compounded by an unfavourable international environment and the lack of genuine commitment on the part of affluent countries to assist them. The LDCs are thus the main losers of the asymmetric globalisation." (Sachs (2004: 1802)

Earlier, national development projected higher standards of living for people, now globalisation promises a better world for those who enter the charmed circle of the world market economy. This is premised on a neo-liberalism that can only favour those who already have entitlements of wealth and privilege, economic and social capital such as the poor and the disadvantaged do not possess. Inevitably, such economic globalisation excludes those thus handicapped, and sharpens the economic inequalities and social disparities even further. In India, as in other developing countries, this market-friendly economy has reflected and strengthened iniquitous traditional social structures further, and created new and more iniquitous ones.

This globalisation from above is a hegemonic exploitation, whereas a globalisation from below could be a liberating movement. Numerous counter-cultural social movements point precisely to this. Yet, Africa, slipping off the map of our world is one of the most severe indictments of such top-down globalising. "Make poverty history" is an inspiring slogan promoted in many first world countries today, but the negotiations at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and other multilateral organisations actually evidence a more cynical *politique reale*. Humanitarian aid tends to perpetuate dependencies; trade could end them. Nandy's reading of this situation cuts closer to the bone: "presently the trendy slogan of globalisation can be read as the newest effort to paper over that basic contradiction; globalisation has built into it the open admission that removal of poverty is no longer even a central myth of our public agenda." (Nandy 2004: 95)

In India while the old order is crumbling in ruins, the new one is distorting its own promise. So we now seem to have the worst of both: of the old and the new, of the East and the West, of tradition and modernity. What is left of our 'mixed economy', where the commanding heights were to be socially controlled by the state for the common good? We are now privatising those heights within a liberal capitalism that privileges the rich with an open market and private profit, leaving a residual socialism that marginalises the poor with manipulative politicians and an oppressive bureaucracy.

However, neither do the contradictions in our society cancel each out, nor do they yield a new creative synthesis. Rather they add up to a new barbarism, technologically much better equipped, but humanly far more alienating. The development debate seems shipwrecked between the 'state' and the 'market'. Once the 'myth of development' was powered by the dream of removing poverty. Now the dream is turning into a nightmare, as disillusionment with the myth spreads. We need to go back to our Indic roots and rediscover that in this paradox of "Poverty and Progress" the problem to be addressed is our idea of 'prosperity', rather than our definition of 'poverty'. (Kumar 1999: 6)

Since Panikkar made his indictment of India's development, this precipitous progression has gained, rather than lost any of its momentum. A sensitised conscience for the rich and an activist conscientisation of the poor should help towards good governance and perhaps manage the crisis for a time. But for how long is this model of development sustainable? Casual Cassandras have been predicting doom for decades, but now serious scientific researchers are project alarming scenarios of ecological degradation and climate change, of unsustainable agriculture and energy demands.

Yet Panikkar is not an alarmist or a pessimist, rather he is trying to awaken a sense of urgency in addressing our predicament, for it demands a deeper level of engagement. Our present responses so far have not measured up to our crisis. At best these have provided, what Panikkar has here called *Interludes*. Yet we may use these as a reprieve to go beyond the present parameters of our discourse and discern other dimensions at which to encounter our present dilemmas. Then a new reorientation could bring new hope.

III. Contextualising the *Interludes*

Contradictions and Conflicts

Panikkar characterises the responses to our present predicament as *Interludes* because these are like “intermezzos” in what must be a larger drama of change. They could well be indicators of what is still to come, but they do not add up in his understanding to a comprehensive or adequate response to the challenge of modernity, even though the three overlapping categories he describes cover vast ground. Since Panikkar made his comments, these movements have gathered momentum in some instances, and lost it in others. However, the continuing contradictions and conflicts on the ground have not as yet significantly been resolved, rather these have escalated to bewildering proportions.

Technological Divides

The technological pursuit that enthralled India today is hardly the “appropriate” or “intermediate” technology urged by E. F. Schumacher’s *Small is Beautiful*. (1973) Rather it strives to be large and succeeds in being ugly. Its energy intensive applications and its fossil fuel dependency are hardly sustainable as we reach the ecological limits of the carrying capacity of our increasingly fragile environment. This same technology is more part of the growing problem rather than part of a viable solution. More of the same is only likely to intensify the vicious spiral, more inappropriate technology, more insoluble problems.

Moreover, the information and computer technology, which is at the cutting edge of India’s surge into the 21st century, is a high-end technology that employs and serves those who are already in the upper strata of our society. The global competitiveness of India in this arena means nothing to those excluded because the technology is beyond their grasp, and beyond their reach as well. The trickle-down effect, if any, is still painfully slow and not necessarily characteristic of a market economy. There is an urgent need for better planning and more deliberate implementation. As it is, the digital divide is replicating and further reinforcing the other socio-economic ones. What Panikkar calls *informatic enthusiasm* may not be the undisguised blessing we presumed it was, and the sooner we address this, the less of a curse it might turn out to be.

But more peculiarly in India, modern technology that was expected to advance the ‘scientific mentality’ so dear to Jawaharlal Nehru, seems to have introduced a schizophrenia that compartmentalises people’s lives into a craze for this science-based technology and its gadgetry and an increasing reliance on irrational practices and religious ritualism. Whether these be

traditional taboos or modern superstitions, astrological horoscopes or magic portions, they still affect the lives of politicians and professionals, businessmen and workers, rich and poor in disproportionate measure.

While acknowledging that the rationalism of the Enlightenment does have limits of its own, we cannot ignore the cultural contradictions of India's modernity. Meera Nanda, insists that

“the Indian counter-Enlightenment has tended to subsume or co-opt scientific reason within the spirit-based cosmology and epistemology of the Vedas... Modern ideas and innovations are being incorporated in a traditional Hindu world view, without diminishing many of its starkly irrational, occult and pseudo-scientific tendencies.” (Nanda 2006: 491)

This can only lead to a kind of social schizophrenia, the compartmentalisation of our lives in lived contradictions that cannot be creative. Panikkar confronts this anomaly very incisively in his *Radical Quest* later in the monograph.

Weapons of the Weak

Yet in spite of these contradictions, India is far from being a failed state, it is still a heroic 'experiment' as yet in process. However, for the vast majority ordinary Indians, it is still very much a wrenching struggle to cope and salvage something of their dignity and identity, with varying measures of success, and, we should add, failure too. Panikkar refers to the Indic psyche's response to such struggles with an *Inner Resistance and Withdrawal* that amounts to a non-acceptance and non-commitment to this social order, rather than an active engagement against and rejection of it. This has often been misread as apathy and fatalism.

However, in traditional societies there were more social spaces where such an inner resistance could find expression, where *Weapons of the Weak* that constituted *Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, (Scott 1985) were used in self-defence quite effectively, because at the time traditional interdependencies were in place. In modernising societies, these are breaking down and being replaced by more asymmetric ones. Even as the state and civil society impinge on every aspect of people's lives, there is less social space to which to withdraw, or from which to resist. People must find newer ways to do this effectively, which now often involves protest and even rebellion, as we see rapidly spreading. This is evidence, if indeed it was needed, that their inner resistance has not been sapped.

A Million Mutinies

In the developing world, neo-liberal hegemonic globalisation relegates economic growth to market mechanisms and so de-politicises development. It relocates eco-political decisions away from the national state to multilateral institutions and multinational corporations and so undermines national governments. The overall effect was inevitably to devitalise national and especially local political institutions. However, as D. L. Sheth emphasises “an important, if unanticipated, consequence of the decline of institutional politics was the revitalisation of old social movements.” (Sheth 2004: 46) For

“based on such an assessment of globalisation’s adverse impact both for development and democracy, grass roots movements conceive their politics in the direction of achieving two inter-related goals: (a) re-politicising development and (b) reinventing participatory democracy.” (ibid.4: 49)

Increasingly now, grass-root movements of protest and rebellion are more stable and better organised. They cannot be wished away. Their politics is mobilised around new articulations of the old categories of class and caste, and now on new issues of gender and ecology as well. Their inspiration is neither from the older party politics nor the newer modern technologies, but from Paulo Freire’s “conscientisation” (Freire 1972) and E.F. Schumacher’s “appropriate technology”, from Gandhiji’s *ahimsa* and *satyagraha*, and Jay Prakash Narayan’s “total revolution”. Against the exclusion and inequality of hegemonic globalisation, they urge the ancient Indic principle of *vasudaiva kutumbakam* (the world as one family). Together with Gandhi’s *swaraj* and *swadeshi*, this would amount to a bottom-up globalisation of solidarity and equity, a worldview of ever expanding, always including oceanic circles. Rather than the ‘low-intensity’ democracy that suites a hegemonic globalisation, this could add up to a counter-hegemonic one. (de Souza Santos 1997)

Panikkar’s *Interludes* list a dozen such movements in the 1990s, though, as he admits, these do not add up to an effective and integrated solution to the overall crisis. Today many of these have gathered momentum, and many more newer ones are making their presence felt. Together these do provide an incisive critique and point to new possibilities, but by themselves, they are not as yet able to implement a new agenda for an ‘alternative development’ and ‘another politics’. However, they have conscientised our marginalised people, the poor and dispossessed, dalits and tribals, women and youth, workers and farmers, and thus created an awareness and an urgency even in our mainstream society and politics, that cannot be silenced now.

Ecological movements, first typified by Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save the Narmada Movement) have cautioned us against large development projects, which, for environmental clearance, must now satisfy more stringent criteria. Women’s movements have advanced from early tentative beginnings to include women from all classes and castes, from cities and villages, professionals and housewives, and become a force to reckon with. Farmers’ suicides have focused attention on the plight of agriculture and politicians are being compelled to respond to small cultivators’ problems. Tribal movements are more assertive of their identity and dalits ones more confident of their political clout. In spite of initial difficulties, with the 73rd 74th Constitutional amendment, passed in 1992, panchayati raj and tribal self-rule are taking root in our villages and are set to revitalise local self government. True, bonded labourers are still cruelly exploited, and child-labour has not been abolished, but such abuses are now out in the open and impinge more acutely on our political conscience. Public interest litigation has come to stay, while human rights organisations monitor violations and file credible appeals in the courts that have been successfully vindicated.

However, we can hardly pretend that all these new movements are positively oriented towards solidarity and equity. Our intellectuals’ critique and our artists’ creativity have not given us the meaning and motivation for a new beginning. Identity politics premised on caste and

religion have precipitated a "politics of passion". Religious identities have become more fundamentalist and easily manipulated into a "politics of hate" that precipitates vicious communal riots. Caste and regional movements indulge an ethnocentric chauvinism and get progressively fragmented among themselves and coopted by oppressive elites. Extremist politics outside the gamut of parliamentary democracy programmatically espouses revolutionary violence, while cultural nationalism pragmatically promotes religious conflict within electoral politics.

All this makes for an explosive mix that now threatens the fundamental structures of our "Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic Republic" as the Preamble of our Constitution proudly proclaims. Sovereignty seems compromised to the sole superpower and socialism to new economic policies; secularism is in shambles and under serious threat, our democratic institutions hijacked by criminal politicians.

However, the political agenda has also been crucially affected for the better. Thus, the necessity of guaranteeing fundamental rights and addressing basic needs can no longer be ignored by any government in power, and when they fail to do so they are penalised by the electorate when the voters have the opportunity to do so. The importance of bringing extremists into the mainstream political processes and not merely suppressing them with state violence is more widely accepted, as is the urgency of protecting and not isolating minorities, especially religious ones. Affirmative action for weaker sections of our society has gained growing legitimacy. The Common Minimum Programme of the United Progressive Alliance attempts to respond to this new scenario and it is being monitored from within the government and from without, as it reaches out to the marginal and neglected among our peoples.

Periodically, all this *manthan* (churning) does get articulated from time to time in general elections that have made tectonic shifts in the political scenario. But these represent more a plebiscite that throws one set of rascals out only to be replaced by another. The same politicians and their parties get recycled in new avatars, and the political structures are replicated, not changed, even as dynastic succession prevails on the national and regional political stage.

All said and done, India is today a contentious polity where the civil and social order is no longer taken for granted. It is contested in numerous and diverse ways by its billion plus people. These protests and rebellions now add up to more than *A Million Mutinies* since V. S. Naipaul, wrote about them in the 1990s. (Naipaul 1990) We need a new more innovative discourse to reflect and articulate our rich experiences with these contestations and to carry this forward in constructive and creative action, in a gentler, kinder inclusive society embracing all its citizens, rather than an 'India shinning' for the few, while the many are left in darkness. Panikkar points to such a praxis in his *Radical Query* in coping with *The Challenge of Modernity*.

IV. Interrogating Modernity

From One to Many Modernities

We begin here with some conceptual clarifications for our purposes: 'modernisation' is the social change that results in 'modernity' and is driven by 'modernism'. Thus 'modernisation' is a social process, 'modernity' its social consequence, and 'modernism' its social ideology. The terms imply not just a reference to a timeframe, but more importantly, they are distinguished by a substantive content.

Modernity was first derived its inspiration from the European Enlightenment, which was characterised as the 'age of reason' with 'man come of age'. It was projected as an emancipation from tradition and as such precipitated fundamental social changes across the West, that were carried over to its colonies and eventually spread over the globe.

However, the process of modernisation is not unilinear and monolithic. There are differences and contradictions, nuances and complexities that drive the change process in various ways and in varying directions. For these processes are not just the result of a new and value-neutral scientific technology. There are ideological inspirations that drive modern technology and impact social and cultural systems in a society. Necessarily, this had different implications for different societies, even if these ideological inspirations are substantively similar in their common core.

Moreover, any social change is necessarily coloured by the cultural and institutional systems of a society, its historical experience and its geographic resources. The technological and ideological changes must be contextually internalised in these changing societies and inevitably, once again they will be nuanced accordingly, as some aspects are found to be more compatible and acceptable than others. Hence, when confronted with a multidimensional and complex process like modernisation, societies are affected in correspondingly multiple and varied ways. Thus, even within an overall commonality, substantively modernism will not mean exactly the same thing across such societies. Consequently, there will be multiple modernities, often at odds and even in conflict with one another, i.e., different societies with different responses to perhaps substantially similar exigencies of social change.

Nor can modernity be conflated with capitalism. (Wood 2001: 35) The Cold War was an example of two competing 'modernities', both claiming to be the more progressive, yet emphasising different aspects of the same European Enlightenment: the liberal capitalism of the first world and the socialist communism of the second. When modernisation reaches beyond Europe, bringing with it the ideology inspired by its Enlightenment, we can expect even greater differences and contradictions. Today the patterns of modernity differ across the Americas and between Western and Eastern Europe. Yet all these societies are basically within Western civilisation. Hence, it is now becoming apparent that even in the West modernity is not singular or uniform but decidedly multiple and complex. (Hefner 1998: 87)

The present ethnic and religious conflict enveloping our world has precipitated so much violence and even a state sponsored 'War on Terror'. All this is in no small measure due to the underlying social and political changes in these societies, consequent on the impact of modernisation on them. Though the motivating inspiration may well be alien to some ideologies of modernism, especially when these are perceived as Westernising or secularising influences. Yet, there can be no gainsaying the changes themselves have come with modernisation,

precipitated by its scientific technology and carrying the burden of its ideological inspiration, albeit in an alternative context and all too often with other and unanticipated outcomes.

If modernity in the West was rooted in the European Enlightenment, its effects were most dramatically and drastically apparent in the industrial revolution. Classical social scientists, like Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, theorised the social consequences not just in terms of technological change but as driven by a political economy that transformed society. Premised on such interpretations, early theories of modernity, such as ones by Talcott Parsons, Edward Shils, Daniel Lerner, Alex Inkeles and others, predicted a convergence in which modern societies would inevitably replicate the model of the West. Thus in 1966, S.N. Eisenstadt affirmed:

“Historically, modernization is the process of change towards those types of social, economic and political systems that have developed in Western Europe and North America from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth.” (Eisenstadt 1966: 1)

For these social scientists, the West was thus seen as the yardstick against which the modernity of other societies was to be measured. But by 1998 Eisenstadt himself had clearly changed his mind:

“early studies of modernization assumed that the project of modernity would not only continue in the West but spread and prevail through the world. The reality proved to be radically different... Not convergence but divergence has ruled the history of modernity.” (Eisenstadt and Schuchter 1998: 4)

Granted that there is a common substantive core to our understanding of modernity, in terms of scientific technologies and rational ideologies, the fallacy of only one modernity is today rejected in favour of “multiple modernities ... shaped by the historical experience of their respective societies.” (ibid.) The monopoly of the West over modernisation and modernity was challenged in newly developing societies, where it was not seen as neutral but as an instrument of cultural aggression.

In the West, modernity implied a social transformation, in which technological and economic, political and intellectual processes reinforced each other. Early Western modernity derived more from the totalising rationality of philosophers like Rene Descartes, than from the more pluralist reasoning of others like Desiderius Erasmus. Its march through Europe was not a peaceful progression, but a history of ideological violence, terror and war. From the French Revolution through the Russian and the Chinese, military coups and mass movements, it has been closely associated with a millenarianism. We have too long ignored its destructive possibilities, rather than exorcising them. And so we have continuing testimony to Eisenstadt's sombre conclusion: genocide is the barbarism lurking at the core of modernity. (Eisenstadt 2000: 12)

From Simple to Reflexive Modernities

Thus, though the project of modernity that was essentially conceived as a liberative one, there is an inherent contradiction and dilemma at its core. As Anthony Giddens perceptively observes:

“Modernity, one should not forget, produces difference, exclusion and marginalization. Holding out the possibility of emancipation, modern institutions at the same time create mechanism of suppression, rather than actualization, of self.” (Giddens 1991: 6)

It makes the transition from tradition to modernity in non-Western societies ambiguous and paradoxical and unless we face up to this, it cannot deliver on what promise it may have. Even in the West, the new social movements like the ecological and the feminist ones are today challenging the early Enlightenment’s rationalist modernity.

Now in the context of globalisation, modernity is continually reinterpreted and repeatedly challenged by new understandings, projects and agendas. This demands a collective response to the existential condition of people struggling to cope with the rapid and sweeping changes to which they are subjected. For

“the modern world is a ‘runaway world’: not only is the pace of social change much faster than in any prior system, so also is its scope, and the profoundness with which it affects pre-existing social practices and modes of behaviours.” (ibid.: 16)

We are now coping with what some have called “the second modernity” (Beck 2000: 12), to distinguish it from “the first modernity”, which, as we have seen, was associated with the Enlightenment. In the post-war period, it gave rise to the mega rhetoric of development as economic growth, high-tech, agribusiness, militarism. Rather this second modernity “now seems more practical and less pedagogic, more experiential and less disciplinary than in the fifties and sixties”, (Appadurai 1997: 10)

In a similar vein, Anthony Giddens argues that “the Enlightenment prescription of more knowledge, more control,” (Giddens 1994: 4) is no longer viable in our present-day world of “‘high’ or ‘late’ modernity” where “the self, like the broader institutional contexts in which it exists, has to be reflexively made.” (ibid. 1991: 3) For modernist rationality corresponds to an earlier ‘simple modernisation’. It is rather misplaced with the ‘reflexive modernisation’ such as is precipitated by the impact of contemporary globalisation. For this is not a simple continuation but a qualitatively different and inherently ambiguous process.

By ‘reflexivity’ Giddens refers “to the use of information about the condition of activity as a means of regularly reordering and redefining what that activity is.” (Giddens 1994: 86) At the individual level such a feedback process creates a ‘reflective citizenry’. Moreover, “the growth of social reflexivity is a major factor introducing a dislocation between knowledge and control – a prime source of manufactured uncertainty.” (ibid.: 7) Such situations precipitated by human action, have largely new and immensely unpredictable consequences that cannot be dealt with by old and tried remedies.

In the old modernity cultural identity was very much constructed in a territorial context and found its expression in the territorial nation-state. This allowed for multiple modernities across national societies with their own particular historical narratives and identities. With globalisation these national identities get inscribed in the macronarratives of larger global processes. However, given the accessibility and penetration of electronic media and social communication with the new information technologies, both are further "punctuated, interrogated and domesticated by the micronarratives of film, television, music and other expressive forms which allow modernity to be rewritten more as a vernacular globalisation". (Appadurai 1997: 10)

Thus, globalisation paradoxically precipitates localisation with localised regional histories and local cultural identities, as "the conscious and imaginative construction of difference as its core ... differences that constitute the diacritics of identity." (Appadurai 1997: 10) This precisely is the premise, which grounds a reflexive modernity that allows for the opening of newer social spaces in more innovative ways, where society can be reconstructed and not just reproduced.

Hence, we still have to come to terms with *Modernity and Its Futures* (Hall, Held, and McGrew 1992) For now, more than ever before, "modernity is a risk culture... Under conditions of modernity, the future is continually drawn into the present by means of the reflexive organization of knowledge environments." (Giddens 1991: 3) All this puts *Modernity on Endless Trial*. (Kolakowski 1990) However, we have not yet uncovered the limits of modernity, such as there may well be. In a globalising India, the 'Indic experiment' facing this challenge of a second, reflexive modernity makes it so much the more critical and crucial, for the stakes are higher and the risks have multiplied. This is now the context in which Panikkar's *Radical Query* must be read.

Living in a Revolution

In India, modernity is historically enmeshed in the colonial experience. Like British rule itself, it was introduced incrementally and piecemeal, continually compromised between the universality of the Enlightenment and the particularities of India. (Kaviraj 2000: 143 - 145) The national freedom movement replaced colonial rule with the nation-state, but it involved many contrary and contested understandings of nationalism, and what the challenge of modernity must mean for our future. The responses covered a wide spectrum. Among the most decisive ones that still impact the Subcontinent even today are: the religious nationalism of V.D. Savarkar, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the democratic socialism of Nehru, the swaraj of Mahatma Gandhi, the creative autonomy of Rabindranath Tagore, the affirmative action of Babasaheb Ambedkar, to mention but a few.

In India the Nehruvian consensus, which began our tryst with destiny became the dominant inspiration after Independence. This has now come unstuck, and while the new emerging order still plays lip service to Gandhiji's ahimsa, it is increasingly embedded with violence: the aggressiveness of Hindutva and the fanaticism of religious fundamentalists, the extremism of the Naxalites and the prevailing atrocities of caste.

Those unwilling to pay the social costs of modernity seek an escape into the past, like the blind traditionalists, or into the future, like the uncritical modernisers. But we have already bitten the apple and compromised our innocence, we have been seduced by Indra's temptation and begun an experiment, which is now faltering, if it hasn't already failed. But we must try to redeem it, because we cannot abandon it. There is no escape into the past or the future, no withdrawing from confronting this present challenge, without becoming irrelevant and getting lost in obscurity, assigned to the dustbin of history.

With continuing and rapid social change, people's experience of the new world opening up before them creates a dissonance between old understandings and new experiences. As this keeps mounting, the tension is no longer viable or sustainable. Modernity produces this culture-quake and the tsunami it precipitates threatens traditional societies struggling to cope. Masses of people are dragged into this vortex of rapid change, moving out of their earlier securities into a world they cannot quite comprehend. Those who can cope with such disorientation, become committed to the changes, not because they comprehend them but more because they benefit from them, even as others are left behind and go under.

I submit that with modernity we are going through a new Axial Age. The first such one was between 800 – 200 BCE, when agricultural economies stabilised and trade expanded and old traditions, religious and cultural, were no longer persuasive or viable in a changed world. Eventually, a new cultural heritage displaced the old as a new civilisation was born. The Zoroastrian and the Abrahamic, the Buddhist and the Upanishadic, the Taoist and the Confucian civilisations marked this age in their respective societies with new mythic understandings and new ideological interpretations.

In India we are *Living in a Revolution* (Srinivas 1992) and the incompatibilities and contradictions can no longer be contained in an unsustainable Indic experiment, neither are they likely to disappear and dissolve by exhaustion or default. At its deepest level, the challenge of modernity cannot be adequately met with technological inventions and political innovations, but as Panikkar claims, only with a new myth to redeem and reorient our failing Indic experiment with a creative and innovative ideology.

Myth and Ideology

Elsewhere, Panikkar elaborates the distinction between 'myth' and 'ideology'. This is crucial to his approach to modernity. 'Myth' here is not understood in the pejorative sense as opposed to fact, but rather in its original Greek sense of 'mythos', as the "horizon of intelligibility" (Panikkar 1983: 101), and hence "a form of consciousness". (Crook 1996: 6) It is taken for granted, unquestioned, pre-understanding, something that is accepted in 'faith', not an irrational blind faith, but a non-rational, pre-articulate understanding. Human society is grounded in such 'myths'.

When myth is rationally articulated, it undergoes a "passage from mythos to logos" (Panikkar 1983: 21) and develops into an ideology, i.e., "the more or less coherent and ensemble of ideas that make up critical awareness, ... constructed by the logos as a function of its concrete historical moment." (Panikkar 1983: 5) We need ideologies to articulate and locate ourselves in

our social world. And yet the more coherent and cogent the articulation of an ideology is the less able will it be to accept alternative understandings without reducing them to its own terms.

For ideology functions at the level of meaning, myth at the level of meaningfulness. Thus, ideologies are ultimately founded on myth, on the taken-for-granted, unquestioned understandings that precede it. Hence, the richer and deeper is the meaningfulness of the myth, the more open and accommodating will be the ideology that it can inspire. There are of course complex ways in which meaning is produced and contested. But this always happens within a context of meaningfulness. Thus as 'mythos' is articulated in 'logos', 'ideology' is contextualised by 'myth'.

Contemporary ideologues have understood this far better than traditional mythmakers. But such 'myths' are not created individually in a society. They emerge collectively, though we can facilitate their emergence and articulate them in ideologies. In sum, 'mythos' is what makes our world meaningful; 'logos' explains the meaning and its implications for our lives. We need both to cope with our everyday life. Having lost our old religious and cultural myths and abandoned our traditional social and political ideologies, we are still in quest of a new 'mythos' and a corresponding 'logos' in consonance with our age.

Joseph Campell describes 'myth' as a collective dream that expresses the unarticulated depths of a people's unconscious, their deepest longings of which they themselves may not be consciously aware. (Campell 1991) Perhaps the Australian aboriginals better understood this mythic poverty of modern man when in their encounter with colonials they regretted: the white man, he hath no dreaming! We need a new dreaming for our Indic experiment, for a fundamental reorientation, a new 'mythic' foundation for a new more authentic experiment, or rather a new *mythomoteur*, a founding myth, to refound our society. When we find such mythic *meaningfulness* for our society, then we can begin to articulate an ideological *meaning* that can be translated into a new social agenda. This is where Panikkar's *Radical Query* leads us. If this seems like utopia, a nowhere society, then we must learn from liberation seekers how history can be made to follow myth. (Nandy 1983: 63)

Incompatibilities and Alternatives

In the context of his understanding of myth and ideology, Panikkar's *Radical Query* explores the incompatibility of modern scientific technology with the cultural values of the Indic tradition and the contradiction between the Western mind and the Indic psyche. The supposed universal validity of Western technology, its aggressive rationality and ecological unsustainability is now more than ever in question. It is no longer the panacea it was once uncritically thought to be. Indic civilisation with its deep cultural roots going back forty centuries, its huge demographic scale, and immense social diversity, is the place to work out a new paradigm for itself and the world. For India has been at the crossroads of cultures and civilisations, the origin of, and home to world religions and philosophic systems. It has now arrived on the world stage as a dominant regional political and economic force, aspiring to project its power, political, economic and cultural, beyond South Asia. If it falters and fails now, the consequences could be earth-shaking. Panikkar rightly sees this as the crucial significance of this Indic experiment.

However, scientific technology must not mean a new colonisation. At most, it can be “a healthy intermezzo”, not the final end of this experiment. A positivist “cosmology” with its rationalist theory of the world is a production of the Western mind. But the Indic psyche is more in need of what Panikkar calls a “Kosmology”, a world-myth to read and listen to how the cosmos manifests itself to us today. For Panikkar this must be a three dimensional integrated understanding of the material cosmos, human consciousness and divine transcendence, in what he explains as a “cosmotheandric solidarity”, a concept he has insightfully elaborated elsewhere.

In this solidarity, he seeks alternatives to our present predicament not in polar opposites that are dialectical contraries, but rather in promising possibilities that make for dialogical complementarities. In our globalising world, dialectics at best may yield a synthesis but as we have seen, this is usually in terms of the dominant thesis, not the subaltern antithesis; dialogue allows for a cultural conversion, an inversion of roles that can bring a new symbiosis, if only we can confront our narcissism and our inadequacy honestly.

Our present Indic experiment with modernity seems to result in the transmigration of the Western ideological soul into the Indian body politic. This would be a neo-colonialism and an abandonment of our tryst with destiny. Panikkar sees this as a new political tryst not in Nehruvian terms of a powerful nation state grandiosely demanding respect and aggressively pursuing its self-interest, but of a society seriously and effectively committed to the commonweal of its people.

During the freedom movement, Tagore and Gandhiji had warned against our nationalism getting trapped in chauvinism. Today religious and cultural nationalisms are tearing apart the peoples on the Subcontinent. Yet there are possibilities and promises of peace and progress that a new Indic experiment must dare to espouse, for we seem to be trembling on the brink of a breakup or a breakthrough. Having yielded to the temptation of Indra, we can still redeem ourselves, if we realise that our problem is not just economic or political, but essentially metaphysical and religious. It is one that demands a transformation to a new ethos of “sacred secularity”, where the sacred and the profane, the religious and the secular, the human and the divine are no longer in opposition with each other or with our cosmos, but are subsumed into an inclusive ‘cosmotheandric’ reality. This is the vision that Panikkar challenges us to engage in with a new more universal experiment.

Transcending *Indra's Cunning*

Hence, this radical reorientation must breakthrough the false dichotomies with which *Indra's Cunning* presents us. For this, we will need a new myth that will create new dialogical alternatives for another tryst with our promised destiny. Panikkar's sacred secularity in its three dimensional “cosmotheandric solidarity” already indicates its emerging contours in terms of justice, ecosophy, peace, human primacy and dignity. This seminal contribution of Panikkar is all the more pertinent in the increasing religious fundamentalism and extremism that could sweep the India of Gandhiji's dreams into the nightmare of a new history.

Today, our concept of justice must include affirmative action. Our understanding of ecosophy imply more than harmony and equilibrium with nature but responsibility to regenerate it as well. Peace is to include freedom and tolerance. Human stewardship over the material and subhuman world no longer can exclude openness to the transcendent divine. Human dignity must affirm the last and the least. Today the outline of this mythic understanding is being further sketched in a hesitant social ideology and etched into a stuttering political agenda, but it is gradually beginning to get rooted in a wider consensus.

Gathering the Fragments

In the end, Indra's divine cunning exposes our vulnerability and dependence, which we cannot escape. But in transcending this we will find our autonomy and interdependence for which we must take responsibility and in which we will find our freedom. There is still a long way to go for such a liberation, but the direction has been indicated. It is for us to stay the course, or we find that even if we win all our battles, a very unlikely possibility, we will come to the tragic realisation that we have fought the wrong war! For now, we can gather the fragments that we have found in *Indra's Cunning* and begin to meet the challenge of modernity with a renewed, more inclusive and human Indic experiment.

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