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Broadly speaking, the paradigm of ‘aitihya’ is anchored in the nature and structure of narrative just as the paradigm of modern history is embedded in the autonomy of evidence. Yet, the spectrum varying from evidence-hunting to significance-directed-narration is so wide today that the contentious enterprises of history and of itihāsa have arbitrarily come to be encompassed together into this. In vernacular circuits, ‘history’ continues to be pragmatically translated as ‘itihāsa’, unmindful of the theoretical discord between the two that brews underneath. An attempt is made in this essay to articulate the gamut of issues that are involved in a discord that is apparently a puzzle of Indian modernity and to resolve it through an examination of the nature of historical thinking in the context of traditional Indian theorizing about the past.

In doing so, we intend to analyse the ontology of objects peculiar to general thinking about the past as also theorize on the construction of significance in such a thinking. The analytical tools of Vaiśeṣika and the Mīmāṃsā will be used here to offer a theory of significance. We believe that two fundamental approaches – basically asymmetrical – may be involved in such a construction of significance, and these would relate to: (i) recollecting justice, and (ii) recollecting injustice. Paradigmatically, the basic signature of history and itihāsa may be read respectively in the statements that, “there simply cannot be a history of justice” and that, “recollection of justice in past will take the form of itihāsa.” Analytically, it has to be so because the evidential bearings of ‘injustice’ are possible to be documented and adduced but that would not be the case in respect of ‘justice’. Keeping these points in mind, we propose to further explore the possibility of underscoring a new paradigm of ‘historical itihāsa’ that would integrate actual historicity into its narrative. This is required because theories of history are classically founded on
the premise of hopping from ‘tragic to tragic’, drawing strength from a Greco-European exploration into the forms of the tragic. In contrast, theories of *itihaśa* are founded on a search trajectory for ‘contentment’ where the ‘tragic’ only occasions a commencement of the trajectory, based, as they are, on the Indian quest to explore the forms of contentment. Nothing that may be vital to the enterprise of *itihaśa* will be lost if the tragic is grounded in actual history without compromising on *itihaśa*’s accent towards contentment.

Let us see how this discord is ingrained in grossly inadequate interpretations of Indian accounts of the past and the ambivalent nature of historical objects.

**Discord between History and *Itihaśa*:**

*Open problem of Trans-Historic Content of History*

Traditionally, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* are known as *itihaśa*. They are also widely believed to be authoritative, though in the modernist rendering they are considered to be no more than epic stories. Judging the proclivity to take the epics and legends from the past as sources of Indian history, German historicist philosophers have theorized on the ‘ahistoricity’ of the Indian mind and culture. Similarly, professional historians too have been uncomfortable in associating traditional *itihaśa* with the modern enterprise of history. In the modernists’ sensibility, the materials that traditionally constitute *itihaśa* may surely be valuable fodder for historical analysis; but those materials would not be valid for proper ‘history’ since they constitute a kind of ‘evidence’ that is considered lacking in ‘scientific’ adequacy.

In fact, the nature of evidence is so grounded in historical narrative that evidence per se tends to severely under-determine the latter. The content of any historical narrative, even one that is modern, is substantially more than that warranted by the facts that may be lodged in the related evidence. It may also be stressed that a historical narrative crucially, analytically and independently hangs on the somewhat elusive belief in the ‘invariance’ of ‘human significance’. On its own, such narrative constitutionally presumes a certain constancy of human significance, a constancy that is shared by historians, historical personages and the consumers of history. Otherwise, the very possibility of meaningful historical narrative will not obtain. This constancy has to be invariant to endow such narratives with ‘objective immutability’ or ‘emancipate it from
subjective relativity'. In the situation, it seems ironical that a historical narrative necessarily requires it to be based on some trans-historical foundation. Meaningful access to times bygone requires trans-temporal invariance apart from the evidence about the reality of those times. *Historical thinking thus moves on two legs — empirical content and trans-historic content.* And, to be able to stand on both legs, it has to search for some immutable ground. But this ground continues to remain elusive. In sum, therefore, a resolution of contentious conjugation of the enterprise of history and of *itiḥāsa* remains clouded due to ambiguities regarding the nature and form of trans-historic content.

**Ahistoricity at the Foundation of Historical Thinking:**

*Some Modern Indian Propositions*

Both analytically and philosophically, the foundation of trans-historic content is a more challenging problem than that of finding a secure grounding for empirical content. Any theory of history proposes and rationalizes trans-historic invariance, one way or the other. Several contending theories have been proposed since the rise of historicism in the West. The Hegelian Sphinx rises from the animal to the human to soar as a ‘free spirit’ through an invariant autology of dialectics between thesis and antithesis. The Marxian commune works out its checkered way through an invariance of materialist dialectics of exploitation, from the state of primitive communism to the state of ultimate communism. Discarding dynamic invariance of ‘historical motion’, a kinetic outlook locates the invariance in one or the other version of ‘human nature’ or ‘ultimate telos’ or ‘ultimate reality’ that plays itself in and through time. Paradoxically, in all these formulations, ahistoricity seems to be at work at the very foundation of historical thinking.

Emboldened by the analytic need for an ahistorical foundation of history, a modern Indian philosopher emphatically states that — “The general Indian view, then, is that history is but metaphysics translated into the language of time.” The modern enterprise of evidence-centric history is to be harnessed in the service of invariant metaphysics whose emanation it is fated to be. Another Indian historian has similarly proposed that — “The task of history is to emanate values that stem from the perennial.” So, the challenge in the modern enterprise of evidential history is to recollect the perennially cohesive highpoints of cultural assent over time. An
Indian philosopher-statesman similarly maintained that:

India has adored and idealized, not soldiers and statesmen, not men of science and leaders of industry, not even poets and philosophers, who influenced the world by their deeds or by their words but those rarer and more chastened spirits whose greatness lies in what they are not in what they do (italics mine); men who have stamped infinity on the thoughts and life of the country, men who have added to the invisible forces of goodness in the world.

In the true spirit of changing the world rather than interpreting it, he thus declares — “Meaning of history is to make all men prophets, to establish a kingdom of free spirits.” These claims are modern and perhaps echo certain strands in the modernization of traditional Indian philosophies if not the Indian traditions of accounting for the past. However, proposals of timeless metaphysics or of the perennial presence or of ahistorical value have to be thematized, analysed and critically evaluated in terms of their power to yield a well-founded enterprise of history. In particular, this will require an evaluation of the manner in which conceptions of the timeless are related to the temporal?

Relation between the Perennial and the Temporal

In Indian philosophical traditions, the posited relation between the perennial and the temporal has been segregated into two groups of doctrines — (i) vivartavāda (emanationism), asserting that the temporal perpetually emanates from the perennial, and (ii) parināmavāda (evolutionism), asserting that the temporal evolves in spite of the perennial. These are the two broad clusters of causal doctrines. In the first proposition, temporal sequence has no autonomy; at every point its relation with the perennial over-determines it. Autonomous temporal sequentiality in the second proposition is linked to the perennial by upholding a deferred unity of seed in the beginning and fruit in the end. However, the state of beginning and the state of end are not identical in spite of their being the same ontologically. Yet, in both the propositions, there is a motion from bandhavastha (bonded state) to mokṣavastha (liberated state). It is a disputed matter in the two approaches whether this motion is of the nature of cleaning (of being) or of the nature of constructing (for being), respectively. It is the second approach that prima facie seems to match well in accounting for the temporal necessity. For, in the first approach the relation between a temporal entity and yet another temporal entity is accidental and is mediated
by the necessary relation that each temporal entity independently has with the perennial. Since any proposal for trans-historic invariance must account for temporal necessity, which history deals with, it is one or the other version of parināmavāda (evolutionism) that aitihya is likely to be founded on. It may be noted that for parināmavāda the perennial is necessarily plural whereas for vivartavāda the perennial is necessarily singular.

It is disheartening to note that the major modern Indian stances on ahistoricity, mentioned in the last section, draw from vivartavāda rather than from parināmavāda. They strangely feel no burden to account for temporal necessity. Philosophical discourses apart, the pertinent issue is of the manner in which traditional Indian accounts of the past handled the relation between the temporal and the perennial.

Aitihya and Trans-Historic Invariance

Traditionally in India, there is a fairly rich, indigenous corpus of literature giving accounts of the past. This consists of gāthā (songs of achievements), nārāśaṃśi (praiseworthy deeds of men), ākhya (legends), itihiṣa (grand epics), puraṇa (ancient lore), vaṃśa (moral genealogies) and carita (exemplary biographies) all of which render accounts of the past. We can collectively and paradigmatically refer to them as itiḥāsa or aitihya. We have to look for exactly what is there in this corpus in terms of the ‘ahistorical’ foundation of the indigenous enterprise of itiḥāsa?

In this respect, we do have some highly thoughtful and theoretically stimulating analyses of classical Indian approaches to account for the past in terms of discovering, and underscoring a universal structure of historical narrative. Pathak (1976) thus critiques different classes of the itiḥāsa corpus with the help of the classical conceptual apparatus of nāṭya (dramaturgy) and kāvya śāstra (poetics) and thereby unfolds the structure and nature of the itiḥāsa narrative. We may briefly explain this structure and the dynamics of its operation. The sequence in the framework begins with the bija (seed) and ends into the kārya (achievement) that follows from it, thus representing a seed-to-fruition series which may be temporally spaced out or deferred if the seed got soiled with some human activity or the other. Between bija and the kārya are embedded the three stages, namely binda (expansion of seed through the world) along with yāna (effort), patākā (playing of assorted sub-episodes
implicating a variety of connected issues) with the hope of achieving the end (prāpyāsā) and prakārī (various clinching deeds and happenings) that establishes certainty of achievement (niyatāpti) which together inexorably and automatically lead to the last state of kārya (achievement), the final fruition (phalāgama) that inherently lay in the seed. Narration is meant to account for the ‘fruition of seed’ that is resisted thoroughly by the external forces but finally it is resolved despite that resistance. This five-fold structure is theorized in classical dramaturgy but it seems equally pertinent as a tool in historical interpretation as it analytically represents a potentially critical and significant method of approach. If such a structure and approach were applied to the vast variety of the itihāsa corpus it could engender invariant formal insights of great promise.

The Mahābhārata can also be analysed in terms of the amalgamation of a large number of ‘seed-to-fruition’ cyclic episodes. These episodes get stitched together because they are fraught with morally pregnant actions. Each such action unleashes another ‘seed-to-fruition’ episode. The sequence of such actions is linked to the grand overarching seed-to-fruition saga of the Mahābhārata. A seed-to-fruition structure admits of its embedding within itself and thus it is formally recursive as well as sequential. It seems that the Mahābhārata is an epic precisely because every seed-to-fruition cycle implicated in the sequence of morally pregnant actions is embedded in it even as it is also brought to conclusion. In a strict sense though, this would not be the case, since the Mahābhārata would then itself become a complete human universe. In that eventuality, there would remain few open cycles that would not be brought to a conclusion and would therefore be open to different critiques in different ages with different conclusions. So, the structure of the Mahābhārata’s narrative rests on accounting for the nest of actions that are impregnated with moral problems. Only that in this great work, the accounting is done in such a way that moral problems not only get articulated but they also get resolved in the labyrinth of the world. The Mahābhārata thus emerges as a time-tested grand exemplar of itihāsa.

Trans-historic invariance as instantiated in itihāsa can be explained more in terms of the form of narrative than in terms of any substantive or essential content, which may be extensively varied. It will indeed be futile to demonstrate that a timeless metaphysics or a perennial presence would constitute an ahistorical content of the corpus of itihāsa. Instead, it may be asserted that only a contentless form of
narrative can account for trans-historic invariance as well as temporal necessity. Form is vacuous and carries no ontological burden that may impel us towards the formulation of trans-historic invariance permeated with content.

**Universality and Formal Grounding of the Structural Invariance**

There is a deeper formal rationale for this structural form, which we shall digress into to impress upon the generalized underpinnings of *itihiisa* narrative. This structure has several powerful formal features: universality; necessity; closure, and recursivity.

The **universality** of the seed-to-fruition structure rests on the temporal passage from problems to solution in a manner that resolution is implicit in the impregnated seed itself. If we recast that structure in general terms as consisting of (i) the impregnated seed; (ii) difficulties in its sprouting; (iii) intricacies in its nourishment; (iv) surprises in its maturing; and; (v) eventual fruition, it sounds like a universal structure fit to underlie any saga of human affairs except that of a tragedy. The form of a seed can take a variety of content. There can be a moral dilemma in the seed that is resolved in the conclusion. There can be a resolve in the seed that is achieved in the end. There can be a contradiction in the seed that is transcended on fruition. There can be an element of the tragic in the seed that is brought to an amicable adjudication.

The **formal necessity** implicit in this structure can be witnessed in the feature that disables the impregnated seed to break into a ready resolution just by itself. If this were so, there would be no reason for discord to be there in the first place. For, it will be resolved at its birth instantaneously. In essence, discord implicates the rest of the world in an attempt to resolve itself. This necessity is important and is an intrinsic reason for temporal deferment or temporal passage in the fruition of seed. It is the external world that endows the form with the temporal necessity witnessed in a passage from the second to fourth stage. In fact, the narrative called propaganda is precisely of the type where, from the discordant seed, there is a straight jump to its resolution, without letting the seed to be polluted by the external world or getting it tested in the complexity of the outlying world. Thus, *itihiisa* as a narrative would be fundamentally different from propaganda precisely because there can be no movement from seed if it is not enwrapped by pushes and pulls that lie in the world external to it.

*Itihäsa* also has a **closure** in terms of the eventual resolution of
the situation from which the narrative originated. This closure is important; otherwise the narrative will be merely in a perpetual motion from one discord to another. Such a narrative would have an *ad hoc* end. Without closure the infinity of discords would perpetually populate the world without a hope of resolution. The tragic would be the deepest signature of man. The account of past would then be a motion from one tragic situation to another. Thus, *itihasa* not only presumes a movement external to the discordant origin of narrative, it also posits the closure of discord at the end of narrative. There is an internal order in the structure that stems from (i) the externality of the world *vis-à-vis* the seed-discord, and (ii) the confidence that any discord is inherently resolvable.

The actuality of human actions is rendered so not only in the impregnated conceptualization of the seed and its fruition but also in various episodic insetting that go into making of a passage. These insettings have the same structural form as would be implicit in the entire narrative. The form of the structure of narrative is recursively embedded within itself to create its passage. The internal sequentiality that may be necessary in a passage terminates the possibility of infinitary recursive embedding as well as it allows the picking up of definite number of relevant episodes for a narrative. Thus, *temporal necessity* in the structure ensures the finite embedding of structure within itself and the *closure* ensures the eventual termination that was implicated and sought after from the beginning of narrative.

*Itihāsa* is thus a *temporally discriminated* stitching of events and episodes collected or construed to demonstrate the fruition of the re-recognized seed. Recognition of seed is at once old and contemporaneous. This gives immutable trans-temporal universality to the structure of narrative. Such seed-to-fruition passages discovered or invented in the past continue to inform us about the nature of present situation as well. Thus is constituted the ahistoricity of narrative that provides trans-temporal foundation to a narrative. The *resolvability of morally impregnated seeds is of trans-historical interest of man*. The past is not significant if morally impregnated seeds cannot be recognized in it.

*Dukkha Nivṛtti* and Variety in Contents of the Invariant Form

At the highest level of generality, the world is a passage from the beginning-less (*anāditva*) situation to the state of definite end (*sānta*). Classically, this passage is traced from *anadi dukkha* (beginning-
less suffering) to dukkha nivrtti (freedom from suffering) by all the
darsana-s. This summary of the world is most pristine exemplar
of the form of narrative. Like geometric fractals, it is the same global
form that is found in various localities, both spatial and temporal, of
the variegated realm of life. Any situation of dukkha is the content
that initiates the instantiation of the form. The hauling of dukkha to
its dissolution/resolution is the content of this vacuous form that
underlies the passage from discontent to contentment.

A greater appreciation of the power and content of the seed-to­
fruition form calls for a research design involving an assortment of
classical Indian theories. For, this form can be found in them
instantiated in an astoundingly wide variety of ways. Even in the
Indian mathematical traditions this structure is fruitfully employed.
The difference between application of the form in literaryitihāsa
narrative and in mathematics lies only in terms of the domain where
a discontented seed is planted. In the itihāsa narrative the seed is
planted in an open domain of human activity, whereas in mathematics
it is planted in restricted domain of numbers. Of course the content
of seed in the two differs significantly. In itihāsa it has a content of
moral dilemma and in mathematics it has a content of an
indeterminate value or a variable. The invariant nature of the seed­
to-fruition series, however, remains the same in both the domains in
spite of a radical difference in their contents. Though this versatile
form can harbor a variety of content, the question remains whether
it can inform historically actual content as well.

Historic Factuality versus Dramatic Idealization in the Contents of
Aitihya Form

When we shift our attention from the form to its content, one pertinent
problem faced is regarding the distinction between imaginary (ideal)
and real (actual) content. This draws us towards an ontology of
content. We were able to avoid ontological issues by determining
trans-historical invariance in formal terms. However, ontological
issues surface when our attention shifts to contents of the form. But
in the process we have gained one clear and substantive advantage —
ontological issues will now get raised within the temporal realm. It
is in instantiation of form that content becomes an issue. Its
instantiation in itihāsa is clear but its instantiation in history is fraught
with problems. However, we shall now invert our strategy to crack
our original problem of discord between itihāsa and history. We
shall approach *itihiṣa* through examination of the enterprise of history and tie up the two together in the end.

In the passage of the *itihasa* narrative, the *distinction between historical factuality and dramatic idealization* gets blurred. Even if the trans-historic invariance of the narrative form is accepted, the *itihasa* narrative seems closer in spirit to fiction rather than being sensitive to historical actuality. This issue forms the crux of the discord between the enterprise of history and the enterprise of *itihasa*.

It is said that fiction is a window to sublime reality, nonetheless, the historically actual has to be authentically accounted for in a narrative about the past. Is there an irretrievable chasm between the content of history and the content of *itihasa*? Is it possible to conceive a ground on which the historical ‘actual’ and dramatic ‘ideal’ lie in a continuum that stretches from material reality to mental reality? If not, then, the exact partition of the diverging content of history and that of *itihasa* will have to be articulated to understand the nature of discord between them.

It is here that we turn towards the inquiry and analysis of the nature of the historical object. Through the analysis of the objects of history we shall pave the way for an examination of the possibility of co-locating the content of *itihasa* with historical actuality. The blurring of the boundary between dramatic idealization and historical actuality has to do with the issue of ‘significance’ in accounting for past actions. To meaningfully situate the issue of significance, ontology of content will have to be first sorted out.

**Ontology of Historical Content**

If a question were asked as to how ‘history’ as a modern discipline is different from other areas of human inquiry, an answer would require a clear delineation of objects peculiar to ‘history’. Modern historical thinking rests on the conceptions of two complex objects inertly unique to the discipline – (i) *historical fact*, and (ii) *historical inevitability*. Apart from these distinct and characteristic objects of history, the enterprise of modern history claims to draw its strength from its disciplinary grounding on ‘historical evidence’. However, the concept of ‘historical evidence’ is dependent, directly or indirectly, upon the kinds of objects that peculiarly characterize history. Ontological decomposition of these complex objects will reveal the furtive nature of historical thinking. That would give us a clue as to how historical content can get meaningfully associated with the enterprise of *itihasa*.
Objects of the first class, namely, historical fact, are decomposable into *material entities that have a date-indexed human signature*, like an old artifact or an old record (an inscription or even redacted texts). Date sensitive ensemble of such entities constitutes a historical fact. Pursuits of such date-indexed entities lead to discoveries like that of Harappa, which was not part of the living memory of civilizations. Thus, there can be *new* historical facts. We can call the 'primitives' of this class as *indexical objects of history*. New historical facts may emerge in other ways too. Developments in science do periodically yield new dating techniques to investigate and to even invent such an entity for history that eventually go into making a historical fact. For instance, emerging genome research is perhaps on its way to bring in factual surprises for history through genetic archaeometric research in the years to come. Even gene will go into constituting historical facts.

There are two sub-types of indexical objects – (i) with the primacy of material content (like an artifact or even gene), and (ii) with the primacy of signate content (like a text). Indexing of the first kind borrows its methodology from science whereas indexing of second kind borrows its methodology from literary criticism (like in segregating layers of text and in cross-identifying personage or events recorded in different texts). Modern historical thinking involves a variety of entities and events, all anchored in an ensemble of date-indexed objects. Only such an anchorage endows the enterprise of history with critical verifiability. Typically, embodied personages (such as kings and other historical figures), cities, ruins, deeds extracted from texts, etc. go into the construction of historical facts. The objects of the second class, namely, historical inevitability, are conceived as a kind of 'force' disclosing what is fated. Nation, class, race, etc. are such objects embodying historical fate or inevitability. Events in the past are seen as expressing the sub-text of such a force embodying historical necessity. 'Force-objects' actively persist over time; they have temporal extension unlike the point-like indexical objects. We shall call the 'primitives' of this class as *vital objects of history*.

Open-ended empirical history (insistently based on indexical objects) apart, it is the theory of historical forces that constitutes the foundations of modern historical thinking, explanation and causation. Indexical objects are only fodder for sorting, arranging and cross-verifying claims issuing from vital objects. They are involved in accounting for or anchoring of vital objects. The theory of history
2. *Significant Account*: Signs and language are means of historical account. Possibility of an account of temporally spread out events presumes one or the other trans-temporal stance. A certain constancy of human constitution and resources is involved in making a historical account possible. Such an invariance of human-ness allows the historian to impersonate, analyse and portray happenings in the past and to construct consistent account that is understandable today. It is for this reason that we do not have in any normal sense a 'history of cats' since the invariance of human-ness does not obtain here which leads to the loss of access to cat’s mental entities. There is stability of human nature through all periods and regions of which we may have knowledge. Man with his reason and passion, virtue and vices, suffering and ecstasy, has remained more or less the same. There is no history of the mental capacities of man, though there have been conjectural attempts at its pre-history. There can be descriptive account of indexical objects as in empirical history. But it is vital objects that yield a significant account with live moral content of relevance to the present. It is, thus, often said that 'all history is contemporary history'. Abstraction of historic significance that has contemporary relevance is still an open question. In *itihaśa*, significant account simply overlooks indexicality.

3. *Human activity*: Human action is a universal anchor for history. However, the nature of human activity that would have historical significance is far from clear. The key question is whether one can identify historically significant activity from the infinite details of human activity. A historical account fundamentally presumes such a reduction or summation. Which account of human activity becomes historically relevant? In the next section of the essay we make an analysis of this reduction or summation, for, in the absence of a theory of such reduction, history will remain just an *ad hoc* discipline.

In the definition of history, all the three elements, mentioned above, have open-ended problems that are related to what goes in the construction of historical-cum-contemporary significance. Temporal discrimination of mental entities, choice of significance in narrative account, and definitive reduction or summation of human activity, these are all related to man's ahistorical access to the past while accounting for past. This access has so far been traced to (i) trans-temporal formal invariance, and (ii) temporal content as vital objects.
The key to these problems is in the *nature of summation of activity* that man constantly engages in. For, it is in this summation that construction of vital objects and instantiation of universal form can both be understood.

**Nature of Significance: Summation of Human Action**

Any human action, even the simplest of actions like the 'lifting of a finger', implicates trillions of actions at the molecular and atomic level. If one goes to the sub-atomic level, numbers of these actions go up to mind boggling figures. In fact, infinitely large or indefinite numbers of actions go in constituting even a simple motion of a finger. The brevity inducing cognitive and linguistic capacity of man renders such infinitude into a definite summary of actions in the form of a simple cognition or in the form of a sentence. "Lifting of a finger" is such a simple sentence and is based on a straight uncomplicated cognition about an action. If there were no summarization of action, a single cognition will be clogged with an infinitude of actions or a simple sentence will have an infinitude of verbs. How does summarization of action in cognition and language occur? This is the lowest level of signification that happens. *Coalescing of actions in aggregated simple 'action' and its rendering with simple verbs* are the real phenomena that terminates indefiniteness into definite significance. This is a natural summarization that we witness in everyday cognition and language. Indefinite particularity of micro actions gets simplified and signified in determinate and definite cognition and language.

Physical actions are infinitely dense so long as substances remain decomposable into the indefinitely minutest of physical parts. Even if there are indivisible and finite active components, it is only the assorted 'whole' on which unison of action can be located. Such a 'whole' survives through the action that gets located into it and remains equipped for harboring another action. The minute actions of parts can coalesce only because of the reality of the 'whole'. Such a 'whole' gets cognized with minute actions of its parts aggregated into the action of a 'whole'. There is thus a summation of the actions of a part into an action of a physical 'whole'. Such 'wholes' are ontologically real entities and are more than aggregates of parts. It is only if their reality is accepted that the indefinite actions of parts can be conceived as the simple action of a 'whole'. The reality of the 'whole' makes significance and summation of actions
possible. However, macro components of the wholes can have independent inherence of actions. Such will be the case when the arm or tongue moves without a moving of the whole body. The cognitive faculty of man is such that these summations of micro actions in wholes or their macro components are readily cognized as simple aggregated actions. In the Vaiśeṣika philosophical vision, the mechanics of such 'whole' based summation of actions has been worked out in unambiguous details. Such significant action is cognized and can get articulated in language too.

The rendering of actions in language is obtained in terms of verbs. A particular actional behavior can be rendered with the help of a variety of verbs. For instance, while I type, I move fingers, I hit the keyboard, I touch the keys, I enter the characters, I insert letters, I delete letters, I compose words/phrases and so on. One action, which is ontologically a simple and particular action, can get rendered in a language by using many verbs. Such linguistic fecundity spreads out, swells and fractures a simple ontic unity of action. Same action is more than often read in a variety of ways with the help of many verbs. Moreover, a particular action in a particular verb form also can get variedly paraphrased in language, thanks to the help lent by a variety of nominal determinants of action. The rendering of an action with the use of a particular verb can be done in several ways by using different nominal relations. The simplicity of an ontological summation of action is lost in its accounting through language. In the Mimamsa philosophical vision this language-specific phenomenon of de-centering and fracturing ontic action is reclaimed at another level of summation. This doctrine of summation and significance is known as arthavāda. And it deals specifically with human actions.

When it comes to reading human action, the issues are much more complex compared to the readings of physical action. The unit of human action not only involves a physical aspect but also mental effort and the intended purpose. The unit of the 'purposive action' of humans is 'deed' or karma. Human action has a structure that involves a purposive end and an initiating effort besides the in-between motor activities. Behind the action initiating effort is a disquiet that is supposedly resolved by the accomplishment of action. The beginning and the end of human action are mental constructions though their passage is physical. The human being is not a simple physical whole but is a tied up composite of self and body. The deed as a unit embodies that tie-up. Thus, human activities are read,
evaluated and reinterpreted in the units of deeds. A reading of each other's deeds is a pet and compulsive engagement of man. *It is deed that is a most primitive of vital object in the sense that other vital objects can be composed out of them.*

The deed is simpler than the fertile language used for rendering it. The deed is even simpler than cognized activities because a single deed may involve a series of actions. A summation of human action from its serially cognized actional components is done in deed. A deed also represents the summation of cognized human actions on the basis of its rendering in language. Humans perform deeds and humans read deed. A deed is a signified unit of human actions spreading over a variety of motor activities, including speech and their corresponding mental content. A unit of a deed has a structure of intention-action-fruition. The reading of a deed summarizes human activity the way that a reading of action summarizes physical processes. Deed is a second level of natural construction of significance. The first level of natural construction of significance lies in action. Actions are read in physical wholes and in the motor activity of humans but deeds are read only in human activity (or even in the activity of other living beings). Actions are found only in physical 'wholes' including the human body whereas deeds are found in non-whole composite, the human being, which is 'body tied up or bound with conscious self'.

Human deeds often clash and create disquiet or discord. A significant volume of such clashes is witnessed in the community of humans who are engaged in reading about each other's deeds. Such a fractured universe of deeds creates a spread that calls for another level of summation or construction of significance. This summation is reckoned in terms of 'judicious deed' that resolves discord between different deeds. We prefer to call 'judicious deed' by another term 'feat' or *vidhi*.Feat has the same structure as deed, except that the physical aspect of motor activity in a deed is reduced to a mere remediation of injunctive content. When deeds clash, the resolving 'judicious deed' takes the disquiet between deeds as its initiating effort and formulates a judicious resolution as its end. The summation into a feat is an active summation based on the possibility of adjudicating discord among deeds. This summation is implicit in injunctive content because deeds do in fact coalesce around injunctive force points. Deeds are repeatable. Deeds can be reiterated. Discord of deeds also gets recreated. So also the judicious deeds get repeated, reiterated and recreated except that judicious deeds represent a dead
end, which requires no further summarization. Construction of significance automatically comes to a halt there. Feat is an embodiment of closure. And there are good reasons to believe, in accordance with the Mimamsa tradition, that such feats are plural.

We have, through the analysis of human action, shown that three natural reductions are involved before human action acquires historical significance for narration –
1. First reduction of infinitely dense material action to pronounceable linguistic summation of action.
2. Second reduction of prosperous linguistic summation of human actions to deed-centric summation.
3. Third reduction of discord in human deeds to resolution in judicious deeds or feats.

Constitution of Vital Objects: Natural Phenomena of Temporal Indiscrimination

There is another aspect to the second reduction that needs to be stressed here. Deed-centric summation of human activity, when accounted, involves trans-temporal readability and repeatability of deeds. Thus, we land up with yet another paradoxical situation, which makes strict temporal discrimination of past deeds unfeasible. If an account of the past is indeed an account of human deeds, the temporal discrimination of deeds will get compromised because there is a natural phenomena of temporal indiscrimination that is operative in the continuum from deeds to feats.

Indian theoretical traditions addressed this paradox by positing stratification, function and ontology of past human deeds. The distinction between judicious deeds and injurious deeds, as pointed out earlier, is fundamental to this onto-typology. The distinction between the material body and the body of deeds is also fundamental to this ontology. This is an interesting idea of dvija (dual birth) that is involved here. A living person in the course of life performs many actions, which get summarized in deeds and feats. This summary happens in an ontologically real locus, which is different from the real locus of that living person. This is a vital locus. This locus is accessible to the minds of the person who know of the deeds of this person. Knowledge regarding deeds of that living person is derived from this vital locus, which is a cluster of his/her deeds, even if that person is not perceptually present. Even when that person dies, this vital locus stays as his/her deeds and can still be recalled. Thus,
every person has two births, one is a physical birth and the other is
when that person initiates performance of morally relevant deeds.
When a child grows up fully, to act on his/her own, he/she takes this
second birth as well. The body of second birth grows with the
performance of deeds by the living person, but it survives even after
his/her physical body dies. The second body is a cluster of deeds
summarized using natural reductions. Natural reductions provide
the physiology of this new vital locus. The fact that we can recall a
dead person is an evidence of the being of the vital birth of that
person.

Traditionally the vital locus of this second birth is called *pitr yoni*
(ancestral womb). There exists a realm of such vital loci accessible
to humans. This realm is populated with all possible vital objects,
which get born in this realm. These vital objects become dormant or
active in different minds at different times. But they never disappear.
They do, however, coalesce among each other. This realm is
accessible through the instrument of memory. The second birth is
the lowest level of this realm. Second-birth loci can coalesce into
other such loci whose feats include their deeds. These constitute a
second level of vital objects and are classically known as *ṛṣi yoni*
(prophet womb). Persons who have performed ‘judicious deeds’
have a second-birth in the *ṛṣi yoni*. An exemplary personage can
coalesce many lives. Seers, prophets, theorists, teachers, etc. have
such birth as well. There is a third level of vital objects that are
created by the collective deeds of many people. These are objects
like nation, class, family, etc. The loci of this third class are classically
called *deva yoni* (god womb). Reborn loci of deeds coalesce and
split in three-fold ways, populating the universe of deeds and creating
three classes of vital objects.

This disembodied realm of deeds and feats has injunctive content
that is operative in living persons today. This realm has its own
dynamics of coalescing and partitioning of cluster of deeds and thus
it forms a continuum with life of its own. The ontological stance
regarding this realm can be referred to as injunctive realism. Vital
objects are constituted, decomposed, reconfigured and invented in
this realm. This realm is a reality and it represents the structure of
the reduced/summarized memory of humanity even as it constitutes
a fodder for the construction of historical significance. This is prime
stuff for *itiḥāsa* that is ever reconstituting itself not on the basis of
temporal discrimination but on the basis of *adhiḳāra bheda* (dominion
discrimination). We shall not go into the principle of *adhiḳāra bheda*
Recollecting Justice versus Recollecting Injustice

It is the second and the third reductions that constitute the baseline of significance in accounting for the human past. The first reduction allows for a pure descriptive rendering in language. Even the second reduction allows for a pure descriptive rendering of the past in as much as it allows for a pure descriptive rendering of contemporaneous deeds. Pure descriptive rendering requires an eliminative choice in respect of subject matter, which is perspectival matter and not really matter related to the construction of significance. Ideological or perspectival bearings of choice are external to the natural construction of significance. However, injunctive content can be found in the second reduction, which brings in 'prescriptive content' at this level. It is with the third reduction that significance for history or itihāsa gets constituted. Failure in the operation of the third reduction leaves us with discordant deeds. Accounting for discordant deeds amounts to recollecting and reading injustice. Success in the operation and recognition of the third reduction leads to accounting for feats. Accounting for feats amounts to recollecting and reading justice. Usually, history, if not limited to pure description, is a narrative of recollecting injustice, whereas itihāsa is a narrative of recollecting justice. A moral burden is involved in a feat but not necessarily so in a simple deed. From deeds to feat is an injunctive continuum and in their recollection and operation is situated the enterprise of history and of itihāsa.

However, the apexes of feats are such that even temporal discrimination found in the continuum of deeds disappears, not to speak of spatio-temporal discrimination of physical actions. Feats are radically contemporary; they do not admit temporal indexicality at all. Temporality hails at their doorstep even if they are found instantiated in the memory of the past. For this reason, the Mīmāṃsā tradition characterizes them as 'independent of human situations' (apauruṣeya) and uncreated (anādi). Deeds are created and as such can be temporally indexed, if not spatio-temporally indexed like physical actions. Justice as such cannot be temporally discriminated whereas injustice seen in discordant deeds can be temporally
discriminated. As can be seen in an ordinary human situation, the acts of justice are not recalled but those of injustice are rapidly recalled. Acts of justice seem to radically coalesce onto each other, leaving no individuated material signature or temporal record. Acts of injustice on the other hand get frozen in the event itself till justice dissolves it. Thus, by the nature of historical enterprise, the history of justice is the impossibility. This is a strong limitation that lies at the heart of the very paradigm of history, which insists that indexicality cannot be abandoned. There can be a history of justice or a history of institutions of judicial administration but not history or chronicle of justice as such. On the contrary, the history of injustice is what we can readily expect from the enterprise of history. This is because injustice gets frozen into events that can be indexed. The history of injurious deeds is plausible and has been even theorized by Marx with a promise of a just society at the end of history.

But the history of injustice, with an absolute externalization of justice from history, would lead to a fatally incomplete and inaccurate chronicle or account of past. For, acts of justice did take place in the past and they continue to occur today. Only the history of justice, not reality and the actuality of justice is the impossibility. Accounting for justice, thus, should be possible, though it may not be possible within the paradigm of history. A way has to be found to integrate both, accounting for injustice and accounting for justice together. *itihāsa* is an enterprise that precisely does that. In doing so, it has to bank on the invariant form of passage from discontentment to contentment and not on the form of tragedy. In doing so, historical indexicality will have to be necessarily sacrificed. The narrative of *itihāsa*, thus, would resemble literature more.

There is a relational temporal indexicality in the narrative but it is bereft of spatio-temporal indexicality as demanded by the modern enterprise of history. However, *itihāsa* can be historically authentic in the sense that the rendering of injustice in its body (in bija-s of various formal cycles) is regarded and acknowledged as a summary of the real situations in the past. All historically actual and significant discordant situations relatable to the fruition of a seed should be implicated in *itihāsa* for it to become historically authentic. Thus, historical knowledge has a role in the constitution of *itihāsa*. Since all indexical objects are not available at present, there is the active possibility of the discovery of new indexical objects. Historical knowledge prides itself in bringing to light such new indexical objects whose interpretation may lead to the discovery of new historical
fact. If that has any moral implications, there is no reason that the *itihaśa* narrative will not directly benefit from it. The authenticity of *itihaśa* narrative lies in the inclusion of all relevant injunctive and moral situations in its body. A poor the *itihaśa* would be the one in which the embodiment of injunctive and moral content summarized from the past is minimal.

It seems plausible to embed new insights from history within *itihaśa*, not as a contender of injunctive realism on which *itihaśa* is based, but as an augmenter of the indexical underbelly of injunctive realism, which we know is associated with even physical actions at its base. The discord between the enterprises of history and of *itihaśa* flattens if the proposition about injunctive realism is accepted. A major advantage of injunctive realism is that the construction of signification can be naturally founded and not left to the vagaries of subjectivity or *ad hoc* choices or ideological dispositions. This will have some merit since there is no adequate theory of historical significance in the modern philosophy of history discourse. These possibilities will get teeth only if there is a contemporary creation of 'historical *itihaśa*', otherwise it will remain a conjectural suggestion yet to be tested.

In sum, any attempt to integrate justice and injustice in a chronicle would necessarily lead to the enterprise of *itihaśa*, which is different from the partial enterprise of modern history driven by the partial theories of history promulgated in the last two hundred years. *itihaśa* is *adhikāra bhedi* (dominion discriminating), *ākhyāna* (account) of manusya karma (human deeds) done in atīta (past). In contrast, history is a spatio-temporally discriminated account of human activity done in past.

**Conclusion**

Kalhana in Rājaratāranginī raises the problematic of 'bhūtartha kathana' ('narration of the objects of past'), which has engaged us in this essay. We began with a *bijā*, namely, the problem of contentious conjugation of the enterprise of history and of *itihaśa*. It's resolution was conceived in an option – whether the horizon of the contemporary reality of the past is a tragedy or contentment. Accounting for the past necessarily implicates trans-temporal invariance. Indian traditions of accounting for the past reveal the formal structure of the narrative, which is a plausible candidate for such invariance. Not only that this structure has powerful formal features, which endows it with universality, but also it has the capacity to harbor the contents of the age-old human
quest for contentment as well as discords that fuel the quest for contentment.

Contents of the past are bifurcated in terms of *indexical* and *vital* objects. The most important feature of these objects that have been identified are – (i) All relevant indexical objects are not accessible at present, thus, the discovery of new objects is always possible, and (ii) All vital objects are accessible at present, though there can be a shuffling between their dormant and active role. A major issue here is that no adequate theory of vital objects is readily available. We have proposed the same in terms of the theory of a *natural summation* of actions into the significant objects. The three-tier summation into the reading and doing of *action*, *deed* and *feat* goes into the construction of significant vital objects from the past. These objects populate the form of the narrative in an appropriately rich plot. There is a line of inquiry not pursued here, that I would just mention since I believe it would yield a positive result. And it relates to the hypothesis that it is possible to derive the form of narration from the form of deed. This would bring us to an exact delineation of the laws of metamorphosis that the realm of vital objects undergoes.

In the construction of significance there is a continuum from deeds to feats. The existence of such a continuum from the past amounts to proposing a kind of injunctive realism. At the bottom of this continuum are spatio-temporally indexed actions and at the top are plural feats, which admit of no temporal discrimination, and in the middle are deeds that mediate between the two. A recollection of vital objects from this continuum is a function of these levels. The insistence on indexicality entails a narrative that recollects injustice. Recollection of justice necessarily takes the form of *itiharma*. The purpose of *itiharma* is to reconfigure, recast, reorganize, reinvent and resurrect an injunctive continuum. In this sense, *aitihya* is active in ordinary people.

Lastly, we believe, on the strength of the theory of natural summation and injunctive realism, it is possible to conceive 'historical *itiharma*. 'Historical *itiharma* allows for the possibility of the creation of new *itiharma*.

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1. In contemporary Indian society there are numerous kathā vācaka-s, who expound and innovate on itihaśa. Itihaśa is popularly recalled in ordinary everyday human interaction and not particularly for religious reasons. Further, no noticeable relevance of historical scholarship can be found in such recollections and their use.

2. Marx even proposed the historyless character of India as its unique reality—“Indian society has no history at all, at least no known history. What we call its history, is but the history of successive intruders who founded their empire on the passive basis of that unresisting and unchanging society.” Quoted by D.D. Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, Bombay, 1956, p. 11. Echoing this feature as a civilizational virtue, Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vols. I-VIII, Almora, Advaita Ashrama, 1968, Vol. V, p. 190, exalted the Indian spirit that enabled “to be conquered, and in turn, to conquer her conquerors.”

3. In the modernist perception therefore, itihaśa may be embedded in the living memory of people but it is veritably different from ‘the modern enterprise of history’. This being so because it is not infused with critical and autonomous spirit of evidence, which may turn vulnerable and not be able to withstand critical verification. In contrast, historical evidence is believed to be radically independent of legends.

4. The test case of discord between popular opinion and the modernists is on the question whether the Rāmāyaṇa is earlier than the Mahābhārata or is it the other way round. In contravention of popular belief, modern historians take the Mahābhārata to be older. M. Winternitz, *A History of Indian Literature: Introduction, Veda, National Epics, Puranas and Tantras*, Vol. I Section II, Calcutta, University of Calcutta, 1978, p. 416, first raised the dating issue. Kosambi, op. cit., justified it from the perspective of the Marxist theory of history and B.B. Lal attempted to legitimize the same on the basis of archeological research.


6. Such invariance can be defined in modal terms as—“necessary unity of
the ‘historically significant’ with the ‘contemporaneously significant’ but disunity of any particular ‘contemporaneously significant’ with some possible ‘historically significant’.” This entails the existence of the ‘contemporaneously significant’ without explicitly discerned roots in the ‘historically significant’. For, the present is existentially independent of the past.

7. The empirical aspect is well founded in so far as scientific methodologies are rigorously applicable to material objects of history as is the case in archaeology, numismatics and palaeontology.


9. Dynamis versus kinesis has been a contentious philosophical issue in the Greco-European thought right from the antiquity of Greek times. In nineteenth century Europe, the materialist versus idealist outlook in history overshadowed it. However, there can be an idealist dynamical outlook like that of Hegel or there can be a materialist static/kinetic outlook like that of mechanist determinists. Modern historical analogues of the dynamis versus kinesis can be contrasted as one inclined towards history of ‘having’ and other inclined towards history of ‘being’, respectively.


13. This quote is my rendering of the project of history implicit in Govind Chandra Pande, Bhartiya Samaj: Tattvik aur Aitihasik Vivechan, (in Hindi), New Delhi, National Publishing House, 1994.


15. The invariance of deferred unity can be defined in modal terms as — “necessary unity of seed with fruit but disunity of every evident fruit with some possible seed.” This entails existence of accidental fruits without known seeds. In other words, this entails evident present that is historically indeterminate; this entails realm of happenings that are not entailed in
seed but on which effort for fruition of seed is impressed. The deferred
unity necessitates temporal spread between seed and fruit; it necessitates
invasion of rest of the world in the carrier of seed.

16. Ontological sameness is in terms of same stuff being ultimate constituent
elements of both seed and fruit. Ontological identity does not mean identity
of the state or mode of reality. The same stuff can undergo change if the
reality of structural and modal novelty is accepted. This novelty is
responsible for evolution. In fact, two opposed causal doctrines,
*sakāryavāda* (old reality comes into being anew) of Sāṃkhyā and
*ārambhavāda* (fundamentally new reality, such as that of a 'whole', can
come into being) of Vaiśeṣika, are both evolutionary.

17. Vishwambhar Sharan Pathak, *Ancient Historians of India*, Gorakhpur,
Purva Prakashan, 1984, in a pioneering work, has historically and
historiographically analysed classical Indian accounts of the past in terms
of the universal structure of narrative.

18. Dhanañjaya, *Dasarupakam with Dhanika’s Commentary*, Ed. F.E. Hall,

19. It is yet to be seen if the same structure obtains in later Indian historical
writing like that of Kalhana’s *Rajatarangini*. Such an inquiry is interesting
because Kalhana outlines the task of history as *bhūtārha kathana*
narration of the objects of past), which on face value sounds very close to
history rather than *itihaśa*.

20. For instance, story of Ekalavya is of that kind. His teacher asked him to
offer his thumb as price for learning archery, fully aware that this would
disable his skill forever. This action, done to blatantly favor another pupil
Arjuna, is pregnant with a seed of injustice that is not resolved or brought
to fruition within the *Mahābhārata*.

21. In contrast to this structure of quest for contentment, tragedy is a narrative
form where conclusion is not a resolution but a moral dilemma. Tragedy
ends with a locking of two facets, both of them being right and morally
justified, even then one has to suffer condemnation and the other endurance.
The Greek tradition developed this form, which was resurrected during
European enlightenment. In the Indian tradition there is a notable absence
of the tragic form of narrative; instead the contentment form of narrative is
extensively explored.

22. However, the way the world comes forth is rather tangential to the seed as can be
seen in various strands of *itihaśa* literature. A surprise turn of events occurs when
the seed pushes itself for being tested in the world for fruition. It is through the
width of tangential events that inching ahead may occur with a hope of resolution.
Even mystery is sustained regarding whether the seed will ever reach fruition or
resolution. Off the track events may overtake; natural calamities or an unfortunate
twist in fate may occur. Events that clinch resolution are required to bring in a
closure to the discord-resolution passage. Otherwise, the deferment between seed
and fruition will become perpetual.
23. Karl Popper, 1944, The Poverty of Historicism, London, Routledge, (2nd Edition), 1961, had singled out the theories of Plato, Hegel, Marx and Freud precisely on this ground. Their unscientific nature he had traced to paradigmatic deep-seated immunity from eliminative reason or unfalsifiability. A propagandist jump from seed to fruition is unfalsifiable and over-justified if there is no occasion, that too by design, for it to be soiled with the real world that incessantly infuses susceptibility to eliminative reason. Karl Popper, The Open Society and Its Enemies, 2 Vols., London, Routledge, 1945, had generalized this feature as a basic architecture of a totalitarian political outlook.

24. Analysis of the state of dukkha nivṛtti varies from one darśana to another. It is important to notice that there is basic disputation regarding the nature of end in Indian philosophical thinking. In characterization of beginning-less-ness also there are differences but no disputation as such.

25. Seeding a problem (or resolve) and working out a solution seems to be a universal structure elsewhere too in numerous prayojana śāstra-s (sciences) and pariśkāra śāstra-s (philosophies). Each of them begins by articulating purpose (uddēśa) to overcome the specified domain of dukkha, nivṛtti from which is worked out using eliminative reason (tarka). The passage from the declaration of uddēśa (purpose) to the nirṇaya (conclusion), is marked by stitching tattva with the help of all kinds of pariśkāra (examination). In contrast to these śāstra-s, itihāsa literature seems to stitch together the episodes, which it shares with kāvyā (poetics). Itihāsa differs from kāvyā in its claim to be historically authentic if not historically actual and which is not entirely imaginary.

26. In Bhāskarācārya’s Bijaganita (lit., mathematics of seed), the central imagery is that of a mathematical ‘variable’ as seed (biha) and mathematical ‘solution’ as fruit (phala). This text specializes in mathematics using variables, where a solution to the problem is hammered out by determining the value of the variable. Given a mathematical problem – the variable or biha is formulated from the problem. Then, the variable is planted (bindu) with some effort (prayatna) in the ksetra or domain of numbers to get equations. Various known and secure mathematical operations are then brought in (patrikā) with the hope of determining the end (prāpti). The sequence of mathematical operations is thus brought to a situation where a clinching step (prakari) with certainty of solution is undertaken (niyatāpit), and a final solution is achieved by getting the value of the variable and applying it to solve (phalāgama) the problem.

27. Idealist philosophers of history do not attach any fundamental significance to indexical objects at all. For instance, Collingwood, op. cit., p. 305, even maintains – “Historical knowledge has for its proper object thought: Not things thought about, but the act of thinking itself.”

28. In textual interpretation, there is some degree of spatio-temporal discrimination involved with respect to questions regarding dating.
29. It is possible to have a genotype and phenotype evolutionary story of cats that does not refer to the mind of cat at all. It is also possible to have a history of the domestication of cats on the basis of cat human interaction. It is not possible to have a vital history of cats.

30. In the Vaiśeṣika tradition, the ‘whole’ is technically defined as the ‘last of the part-full’ or antaḥ avayavī. It is significant that entire universe is not a ‘whole’ that acts on its own. Otherwise, a summary of all actions will be one action and significant action will be just that one action at a moment.

31. In Vaiśeṣika tradition, the doctrine that ‘whole is more than its parts’ makes possible such a summation of actions of parts into significant action.


33. The phenomena of coalescing and partitioning of verbs was used by Bhartrhari to build a strong argument for śabda brahma whose vivarta or emanation a language is.

34. Arthavāda is a Māṁśā doctrine that summarizes ‘linguistic fecundity’ and ‘fracturing of action’ into wholesome ‘deeds’.

35. There can be a counter-argument, pointing towards circularity, that even historical personage made these choices and if a historian has to study history of such choices the question of historical significance gets invoked through hindsight. Thus, the distinction cannot be rigorously maintained. The way out of this paradox is by segregating failure or success of the operation of third reduction. History of ‘failure in historical personage’ is possible if in historian there obtains success in the third reduction.
Sānātana dharma literally means eternal law, principle or norm. But in order to understand the concept of Sānātana dharma, as it is used in our cultural heritage, it is important that we first have a working knowledge of what dharma stands for. The word dharma is not easily translated into the English language. Dharma has been used in different contexts to mean different things, but it is usually understood as that principle or law which sustains, supports or maintains (dhāraya)1 individuals as well as the social order, and when applied beyond the context of society to a broader universal context, it would mean that law which sustains or maintains the world as a whole, the universe itself. It may mean a supporting principle that is inherent in things themselves; it may also denote that principle which needs to be followed for the sustenance of the individual and of society. Radhakrishnan in his Religion and Society talks of dharma as “the norm which sustains the universe, the principle of a thing by virtue of which it is what it is.” In the Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad2, we find dharma being identified with satya or truth and being extolled as the most powerful of all, stronger than even the ruling class. It is possible for a man who is righteous to vanquish one who is physically or otherwise strong, and therefore there is nothing greater than dharma.3

Ṛta of the Rgveda, as a matter of fact, is an antecedent of dharma, where it finds a more varied application, in the context of the universe, society as well as the life of individuals. The Vedic concept of Ṛta implies a cosmic order in the universe which cannot be superseded or undermined by any one, not even by gods, for they themselves are worshipped in the Vedas as the protectors or upholders of this principle4. Ṛta is supposed to govern the entire universe as a universal cosmic principle vouching for an invisible moral order also. Like
the Rgvedic rta, dharma too is supposed to have a supreme and an invisible authority in the context of human life and existence.

In our tradition, however, dharma has been practically identified with the varṇāśrama dharma, or the duties assigned to men in accordance with their particular class (varṇa) and station (āśrama) of life. Norms for people belonging to different classes, for example, Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya, and Śūdra, and also belonging to different stations of life such as Brahmacarya (student life), Gārhasthya (family life), Vānaprastha (life of retirement) and Sannyāsa (life of renunciation), are usually supposed to be fixed and they are not to be transgressed, if the social order is to be maintained. It is also seen as possessing a larger significance in view of the fact that it is supposed to sustain the individual in his spiritual progress towards perfection as also the society on the whole. Here also the maintenance or the sustenance (dhāraṇā) of a social order and also of the individual is fundamental to the concept of dharma. Dharma ensures worldly prosperity and also mokṣa (yatōbhuddaya-niḥśreyasa siddhi).

There is also another usage, according to which dharma refers to certain customs, for example those of a class (kula dharma), those of a particular place (desa dharma), rules of a particular period of time (yuga dharma), even certain provisions for deviation from normal rules at the critical time of adversity (āpad dharma), and so on. Even here dharma as that which sustains (dhāraṇā) governs the usage of dharma. Dhāraṇā, maintenance, or sustenance is thus the key-idea centering which the concept of dharma developed in our cultural heritage.

The question that usually arises in the context of varṇāśrama dharma is whether varṇa is to be determined by birth or by guṇa (quality) and karma (action)? The Bhagavad Gītā speaks of four varṇas (classes) determined by guṇa and karma, no doubt, but how does one come to have the guṇa and karma which determine his varṇa? Although there is no definite mention of birth in this connection, it cannot escape our notice that there is a sort of immutability involved in the concept of varṇa in the Bhagavad Gītā. The Gītā speaks of svadharma (duty that is intrinsic to one) which is immutable and the idea is that no one should try to transgress the limits of his svadharma which is intimately connected with his svabhāva (intrinsic nature). Sva dharmas and svabhāva could, however, be seen to have a more dynamic base, in so far as they are connected with the changing guṇas and karma, and not with birth.
The point is more or less controversial, to say the least, and moreover, involves the ticklish question of justice also.

Here I would take for examination another important aspect to be considered in connection with dharma, namely what Śītā would designate as sādhu dharma, s dharma that respects the dignity of others as much as it respects one’s own. Mark her words, in Vālmīki Rāmāyana, Sundara Kānda, “yatā tava tathānyeṣāṁ (‘as in your case, so in the case of others’)”, while giving advice to Rāvaṇa regarding protection of women in general, not only of one’s own clan or community, “Sādhu dharmam eva kṣasva sādhu sādhuvratam cara, Yathā tava tathānyeṣāṁ rakṣyā dārā niśācera”. It is based on the principle of universality in application. This was the universally applicable ethical principle advocated by Śītā as against the Rākṣasa dharma (group morality) proposed by the powerful king of Lanka, Rāvaṇa,” “svadharmo rakṣasām bhīru sarvadaiva na saṃśayoḥ, gamanāṇaḥ vā paraśtriṇāṁ haranāṁ sampramathya vā”.3

Justice can be ensured if an equal treatment is meted out to people irrespective of whether they belong to us or they do not so belong. The concept of fairness, according to Rawls,6 is fundamental to justice. And the idea of fairness is inherent in the notion of sādhu dharma (ideal principle) as envisaged in the Vālmīki Rāmāyana and propagated in the form of Śītā’s advice to Rāvaṇa.

The sustenance value of dharma, according to me, though undoubtedly important, is not enough. Moreover, under certain circumstances, it may not be conducive to justice. Justice should not be sacrificed in the name of dharma; rather dharma should facilitate the implementation of justice in society. To me it appears that varṇa dharma can be an example of sādhu dharma if and only if the varṇa vyavasthā (class principle) is determined by guṇa and karma alone, as explicitly mentioned in the Bhagavad Gītā, not by birth. Guṇa and karma are not entirely determined by birth and heredity, after all; environment as well as personal efforts and aspirations of the individual have a significant role to play in this regard. And what is more, guṇa and karma are not fixed once and for all. But at the same time, it cannot be denied that strict smṛti laws pervaded the entire system of our social life throughout, with heredity as the determinant factor, while making room for undoubted departures and exceptions here and there, of course.7

It should appear to be somewhat revolutionary, therefore under such circumstances, to favour what I would call a dynamic varṇa vyavasthā, which would do justice to different sections at different
times according to their needs and deserts, and which could be regarded as *dharma* sustaining society on the principles of justice. *Dharma*, in this sense, would be dynamic, not static or fixed once and for all by birth. However, we have to admit at the same time that though it would be ideal to move away from the static *varṇa* *vyavasthā* that degenerates into reprehensible practices in a society under circumstances congenial for such a development, it is difficult, if not impossible, to keep the model of a dynamic *varṇa* *vyavasthā* intact as the *dharma* in practice for long, given the selfish and the monopolizing tendencies of individuals to appropriate the best for themselves, which may certainly not be on the basis of *guna* and *karma*. Society on the whole may in such a case need surgical treatment, so to say, at the hands of a great spiritual leader of the stature of Lord Kṛṣṇa who had not only to pin point the degeneration in *dharma*, but had also to point out in the *Bhagavad Gītā* that such degeneration of *dharma* or loss of balance is likely to occur not only once but also from time to time, when he would need to come again and again to set things on the track of *dharma*: “Yaddā yaddā hi dharmasya gāṇirbhavati Bhārata”, etc.

Another significant feature to be noted in the Indian context is that though *jāti dharmā* (duty of the class) is considered invincible in its own sphere, it is never regarded as the *parama dharmā*, the highest or the best duty/principle for everyone and under all possible circumstance. *Dharma* with all its rigidity, has never completely transcended the contingencies of place, time, and the nature of the particular agent in so far as its practical application is concerned; this is also another aspect of *dharma*, which cannot be entirely overlooked or underestimated. Stories from the *Mahābhārata* and other ancient Indian literature bear testimony to this.

If *jāti dharmā* is not the *parama dharmā*, the highest or the best, what then would constitute the *parama dharmā* in the Indian context? The highest, or the best model of conduct in the Indian tradition is expected from a *vidvān* in the sense of a *jīnā* (a wise man) or a *jīvannuṅkta* (the liberated person) who, though embodied, does not have any selfish desire and is engaged in activities out of a spontaneous overflow of the altruistic tendency*Jaṅgha dharmā* does not apply in the fourth or the last stage, i.e. the *sannyāsā dāśrama*, of course, and the same is true of a *bhākta* (devotee), as also a *yogī*. In different contexts, either *bhakti* (devotion) or *yoga* (meditation) could be extolled as the *parama dharmā*, as the case may be. The characteristics that are attributed to a true devotee, *jīnā* or a *yogī*
Ta, Dharma, and Sanātana Dharma

are more or less the same, where transcendence of some sort or the other is highlighted both in the personality and the conduct of these models of humanity. Such persons, being guṇāṭīta, transcend the three guṇas, are sthitadhi or sthitaprajña (men of balanced attitude and a tranquil mind) and are more or less samadarśī or samabuddhi (men with an impartial eye or mind) transcending the usual opposition and conflicts of duality such as pleasure and pain, gain and loss, good and evil, friendliness and enmity, and the like.\(^\text{11}\) In a sense, the opposition between what is termed as dharma and adharma in the narrow sense is transcended at this highest stage of human development. Here man is supposed to be free from the dichotomy, the opposites of our narrow conceptions of dharma and adharma.\(^\text{12}\)

This is the manifestation of what I would call a unique culture of transcendence in our heritage.

Now coming to sanātana dharma or eternal, everlasting, law, we find that Hinduism is called sanātana dharma in our tradition. The expression which is found in the literature of traditional Hinduism refers to the unfailing, unshakable laws, those rules or norms, which have always been valid and are accepted in tradition. In the Mahābhārata, the words, “eṣa dharmaḥ sanātanaḥ” are used for sanctioning some social or religious norms as obligatory. In the Dhammapada, the well known Buddhist text, we find the expression “eṣa dhammo sanantano”, e.g. – “Nahi berena berāṇi samantidha kudacanāṃ, aberena ca sammanti eṣa dhammo sanantano” (“It is an eternal principle that enmity is not pacified through enmity, or friendliness”). Manu speaks of the traditional norms and customs of the countries, castes, and families, which have been firmly established (deśa dharmāṁ jātidharmāṁ kuladharmāṁ śca śāsvatān) and also uses the expression to point to the particular norms for example, those for the king or the warrior. A code of war called dharmayuddha is also given by Manu.

The laws or norms may be modified from time to time according to the needs of society, perhaps, but the context of dharma in its essence seems to remain the same. That is how dharma is supposed to be sanātana or everlasting with something compelling about it. Dharma is the only friend, says Manu, that accompanies one even in death; all the rest perishes with the body. In spite of differences in respect of special dharmas, Manu speaks of sāmānya dharmas, in which irrespective of caste or station, five virtues constitute common dharmas for all, ahimsā, satya, asteya, etc.\(^\text{13}\)

In case of sanātana dharma, the universality and the unshakable
characteristics are most important. Take the case of a simple dictum, e.g. in Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa. Sundara Kāṇḍa, where it is pointed out that doing good to a person in exchange of some good done to one self by him is a firmly established norm (Kṛte ca pratikartavyamesa dharmah sanātanaḥ).14 These words are uttered by Māmaka before Hanumān when the former, as a token of gratitude, invites the latter to take rest on his peak. Now it is not only an established norm that one ought to pay one’s gratitude in return for the good done to him by someone else but there is also the implication here that it is a universal, unshakable and an unfailing norm to be followed by one and all. There is something compelling and everlasting about this principle or norm which ought to be followed by one and all irrespective of their specific commitments. Sanātana dharma thus refers to some such eternal and universal norm. When the Rākṣasa Virāḍha, however, instructs Rāma to throw his body inside a huge pit because it is the sanātana dharma that the dead bodies of Rākṣasas are disposed of in this manner, here sanātana dharma refers to something that is an established practice or custom, something merely traditional. “Avaṭe cāpi mām Rāma niksipyu kuśāl vrama, Rakṣasāṁ gatasattvānāmeṣa dharmah sanātanaḥ.”15 It is important that both these aspects should be highlighted in the context of sanātana dharma, namely, its eternal and universal nature as well as its status as a well-established traditional norm, both of which aspects are found in the traditional literature. When the Bhagavad Gītā speaks of “kuladharmah sanātanah” or when Arjuna expresses his anxiety over the possible destruction of the established customs of caste and family16 there is evidently an emphasis on the traditional values of a particular society or clan. These established traditional values are binding of course but they can be modified according to circumstances; during the time of āpad dharma (the rule for the critical hour), when for example, jāti dharma or caste duties could undergo modification. But when Kṛṣṇa is regarded as “Saśvata dharma goptā”, he is to be regarded not merely as “a protector of the established norms”, as Wilhelm Halbfass17 would call Him but the implication is that Kṛṣṇa is the protector of dharma which is universal and eternal, something that is binding for one and all.

When Hinduism as the sanātana dharma which literally means eternal religion in this particular context, has to be distinguished from other varieties of religion, we have to consider the following reasons. First of all, it is significant that Hinduism cannot be traced to any propounder or originator and therefore it cannot be traced
back to any specific date in the hoary past from which its tradition has come down to us. Even if it has undergone so many modifications during its development, at the same time it continues to be the same Hindu way of life governed by dharma, the universal rules or norms for which it has been known through the ages. This is one of the reasons why it is called sanātana dharma. It has been more or less identified with Vedic religion in this context based on the Vedic revelation, supposed to be infallible. “Vedākhilo dharmanālaṃ” — this is fundamental to our tradition of sanātana dharma.

The Vedas have the status of the revealed text and that is why they are regarded as śruti, while other literatures like the Bhagavad Gītā, Apastamba’s Dharma sūtra, Manu smṛti, Kapila smṛti, etc., although considered quite important in the tradition, have got a secondary status in comparison with śruti texts and are regarded as smṛti or tradition depending on memory. The smṛtis, as the work of human authors dependent on human memory, cannot be infallible. Śaṅkarācārya is quite clear on this issue, as is evident from his commentary on the Brahma-sūtra, 2.1.1., “Śmṛtyanavakāśa doṣa prasaṅga iti cet nānyasmṛtyanavakāśa doṣaprasaṅga”. Here Śaṅkara explicitly points out that “the authoritativeness of the Veda with regard to the matters stated by it is independent and direct, just as the light of the sun is the direct means of our knowledge of form and colour”, (“Vedasya hi nirapekṣaṁ svārīte prāmāṇyam Reveriva rūpaviṣaye”). As far as the smṛtis are concerned, only those smṛtis which follow śruti are to be considered as authoritative, while all others are to be disregarded, says Śaṅkara, “Śrutiṃsusārinyah smṛtyayah prāmāṇyaḥ, anapekṣyā itarāḥ”. This is very much in keeping with the tradition of Mīmāṃsā,18 where Mīmāṃsā Sūtra, 1.3.3., states, “Virodhe tvaapekṣaṁ syādasti hyanumānem”.

("Where there is contradiction between śruti and smṛti, smṛti is to be disregarded: where there is no contradiction smṛti is to be recognised, as there is inference in that case of smṛti being founded on śruti.")

But why exactly are these revealed texts, śruti as they are called, of paramount importance at all? Ācārya Śaṅkara and others have ascribed their infallibility to the fact that either they are not known to be created by any human being, they are apauruṣeya and eternal, or they owe their origin to an omniscient Being, i.e. God, and so on.

Bāhrtrāhārī points out that the different branches of learning which educate mankind have originated from the Vedas. “Vidhātustasya lokānāṃ angopānganiṣṭah, vidyābhedāḥ pratīṣṭante jñānasamskāraheatvāḥ.”19 According to the great commentator
Sāyaṇācārya, from the Vedas we learn of the extraordinary ways by which we can achieve our good and eradicate the evil: “Iṣṭapṛāptiṇāḥṣaṇaparīḥājayorakṣikāṁ uṣṭayaṁ yo vedaṁ ati sa Vedaḥ”. (That which cannot be known either through pratyakṣa (perception) or through anumāṇa (inference), that reality can be known only through the Vedas), “Pratyakṣenānumanīḥ vā yastūpāyo na budhyate, Enaṁ vidamī vedena tasmād Vedasya vedatā” (as quoted by Sāyaṇā). According to Manu, the Vedas are like the eyes eternal through which everything can be seen or known, (“Pitrdevamānuṣyāṇāṁ Vedaścaksuḥ sanātanaṁ, aṣaṅgaṁ cāprameyamca Vedaśāstramitiṣṭhīṁ”).

The Veda, according to Halbfass,

contains a great variety of form of expression and instructions. It documents the thought of many centuries, and reflects fundamental changes in orientation. But, in a sense, it is this internal multiplicity and variety itself, this challenging and suggestive chaos, that accounts for the significance of the Veda in Hindu philosophy. It provides an elusive and ambiguous guidance, an open, yet authoritative framework, with suggestive hermeneutic patterns and precedents and inherent appeals to human reflexivity.²⁰

Though I have little difficulty in broadly agreeing with what Halbfass says about the Vedic authority, it is not clear to me why he talks of “chaos” and “elusive and ambiguous guidance” in the context of Vedic literature. The Vedas certainly do not deserve such downright condemnation, at least no more than any other revealed text or world-literature for that matter. Such derogatory terms could be applied as a matter of fact to any richly suggestive literature, so long as we are inclined to find fault with the same. The real cause of the attraction of the Vedas, according to me, consists in its antiquity along with its highly suggestive character, rather than its chaotic or ambiguous character. Yāska has talked of several interpretations of the Vedas. The different interpretations are possible because of this highly suggestive character of the Vedic literature which has come down to us in different phases from the most ancient times. We do not know about any author of this vast literature and it is also not possible on our part to assume that the Veda owes its origin to a particular sage or seer. The Vedas are rather revelations manifesting themselves for the benefit of entire mankind from the earliest times. revelations that were received by the earliest receptive spirit of man. That is why the Vedas stand on a separate footing, so to say. It is undoubtedly most significant that when we speculate about the origin of the Veda, we cannot ascribe its origin to any particular man, any particular rṣi.
The ṛṣi only is the receptacle of the revelation. It is this, that endows the Vedas with a unique and a sort of primeval attraction in the mind of man. When we attempt to fix the date of the Rgveda, we find a great deal of controversy amongst the Eastern and the Western scholars. However, there is no doubt that it is "the oldest literary monument of the Indo-European languages" which speaks of its antiquity. This antiquity along with the highly suggestive literature developing through different phases of Karmakanda, Jñānakanda, etc., on which a variety of interpretations could be put, has made it permanently attractive to the human mind, and its unique position as a revealed text is also ensured by these very characteristics.

It must be admitted however that scholars like Halbfass have made a genuine attempt at understanding and assessing the exact significance of the Vedic authority in the framework of what is known as the Vedic religion, although his remark, as already pointed out, has been somewhat off the mark and careless in certain respects. The remarks of scholars such as Ariel Glucklich, are by comparison astonishingly naïve and deliberately offensive, I should say, when seen in the framework of fresh attempts made by such scholars to reaffirm the henotheistic or the kathenothestic thesis of Max Muller, while ignoring altogether the essence of the Vedic religion namely, the revelation of one ultimate reality assuming different names and forms (Ekāṁ sad viprā bahudhā vadanti), a point that has been frequently highlighted by scholars of Vedic culture like G.C. Pande. It is indeed ridiculous when Glucklich speaks of "the worship of a series of gods as the supreme god," as "the theological equivalent of serial monogamy" with obnoxious implications such as "I love you, Indra/baby, and have never loved any other god/woman", "I love you, Visnu/baby, and have never loved any other god/woman". Could there be a greater travesty of truth! I am reminded of a "celebrated passage" from Bradley's The Principles of Logic to which T.S. Eliot refers in admiration, where Bradley is attacking in his inimitable style the theory of association of ideas according to Bain. Here also, adopting the imagery of Bradely, I would say that Glucklich seems to have given himself up most uncritically, like a bewildered infant, to the influence of the goddess Primitive Credulity who whispers into his ears, "I love you Visnu" is inextricably associated with "I love you, baby, and have never loved another woman." I wonder if it may not be advisable for Glucklich to begin to suspect the wholesomeness of that influence instead of accepting the goddess in question as "the mistress of his life", and whether he should not
"wake up indignant at the kindly fraud" by which the goddess has deceived him right and left.

Some of those who would contrast the universality of Hinduism, as sanātana dharma, with other varieties of world religions claim that with all its variations Hinduism carries within its bosom, the essence and the spirit of the diversities of world religions and therefore it is itself an eternal religion. "Hinduism alone was supposed to provide the framework for fulfilling the universal potential inherent in the various religions" and therefore in this context the expression sanātana dharma has remained "a concept of self-assertion".²⁵ Swami Vivekananda and Radhakrishnan have emphasized these universal elements in Hinduism vis a vis other world religions. Radhakrishnan, for example, maintains that "the Vedānta is not a religion, but religion itself in its most universal and deepest significance".²⁶ Swami Vivekananda, in a speech delivered in India, has asserted.

Ours is the universal religion. It is inclusive enough, it is broad enough to include all the ideas. All the ideas of religion that already exist in the world can be immediately included, and we can patiently wait for all the ideas that are to come in the future to be taken in the same fashion, embraced in the infinite arms of the religion of the Vedānta.

These all-pervasive and universal characteristics of Hinduism are emphasized vis a vis other world religions when it is called the sanātana dharma or the perennial, eternal religion. Halbfass has very ably brought out the various implications of this idea by clearly pointing out that "Hinduism as the sanātana dharma is not a religion among religions; it is said to be the "eternal religion", the basis and ingredient of all religions, a kind of "meta religion", a structure potentially ready to comprise and reconcile within itself all the religions of the world just as it contains and reconciles the so-called Hindu sects, such as Śaivism or Vaiṣṇavism and their subordinate "sectarian formations".²⁷ It may be in a certain sense meaningful to emphasize those universalistic elements in the development of Hinduism that have survived through the ages and have either found their replica, so to say, in other religions or have been developed in other world religions independently through their seers. But this cannot justify the attitude of some sanātanis (followers of Hinduism as the eternal religion), as they are called, who consider every other form of religion as somewhat inferior with the designation of mleccha dharma (religion of the aliens, the mlechhas), as Halbfass would tell us.²⁸ Expression
of superior airs by such “followers of the eternal religion”, sanātani or sanātana dharma-valamvins, as they are called, might have had some practical necessity perhaps in the past, in the historical context, but it is not true of any genuine form of Hinduism as sanātana dharma which emphasizes the universalistic and eternal principles without any superiority complex whatsoever. The following observations made in the context of Gandhi and sanātana dharma are quite illuminating in this connection. Zaehner says:

Gandhi, “may have been and indeed was influenced by all kinds of non-Hindu ideas, but he was deeply rooted in, and drew his strength from, the sanātana dharma of his native land, not the dharma of the law-book and Brāhmans, but the dharma that rests on ahimsā, truth, renunciation, passionlessness, and an equal love for all God’s creatures, the dharma of Yuddhiṣṭhira, the king of Righteousness and Truth.”

Hinduism as sanātana dharma, the universalistic perennial religion, can be meaningful, from a genuine Hindu point of view, only within a context where the entire world is taken to be one family (“Vasudeva kutumbakam”, ‘yatya viśva eva kṣatprakaraṇaḥ’). The fundamental truth here is supposed to have been realized by the Vedic seer who does not point to any superiority or inferiority of any particular group or community but only makes a frank and a candid acknowledgment of the fact that the same truth or reality is called by different names, by the different sages (“Ekam sad viprā bahudhā vadanti”).

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The Mahābhārata, “Dhāraṇād dharmamityāh dharmo dhārayai prajāh”.
3. Tulsidas, Rāmacarit Mānas, Yuddha kāṇḍa, “Sakhā dharmamaya asa rathā jāke, Jitana kahun na kauhun ripu ake”.
4. Rgveda, 1.18, “Gopānṛṣaya dadivim”.
5. Vālmiki Rāmāyana, Sundara Kāṇḍa, 20.5 and also 21.7.
7. R.K. Pruthi and R. Devi, History of Indian Culture, Jaipur, 2000, p. 33, where reference is given to some departures from the strict smṛti law in the
background of a general hereditary system prevailing in society on the whole: “We may quote by way of evidence the high authority of Hiuen Tsang, himself an intelligent foreigner belonging to a different faith, who not only refers to the four hereditary castes of Indian society together with their respective occupation, but adds that the members of a caste group marry within the caste. Nevertheless there were in the Gupta Age as in earlier times undoubted departures from the strict \textit{smrti} law”.

8. Acārya Śankara, \textit{Viveka Cudāmaṇi}, ‘\textit{Śantā mahānto nivāsanti santō vasaṇāvallokeṇātām carantāḥ}’ etc.

9. Srimad Bhāgavata, “\textit{Sa vai punāśām para dharma yato bhaktarādhokṣāje}”.


11. \textit{Ibid.}, “\textit{Suḥṛtritrāryudāśīno madhyastha dve.yābandhaṇu, sādhusvapi ca pāpeśu samabuddhirvīśiṣyate}”, and also “\textit{Suni caiva śvapāke ca panditāṁ samadarśinaḥ}”.

12. \textit{The Mahābhārata}, XII, 337. 40, “\textit{Tyaja dharmam adharmaśca ubhe satyāṁtye tyaja, ubhe satyāṁtye tyaktvā yena tyajasi tasyaẏa},” etc.

13. \textit{Manu Āyatra}, 10.63, “\textit{Ahiṁsā satyaṁsteyam śaucaṁśudriya nirgrahaḥ}” etc.


15. \textit{Ibid.}, Aranya Kānda, 4 22.

16. \textit{The Bhāgavatapurāṇa}, 1, “\textit{Uṣādyante jāśidharmā kuladharmāca śāśvataḥ.”}


18. Smṛti-prāmāṇya-adhyākṣara, śrutī-prābhāvyādhyākṣara etc. in the \textit{Mimāṁśā śūtras}, for Jaimini’s approach to \textit{Smṛti}.

19. Vākyapadīya. 1.10.


21. A.C. Macdonnell, \textit{A Vedic Reader}, Oxford University Press, 1951, \textit{Introduction}, p. vi. Cf. Dayakrishna, \textit{Bharatīya Darsana, Ek Nayi Drsti}, (in Hindi) Jaipur, 2000, p. 69, where he speaks of some older religious literatures of civilizations like those of Egypt and Mesopotamia but at the same time points out that, none of these being comparable to the Vedic treatise, the uniqueness of the Vedas (\textit{Veda kā api uṇāyata}) remains unaffected and unchallenged thereby.


It is now well-nigh affirmed that there is no dearth of creative skills and technological actions in the Vedic literature. A number of technologies relating to wood, leather, basketry, textile, lithic, ceramic and others were being practiced by the Vedic-Aryans quite deftly and with a high degree of workmanship. Very often, the technological feats of the age have been expressed by the different derivatives of the Sanskrit root takṣ, Greco-Roman technēs, Avestan tas, etc., meaning to fashion, fabricate etc., which sired the modern English term 'technology'. The allusions to root takṣ and its cognates in a number of Indo-European languages seem to provide us with the very substratum for the evolution of the later day technology.

Apparently, what we perceive of a technological function is a kind of manual action expressed through certain skills, innate in the person of a technician which gain significance by their physical outcome. In the process, whatever is apparent becomes so prominent that rarely do we think of the underlying ideas and concepts bringing into fruition the concerned technological act. Obsessed with the external expression of such an act we define the man in the parlance of early technologies as a ‘tool-maker’ or ‘homo faber’ because the evidence of his tool-making activities are found in abundance throughout the ages in the shape of different artifacts. While framing such kinds of definitions we hardly consider that behind every kind of technological action there is a preconceived idea, a notion, a concept, originating in the mind which propels the concerned action in a systematic and organized manner. However, for any technological act, to come to fruition, a correlation of the mind and physical act is a must and in the absence of any one of these, the technology is sure to remain a non-starter. This means that technologies are at first envisioned in the mind and then replicated into actions. In the ancient Indian tradition, this has aptly been expressed by Yāśka in his Nirukta (III.7) where he defines men as
matvā karmāṇi sīvyaṃti, 'those, who after thinking weave their actions.' Thus, thinking and action are the two interrelated characteristics of man in which thinking precedes human actions. Technology is, hence, an activity, which involves both mind and manual action, the latter being processed by the former.

Interestingly, in the Vedic literature and especially in the Rgveda, a creative or technological act is often assumed to be the outcome of an inherent mental or spiritual power referred to variously by the terms śacī, māyā and visṛ. An analysis of the contextual data relating to these terms makes the sense abundantly clear.

Śacī

The term śacī is mentioned many times in the Rgveda. It has rightly been interpreted by Śāyaṇa as prajñā i.e. knowledge or intelligence or mental faculty (śacī prajñānāmaitat, IV.20.9). Several kinds of creative skills and technical acts have been described as being inspired by śacī. In the Rgveda (IV.56.3), one of these acts is the creation of heaven and earth by Prajāpati evidently by the power of śacī. In the Rgveda (X.89.4), heaven and earth are assumed to have been fixed on two ends by the śacī of Indra as the wheels of a chariot are fixed by the axle:

Yo okṣeṇeva cakṛiyā śacībhī viśvaktastambha prthivīnāta dyām

Some of the marvellous acts of the Aśvins are alluded to as flourishing from this mental faculty. It is said that with these faculties they have enabled Parāvṛja to walk, the blind (Ṛjāśva) to see and the cripple Śrona to go and with the same they have set free the quail when a wolf seized it:

Yebhiḥ śacībhivṛṣaṇā paścāvṛjān prāṇḍhān śronān caṣṭasya eta ve kṛthoḥ
yābhivrvarūkān grastānmunicatam ṭābhiraśvinā gatam //
RV., I.112.8.

It is this faculty by which Aśvins have rendered the aged Cyavana young:

yuvaṃ cyavānamasvinā jaranantam punaryuvānāṃ cakrathuḥ śacībhīḥ
RV., I.117.13.

The wondrous acts of the Rbhus, the famous artificers also originate from śacī. In the Rgveda, IV.35.5, they have been accredited with making their parents young, fabricating the camasa, the drinking bowl of the gods, and shaping the two horses of Indra swifter than an arrow from a bow:
In another passage (III.60.2), all these feats have again been described along with the shaping of a cow from the leather of a dead one:

Yābhīḥ sacibhīcamasasan apiṁśata yayā dhiyā gāmariniita carmanah I
yena hari monasā nirataksata tena devatvabhavah samānasa II

Here, saci stands equated with dhiyā i.e. intelligence as being instrumental in the execution of this act. The creative abilities of the Rbhus find expressions differently in a number of other passages. The Ṛgveda (I.III.1) alludes, “The Rbhus possessed of skill in their work, constructed (for the Asvins) a well-built chariot; they framed the vigorous horses bearing Indra; they gave youthful existence to their parents; they gave to the calf its accompanying mother.” A number of passages (ṚV.,1.20.6; 110.5,161.2; 4; IV.33.5, 35.2; 3; 4; 5; 36.4.) depict their marvellous feat of turning a single camasa, the drinking bowl of the gods, into fourfold. Likewise, in several verses, they are referred to as fashioning riches (atakṣaṁtyabhavo rayim nah, ṚV., IV. 33.8; also, IV. 33.10; 11; 34.2; 5; 7; 10; 35.6; 8. etc.). They are also the givers of valiant progeny. In the Ṛgveda (X. 80.7), they are spoken of as fabricating praise for Agni and sacrifice for the sacrificer (adhvaramataṣṭa). In IV.33.7, they are accredited with making the fields fertile, leading forth the rivers, causing the plants sprung upon the waste and rendering waters spread over the low places:

ukṣetrāknyavanananyanta sindhun dhaśvātiṭhayanoṣadhirimnamāyah

Other things that they are sought to bestow include prosperity and wealth in cattle, horses and heroes and also vigour, nourishment, offspring and dexterity (ṚV., I.111.12). All these acts are the outcome of the inherent mental power of the Rbhus, often referred to as saci and dhī.

Māyā

Another term which, stands for innate creative energies and is equivalent in meaning to saci is māyā. Sayanā often grasps it as a synonym of saci and interprets it as a mental power or intelligence—saci māyā’ iti prajñā nāmasu pāthār. As a creative energy, it is found associated with a number of deities such as Agni, Aśvins, Varuṇa, Mitra, Vaśīr and Īndra. It is the energy by which Agni purifies all the worlds:
He is found investing the heavens, the waters and the clouds over the unbounded firmament by the energy of māyā. When invoked during the sacrifices, the immortal Agni graces the occasions at first so that he may direct the ceremonies by his māyā:

\[ \text{hotā devo amartyah purastādeti māyayā/} \]
\[ \text{vidāthāni pracodayan // RV., III.27.7.} \]

Asvins are also assumed to be possessed with this power, as they sunder apart the wickerwork for the liberation of the terrified (V.78.6). In some of the passages, māyā is described as a creative energy of Varuṇa, who, abiding in the mid-heaven has meted the firmament by the sun as if by a measure (RV.; V. 85.5). The running of water shedding rivers towards the oceans is also a wonderful act of Varuṇa (RV.; V.85.6), obviously impelled by his māyā. He is spoken of as encompassing the entire universe by such kinds of wondrous acts (RV.; VIII. 41.3). In some of the passages Varuṇa has been mentioned in the company of the deity Mitra. Both of them are spoken of as causing the variegated clouds in the sky (citrebhirabhrairupa tiṣṭhatho), sending down the rains and sustaining the sun (sūryamā dhattho) by their combined energies. The Ṛgveda (X.53.9) alludes to the fashioning of the drinking vessels of the gods by Tvaṣṭr, the divine artificer, and refers to the knowledge of his craft as māyā.

\[ \text{tvāṣṭrā māyā vedayatānapastamo bibhratpātrādeyapānāni śaṃtāmā} \]

Amongst all the Vedic deities, Indra is unique in the sense that he stands as the main repository of māyā. Several passages in the Ṛgveda refer to this energy of Indra in generating innumerable forms and causing destruction to his enemies. He is said to have fixed the mountains, directed the course of waters downwards, upheld the earth, the nurse of all creatures, and stayed the earth from falling:

\[ \text{sa prācīnanparvatāndṛmyadojasā dharācinamakrodapāmapah/} \]
\[ \text{adhāryatprthivim viṣvadhyāvasamaistabhānmāyayā dyāmanvasrasah //} \]
\[ \text{RV., II.17.5} \]

He has generated the sun, the dawn and the firmament:

\[ \text{ātśūryaṁ, janayandyānuśāsam,} \]
\[ \text{RV., I.32.4} \]

He has spread abroad upon the earth by his māyā the swollen Sindhu (RV., IV.30.12). Being capable of affecting the desired form, Indra
can manifest himself in any form:

\[ \textit{ni māyino mamire rūpamasmin.} \]

\textit{RV.}, III.38.7.

He is, therefore, called the omniform (\textit{pururūpa}, \textit{RV.}, VI.47.18) as every visible form is a prototype of Indra himself (\textit{rūpam rūpam pratirūpo babhūva}). The sense has been rendered beautifully in the \textit{Rgveda} (III.53.8) "Maghavāna becomes repeatedly manifest in various forms by employing māyā with respect to his own peculiar person." Māyā is rightly explained by Śāyaṇa as the potency to assume different forms (\textit{anekarūpagrahaṇa jāmarthya}) or as \textit{jñāna} i.e. intelligence. It is with this power that he strikes down his enemies such as Nāmuci (\textit{RV.},I.53.7), Ahi (\textit{RV.}, II.11.15; V.30.6), Vṛtrā (\textit{RV.}, II,11.9), Dasyu (\textit{RV.}, II,34.6), Yātudhāna (\textit{RV.}, VII.104.24) etc.

The concept of māyā as an innate principle of creativity, sketched in this earliest treatise of the Aryans is of considerable significance for in the highest philosophical gropings of the later days specially in the systems of Vedānta, the entire phenomenal existence is assumed to be springing forth from this generative principle.

\textit{Viṣṭi}

That there is a potent mysterious power, manifesting itself into creative skills of extraordinary importance is also evident from the root, \textit{viṣ} 'to be active' \textit{\&} its several derivatives \textit{viṣṭi}, \textit{viṣpi}, \textit{vēṣa}, \textit{vēṣiṇa}, \textit{vēṣi}, \textit{veṣiṇa}, etc. The term \textit{viṣṭi} occurs in the \textit{Rgveda} (I.20.4) in reference to the \textit{Ṛbhūs} who are said to have rejuvenated their parents through their \textit{viṣṭi}:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Yuvānā pitarā puṇah satyamantrā rūjāyavah /}
\textit{bhavo viṣṭyaṛkta //}
\end{quote}

Obviously, \textit{viṣṭi} stands here for a mysterious power transformed into an extraordinary creative skill. Veṅkaṭamādhava rightly interprets it as glyptic skill (\textit{tāṣya kaṃma}, Veṅkaṭamādhava on the \textit{RV.},I.20.4). It is noteworthy that there are a number of passages (I.20.4; II.108; 111.1; 161.3; 7; IV.33.3; 34.9; 35.5; 36.3) in the \textit{Rgveda} which describe among the uncommon acts of the \textit{Ṛbhūs} the glorious feat of rejuvenating the parents who are spoken to be old and infirm (\textit{sanajura}, \textit{RV.}, IV.36.3) and lying as decaying posts (\textit{yūpeva jaraṇā śayāṇā}, \textit{Rgveda}, IV.33.3.). A reference to the same further occurs in the \textit{Rgveda} (IV.33.2), wherein it has been expressed by the term \textit{vēṣaṇa}. Śāyaṇa, who erroneously expounds \textit{viṣṭi} in the earlier passage as \textit{vāḍpītyuktāḥ} ‘having pervaded’ equates \textit{vēṣaṇa}, i.e. the
rejuvenating of old and aged parents, with the acts of fashioning the camas (camasanirnāṇādikarmabhiḥ, Sāyana on the Rgveda, IV.33.2) Indirectly, like, viṣṭī, veṣanā=veṣanā also connotes an inherent power to create the objects.

To corroborate this meaning, we would refer to some other passages of the Rgveda. In I.92.3, it has been mentioned: arcanti nārīrapasona viṣṭibhiḥ samānena yojanena parāvatah- 'the Dawn damsels, as they engage in action illumine'5 the sky, the entire firmament, through their viṣṭī. The idea, which viṣṭī conveys in this picturesque account, is the wondrous act of the illumination of the sky and firmament, which resemble the colourful painting of floors and walls of a house (Skandasvāmi uses the term upalepana on the RV.,1.24). In other words, viṣṭī is used here in the specific sense of skill expressed through artistic actions6.

We come across the terms viviṣmah and viviṣṭah in some of the passages of the Rgveda. In VI.23.6 we read:

brahmāṇi hi ca kārṣṭe vardhanāni tāvatta indra maitibhiḥ viviṣmah-

'O Indra, you have composed the auspicious hymns so also we have created them through intellect'.

Here, the term viviṣmah encompasses the power to create the literary compositions comparable to those fashioned by Indra. The Rgveda (X.117.9) makes an allusion to viviṣṭah and avers that though both the hands are equal, they are not endowed with similar potency to work:

samau ciddhastau na samaṁ viviṣṭah

Evidently, it is the capability to act, perform, or work, which has been referred to by viviṣṭah.

It is to be noted that in comparison to ordinary creations, the different derivatives of the root viṣ signify a kind of mysterious or divine power converging itself into creative skills. This can be rendered clear by certain examples.

The Rbhus, who because of their glorious acts are compared to the priests named Vāghataḥ in the Rgveda (1.110-4), are spoken as:

viti śāṁ hita varṇāṇvina vāghato mṛtāṣaṁ santo anṛṣaṁvarṇāṇāsaṁ

'the priests through action speedily brought about the viṣṭā, although mortals, they obtained immortality'.

Here, viṣṭā stands for that mysterious power which enabled the Rbhus to fashion a drinking bowl (camasa) by joining together its four parts. Interestingly, it is by this mysteriously potent action that
the Rbhus who were ordinary mortals, obtained immortality. The sense becomes further clear from the *Rgveda* (III.60.3), where, as in the previous context, *vīṣṭī* occurs in association with *śamī*, another term denoting good actions. It has been stated that the sons of Sudhanvan, i.e. the Rbhus obtained immortality because of *vīṣṭī*:

\[ \text{saudhanvanōśo amṛatvāmerive vīṣṭī śamābhīḥ sukritāḥ suktroṣyāḥ} \]

In fact, there are several allusions in the *Rgveda* which explicitly describe that the Rbhus were common mortals but because of their marvellous creative feats they rose to the ranks of gods.

In the *Rgveda* (X.94.2), this mysterious power is assumed to be inherent in a grinding stone used in the ritual extracting of the juice from the Soma creeper. It is stated that the grinding stone of benign action obtained *vīṣṭī* inasmuch as it tasted the oblations before the priest:

\[ \text{vīṣṭī grāvānāḥ suktāḥ suktroṣyāḥ ātirūtirpiṣṭve haviradyānāśata} \]

Mysterious power manifesting itself into creative skills, as alluded to by the root *vīṣ*, and its derivatives, finds its culmination in the concept of Viṣṇu, a prominent deity of the Vedic pantheon. Derived from the root *vīṣ*, Viṣṇu literally means to perform action, to pervade and to enter. There is no doubt that in several passages, he emerges as a Creator – god. Most illustrative among them is:

\[ \text{vīṣṇuryoniḥ kalpayatu tvāṣṭrā rūpāṇi pinitatu,} \]

\[ Rū, X184.1 \]

‘Viṣṇu prepares the womb and Tvaṣṭr adorns the forms’.

In this context, both Viṣṇu (from the root *vīṣ*, ‘to be active’) and Tvaṣṭr (from the root *tvakṣa* which is similar to *taks*, ‘to fashion’) are mentioned in connection with the fashioning of the world. It is being assumed that creation of multifarious facets of the world is the product of the joint venture of Viṣṇu and Tvaṣṭr. In the process, the former performs the foundation work by preparing the womb, whereas the latter carves the superstructure by creating different forms.

That Viṣṇu is a prime creator of the world is evident enough from a short hymn of three stanzas in the tenth book of the *Rgveda* (X.15.3). It commences with an invocation to Viṣṇu to help the formation of the female womb as a breeding place for children. “May Viṣṇu form and mould the womb”, so opens the hymn. Other gods, Tvaṣṭr the artificer, Prajāpati the creator, and Dhanar the preserver are also invoked to play their specific roles in the entire process of
successful human procreation. Significantly, the entire corpus of the Vedic literature is replete with the parallels of embryology in reference to the manifestation of creative and technical skills.

From the foregoing analysis of the meanings of the terms śacī, māyā, and viṣṭi in the Rgveda, it is quite evident that in the earliest concept of technology, the works involving creativity or application of techniques were perceived as proceeding from a latent mysterious power inherent in the creator. These notions could not remain confined to the Rgvedic people alone; they left their lasting imprint on the Indian thought of the later times. The doctrine of māyā as elaborated in the philosophical systems of Vedānta or that of Viññāna in the Buddhist school of Viññānavāda has basically been built up on the edifice of these rudimentary ideas. Māyā in the Vedānta philosophy is not a human construction. It is prior to our intellect and independent of it. It is verily the generator of things and intellects, the immense potentiality of the whole world. Likewise, in the Viññānavāda, Viññāna or consciousness stands at the substratum of entire existence (sarvam buddhimayaṃ jagat). To it, matter is an idea and nothing more. Things are clusters of sensations. The objects of knowledge are either ideas actually imprinted on the sense, or those perceived by attending to passions and operations of the mind. External objects independent of consciousness are not intelligible.

It is not our objective to discuss here the soundness or unsoundness of the philosophical notions, which give primacy to a kind of unmanifest power or energy over its actualization through creative actions. All that we intend to state is that there existed an intellectual tradition right from the times of the Rgveda which conceived of all sorts of creations as emerging from a latent mysterious power, called variously as śacī, māyā, or viṣṭi. This acquires immense significance from the standpoint of technology, as a technician is assumed to accomplish an act by the potency of a mysterious and mental power inherent in his person. The notion made its lasting impact on the ancient Indian art tradition where an artist is viewed as an agent replicating the powers of Viṣvakarman, the divine repository of technical skills, through his meaningful actions.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

THREE ASSAMESE NOVELS
An Exploration of Identity and Difference

LALIT KUMAR BARUA

A critical elaboration on the theme of identity and difference with reference to the Assamese novel carries with it the presumption that it could be theoretically underpinned as well as empirically analysed. It would also entail a comparative analysis of a few contemporary Assamese novels, which are stylistically different and deal with different strata of social history. The novels thus discussed also deserve to be considered on the strength of their recognised artistic merit, each novel in its own way making a notable contribution to the development of the genre in Assamese. The power of the novel in these instances is derived from a sense of authenticity conveyed through the narrative and the novelists’ command over the sense of an entire topography and landscape while delving deeply into significant periods of social and cultural history with rare insight and creative clarity.

The paradigm of the Assamese novel in the earliest phase was the nineteenth century Bengali novel—the historical novel to begin with—which had its greatest exponent in Bankimchandra Chatterjee (1838-94) in Bengal. But after writing five historical novels under the inspiration of the Bankim novels, the Assamese novelist Rajani Kanta Bordoloi (1868-1939) carved out a different path for himself, though not in form but definitely in content.¹

Society in Bengal was by and large, differently structured with an upper crust of landed aristocracy and a dominant caste hierarchy. Thanks to the nineteenth century Bengal Renaissance, human relationships and social issues were insistently foregrounded specially in the spheres of literature. The ways in which characters and events evolved in Bankimchandra’s narratives was a definite step in the historical sequence of development from the medieval to modern in literature. But significantly, in respect of the Assamese novel, the socio-regional context became more relevant.
Rajani Kanta Bordoloi was the first important Assamese novelist. His forte too was the historical novel. He wrote five historical novels but in his sixth novel, *Miri Jiyari* (1894) the novelist describes, with extraordinary narrative skill, the specificity of the riverine landscape, traditional habitats and customs, in short the whole way of life integral to the life of a tribal community of the Brahmaputra valley. It focuses our attention or rather derives its power from a distinctive, strong and pervasive interrelationship built around the life of a community living close to nature. The narrative is traditional; it is about two young lovers and their unrequited love ending in a tragedy. The novel appealed to its early readers with its romantic theme and its exotic setting; but recent readings have added a new dimension to the theme in the light of its strong evocation of an 'ethnic' or tribal mode of living. This connection is a major preoccupation of the novelist -the external manifestation of it being the constant reference to a kind of symbolism in the narrative of tribal lore and legend. Both the intensity and the particularity of the theme become a strong fictional exploration of identity and difference in terms of historicity and ethnicity.

*Miri Jiyari* (literally, it means a Miri daughter), published in 1948, is unusually evocative of an eco-ethnic social landscape as a kind of scaffolding to a human drama depicting the passionate love of two young lovers, Panei, a Mishing girl and Jonki, a Mishing youth. The story is significantly enacted on the banks of the river Suvansiri, a tributary of the Brahmaputra, mythically and symbolically associated with the life of the Mishing community since time immemorial. The interweaving of the mythical in the human story also reveals its links with the oral tradition. The novelist at crucial points hints that the enacted story is representative of the life of the community and the narrated course of events could have taken place only within the Mishing society or the Mishing community. The bonding of the ethnic and the social, skillfully established in the story, is achieved at the very beginning. The story is outlined below.

Panei, the only daughter of Tamed and Nirima, spends her days in innocent fun and happiness in the company of Jonki, often swimming and rowing together on the river Suvansiri. They are in love. The lovers dream of their further life together. But a time comes, when Panei’s father decides to give her in marriage to another young man whose rich parents offer a handsome bride price, a traditional practice in the Mishing society. It is also a custom among the Mishings for the eligible young man to come and stay at his would-be in-
law’s house offering his service for two years prior to the marriage. As the eligible groom comes to stay in Panei’s parental home, Jonki is harassed and ill-treated and is forced to go to the neighbouring village of Ghunasuti to earn a living. The lovers meet there in secret, consummate their marriage and stay hiding in the forest; Tamed’s men chase Jonki there, beat him up severely and forcibly take Panei back to her home. A trial in a court ensues but Jonki is absolved of the charge of abducting Panei. She is given into the custody of her father. But Panei runs away from her home when she learns that her father plans to deliver her bound hand and feet, to the other young man. In the course of her desperate journey fleeing from the clutches of her father, she confronts hardship and much humiliation including an attempted molestation by a drunken young man who happens to be a Hindu and a non-tribal. Here the plot takes another turn: Jonki appeals to Tamed to return Panei to him; the parents at last touched by Jonki’s appeal and their daughter’s estrangement and suffering agree to her union with Jonki only if she could be rescued. Jonki and Panei are finally united but they fall into the hands of a marauding group of tribesmen from the hills who take them in captivity. Jonki and Panei somehow manage to communicate with each other while in captivity and one day Jonki escapes to the place where Panei is confined and they are about to run away from captivity. But their captors get hold of them and try them according to their primitive law. They are done to death in a most cruel manner, their bodies nailed together and thrown into the river. The grief-stricken parents discover their bodies on the shores of the Suvansiri.

Miri Jiyari is an archetypal story in the older mould. A strongly patriarchal father sacrificing his daughter’s happiness or even destroying her life has been a recurrent motif in folklore. There is also a love triangle present: Jonki is also sincerely loved by another young maiden, Dalimi, who however comes to know of the love between Panei and Jonki and resolves to help and bring about their union. The dramatic situation of their love and estrangement, their passion and the suffering are reinforced against the backdrop of the river and the landscape, which symbolize the flowering of their unselfish and innocent love as against the power and will of the collective community and the primitive law. What stands out here is the distinctiveness of the narrative; the sense of a distinct pattern of life in which men and the river are connected together to define an identity. Nature here provides a meaningful scaffolding to human relationships within a particular eco-cultural system.
The development of the regional novel and its multi-dimensional connection with social history can be seen in the difference between Miri Jiyari (1894) and Jivanar Batat (1944). It is significant that about half a century separates these two major novels in Assamese literature. Jivanar Batat received belated recognition as a novel of crucial historical or cultural significance in more recent times. It is yet to be translated into a major Indian or foreign language though it has come to be regarded as a classic, a great Indian novel of the twentieth century. Its author Birinchi Kumar Barua (1908-64) wrote this novel under the assumed name of Bina Barua. Besides being an outstanding novelist he was a historian of Assamese culture and an eminent folklorist who did some important pioneering work on both ancient and the folk streams of Assam’s history. It is not surprising that his most significant novel has often been regarded as being truly authentic representative of Assamese life and culture.

This particular view of the representative character of Jivanar Batat, recorded a year after the novel was first published, has since been elaborated on by other important critics while evaluating the Assamese tradition of novel writing. It is not only because of the intervening period but also for other preoccupations of the novelist that this novel is very different from Miri Jiyari or any other subsequent novel both in terms of its thematic depth and narrative expansiveness. Despite its strong regional overtones with the evocative presentation of local ambience and idiom, the novel has a Hardy-like engagement with historical and social realities in the context of an agrarian society deeply attached to the traditional mores of religion.

Significantly, the main character in the novel is Tagar, a woman of purer intent and deeper sensitivity than any other person in the novel. Yet the character is not idealized and from the very beginning represents the strong socio-religious context of the novel set in the heart of the Assamese countryside. The texts weaves a rich tapestry of rural life, with tradition, culture and ecology interwoven into it, interpenetrated at times by the deeper layers of religiosity derived from the influences of new Vaishnavism in the social ethos of an organic community. All these combine to provide the backdrop of a human drama working out through the linear flow of the narrative.

Tagar inherits the best of rural refinement and religious culture of a traditional household in an upper Assamese village. Her father Bapuram Bora is a land-owning rural gentleman of moderate means, deeply devoted to the religious traditions of the countryside. Their
Three Assamese Novels

neighbour, the Mauzadar is the most influential man in the locality. The two neighbours are in such good terms that the Mauzadar and his wife treat Tagar as if she is a dear member of the family. The novel opens with a situation of happy conviviality, occasioned by the wedding of the Mauzadar’s daughter. The occasion brings Kamalakanta, a young man known to the bride’s elder brother, to the Mauzadar’s house where he meets with Tagar. Kamalakanta instantly falls in love with Tagar and a day before his departure, he opens out his heart to her and, in an impulsive moment, puts his ring on her finger declaring his resolve to marry her. Tagar’s initial reaction was one of disbelief, if not outrage—her entire upbringing and disposition have been in the conservative mould of religious teaching. Yet out of respect for an educated young man, Tagar, deeply sad but trusting, consents and becomes betrothed. In due course the two families also give their consent. Kamalakanta, a brilliant student stands first in his graduation exam and it is agreed that their wedding will take place once he gains employment, preferably in the civil service. Kamalakanta’s father Mohidhar, a clerk in the collectorate aims high and succeeds finally in cornering the prized post of a sub-Deputy Collector through the good offices of Manik Hazarika, a Rai Bahadur, obviously very influential with the colonial Commissioner. But a price has to be paid. Rai Bahadur offers his eligible and accomplished daughter Suprova in marriage to Kamalakanta; Mohikanta writes a curt letter to Tagar’s father breaking off the engagement. The sudden reversal of his daughter’s fortunes makes Tagar’s father momentarily distraught but he hardly gets sympathetic support from any quarter. In a desperate bid to ward off malicious gossip in the village about Tagar’s association with Dharani Bapuram Bora hurriedly marries her off to a faraway village without her consent.

From then Tagar, the innocent woman, embarks on a journey which changes every aspect of her life. From the day she is made to marry Dharani, the genial weaving instructor from Raha, a village miles away from her own, her fortunes turn irreversibly. Tagar begins a new life in another faraway village: taunted, ridiculed and constantly humiliated by not only her mother-in-law but also by other women of the village. Tagar, a woman of unsullied moral sensitivity takes over the mantle of a daughter-in-law in Dharani’s household. Dharani becomes a bit aloof if not indifferent as he joins the freedom movement then fast spreading in the countryside. When Dharani is away from home, police looks for him and not finding him in the
village takes his wife Tagar to the police station. The police officer humiliates her in every possible way but she stands the test with dignity. Having come to know of Tagar’s detention in the police station, Dharani rushes in, pacifies an irate mob outraged by the behaviour of the policemen and surrenders himself. Soon, Dharani is put behind bars like thousands of others who are participating in the freedom movement. Tagar, all alone, is left to fend for herself. Her little daughter Kamali is now her sole solace and support.

It is the aspect of womanly dignity that gives Tagar a strong sense of identity and makes her hold her own against adversity particularly in situations like the one at the police station when she is face to face with the demonic agencies of alien rule. But there is an underpinning of protest that soon reappears as she travels home along with her husband who now had plunged headlong into the freedom struggle. Tagar could never forget that she was somehow saved from facing an ultimate humiliation due to arrival of Dharani in the police station, which the villagers too were about to attack. On their way home Dharani recapitulates the incident in his own way and offers a few consoling words. He explains to Tagar how service to the cause of the motherland makes one bear insult and oppression with equanimity. But this is how Tagar’s reaction is described in the novel. ‘Tagar did not say a word: like the sky heavy with storm clouds, she followed Dharani, looking grave and lifeless. Even after hearing the strain of patriotism in her husband’s voice her heart was washed silently by a sense of mortification at the indignities she has suffered’.5 Tagar remembers at that point how the police inspector’s ‘greedy look swallowed her from head to feet’ and how he threatened to crush her under his feet for all her defiance. It tortured her to recall how, at a certain point of the interrogation, she had almost fainted and, holding her daughter’s hand, slumped to the ground.

That an anti-government volunteer and that too a woman should show such delicacy of self-respect was plainly beyond the police inspector. In that encounter he was grossly intolerant to a defenceless woman. But there was a quick shift in his tone as the crowd became restive and Dharani appeared on the scene. But vengeance was burning inside him and later, as the tragic denouement unfolds in the novel, he did unhesitatingly arraign the innocent woman on a false charge and humiliated her by raiding her house on a false pretext.

With Dharani in jail, Tagar leads a forlorn existence and as old memories crowd in, she lives face to face both in her conscious and
unconscious mind with the happenings of the past. She often thinks of her father's cruelty in judging her harshly and without reason. She sheds tears or tries to forget her past or runs away from the 'golden moment in her life which now appears to be grand and alluring like the dome of a temple seen from a distance'.

Dharani returns from jail terminally ill from tuberculosis. Tagar nurses him back to recovery and, only for a brief interlude, Dharani is a loving husband. However, their life remains unfulfilled in more ways than one. Tagar's past too stands between her ailing husband and her happiness. An uneasy feeling returns at times when her ailing husband is beside her:

Notwithstanding what she has been doing all through, Tagar could never take possession of her husband as much or in the way she would have liked. Every time she wanted to enter the inmost core of her husband's heart through her love, something, inside her seemed to stand in the way, offering resistance. It is a hint of something, a memory not yet dimmed that would prevent her from doing so. It came in the form of a commotion in her heart.6

From the day Dharani had been out of jail, Tagar had been trying to give her love in abundance. In doing so, she is always earnest, fully realizing that this was what scriptures required of a married woman. Finally, Dharani succumbs to his illness in spite of Tagar's devoted nursing and the treatment provided by a kind doctor who is deeply attached to Tagar's little daughter Kamaii. Tagar, now in need of a livelihood, joins a weavers' guild started by the benevolent doctor for the benefit of the poor widows in the village. The lonely doctor, a widower himself gives some time to the guild, finds happiness in helping the distressed women and finds companionship and joy in the company of Dharani's daughter. This gives grist to the village gossip mill and provides the police inspector an opportunity to settle old scores with Dharani's wife and the genial doctor.

In an ironic twist to the novel, Kamalakanta appears in the novel as the newly posted local revenue official. His wife Suprova, not knowing who Tagar is, calls the latter to teach her a few weaving designs and Tagar keeps visiting her for that errand for sometime. Meanwhile, there is a theft in Kamalakanta's house. The needle of suspicion points to Tagar for none else apparently had much access to his house. The police inspector points the accusing finger at Tagar and the police raid her house. An old ring with Kamalakanta's name embossed on it is recovered inside a box, which bears the name of the doctor. As the police inspector, as conclusive piece of evidence, brings the ring before Kamalakanta, the latter discovers that the ring
was the same that he had put in Tagar's finger in his youthful impulse many years ago. Kamalakanta looks at the ring at first complacently, then in a state of consternation and finally in horror. He sees in it Tagar's innocence, his own past with himself mirrored in it and he falls into a trance.

The novel ends here. The narrative is so authentically detailed that by common consent the novel has been regarded by far as the greatest Assamese novel. While the older critics failed to grasp its essence the more sensitive among the modern critics following the Leavisian mode of criticism have tried to show that the main focus of the narrative brings out a moral vision which imposes a pattern in the novel 'in the context of a particular social process. There is nothing doctrinaire about that moral vision. It pivots round the simple truth of the sanctity of the human fears.' A contemporary reader will perhaps read more into the novel in terms of its particularity as well as its multi-dimensionality as a cultural text.

While discussing the genre of the novel, Bakhtin has identified two important characteristics, which are: the spirit of the process and the in-conclusiveness. This interprets the novel as open-ended and better qualified to represent reality deeply. It has also the potential of representing a plurality or multitude of voices other than the author's or the reader's own. The novel according to this view has an organic rather than abstract logic. A distinction has to be made between the 'novelistic voice' and the real voice, which often speaks through a different language.

One can note in this particular novel the folklore motif and the language with which the narrative begins. Or, one can note that even at particular dramatic points, it speaks through silence. In the narrative, the folk song or the subtle resonance of it obliquely presages or anticipates the fate of a young woman situated in a rural society that was ridden with patriarchy and connected to the positioning of power and privileges. One can recall here Tagar's thoughts in the novel:

At times, Tagar would remember her father's cruel treatment to her; and all alone, she would shed tears. Knowing fully well her character, her ideals, her father had disbelieved her most cruelly. He had fixed her marriage overnight ignoring her inner suffering and without making an effort to get at the truth, just because he wanted to retain his position and prestige in society. For the sake of his own good name and being frightened of gossip and rumour he had sacrificed his paternal love for the child. With a sense of pain Tagar would try to delete from her mind her father's image.
Tagar’s stoic silence at several points when she is undeservedly charged by her mother-in-law or accused by the police or on her long trudge back home from the police station after her acute embarrassment and humiliation is more eloquent than words. It will have needed a different socio-religious context in the novel for the silence to be articulated. The following observation has relevance here although it speaks of a different context:

...resistance is determined by positionality and that the factors of race, class and gender affect the form resistance takes in language. Resistance is not always voiced in authoritative or public ways; what is crucial to a feminist dialogics is the idea that resistance can begin as private when women negotiate, manipulate and often subvert systems of domination they encounter. Both public and private discourses are means of cultural resistance and intervention—speech is not always a sign of power or silence a sign of weakness. Rather, the contexts of silence and speech determine gendered relations.9

It is significant that Tagar’s character is woven more around silence in a novel which is full of chatter, talks and dialogue or chorus-like commentary of a motley crowd. Despite the fact that it was written in the late thirties of the last century, the novel has sustained a realism in which men and women drawn from the common grooves of village life play their roles as they do in real life. Yet, the novelist leaves a good deal for the reader to imagine at the key points of the drama of Tagar’s life and indeed possibilities of a wider response to the situation have not been foreclosed.

Older critics, in focusing more attention on the external elements of the plot like the recovery of a signet ring at the end, somewhat in the manner of a medieval romance missed this significance. These critics have regarded the denouement as a kind of device adopted by the writer. The narrative has both verisimilitude and psychological realism. But, in the ultimate analysis the depth and intensity of the novel could be read more meaningfully in the tale of a woman, caught in the web of a particular social and historical context of a transitional society. It is also necessary to understand the full import of the novel through its language with the images and symbols embedded in it. The language thus has the sharpness and precision fit to portray the essence of the folk refrain and the complexity of the theme.

The significance of the novel in terms of certain specificities of life or culture or habitat genuinely reflective of an Assamese identity can be seen in bold relief if the novel is compared to the other
outstanding novels of Indian tradition like Bankim Chandra’s *Visavriksha* (1873), Tagore’s *Gora* (1910), Sarat Chandra’s *Pather Dabi* (1926), and Bibhutibhusan’s *Pather Panchali* (1929).

The contrast between the ‘novelistic’ voice of a character and his or her real ‘voice’, often the voice of the ‘absent’ or of the ‘other’ - which is one of the fictional ways of establishing identity in *Jivanar Batat* comes out more clearly in the author’s second novel, *Seuji Patar Kahini* (1957). The character at the centre of the novel, a woman, does not stand for a stable order of traditional values. She is in a way overtly subversive of tradition and represents a marginalized identity, ostracized by the orthodox sections of society. In this case, the element of resistance is embedded in a different eco-cultural background but is sought to be solidly placed at the centre of the story.

Often the identities relating to particular socio-regional context have received a representative character in the Assamese novel. Mamani Raisom Goswami (1941) for instance has intensely focused in her novels on marginalized women within the specific context of hegemonic feudal social structure. In her much acclaimed novel *Datal Hatir Unye Khowa Haoda* (Eng. Version: *The Saga of South Kamrup*: 1988) she has placed the theme of identity in the context of hegemony of power, more specifically of hereditary power of patriarchy and gender inequality. This particular novel, has many ‘voices’ represented both by the different characters, and by a particular character through gestures of speech. The point is subtly made in the following statement.

Not surprisingly, theorists have said that ‘speaking from the place of the other’ makes a marked difference in the way women use language. This feminine language is said to be contra logic, ‘not conforming to solid male rules of logic, clarity, consistency. In resisting the ‘official’ language of logic, women’s language can become ‘depersonalised’ and ‘pluralised’ and decentered, polyphonic or dialogic. Because it is spoken by no one, that is, because it comes from the ‘place of absence’, a feminine language does not assume the authority of logical discourse and, therefore, escapes the hierarchy of the official language.”

Both Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya (1924-97) and Mamani Raisom Goswami bring the identity concerns in their different ways to the forefront in different historical-social-regional contexts evolving a specific dialectic that validates difference. Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya’s explorations of the marginalized identities are placed within a more ‘universal’ human identity. But the unique feature of
his major novels also consists in that his texts handle contemporary political events or ideologies and depict the social and political struggle of individuals and societies in respect of their respective identities. Perhaps his most significant novel is the one exploring the critical area of a Naga identity specially their ideology of armed struggle and insurgency with significant social and human ramifications against the tempestuous events of the Second World War on the eastern front.

Kathleen Raine has called this particular novel, *Yaruingam* (literally, 'people's rule') 'a remarkable revelation' and has described it as 'a novel about a tribal people at the other end of the earth'. Other critics have read it as authentic documentation of Naga life and society. But a closer reading of the text shows that the novel is polyphonic in structure in an interplay of a multitude of voices and responses including the author's own. Within the revolutionary ardour of an insurgency and with a strong political message, the novel deals with the conflict of an opposing scales of values represented by the Christian, the Gandhian and the other, the three main protagonists of the narrative with their three different approaches: violence and militancy being more dominant in this ensemble. By virtue of its creative and imaginative power, the novel is a moving human document. It ultimately succeeds in conveying the unique sense of identity of the Nagas as a community with several other overlapping identities of religion, class and gender inhering into it. In the context of the story the political identity, above all, has attained primacy.

The novel, *Yaruingam* (1960) derives its force and relevance from its authentic depiction of life in a small Tangkhul Naga village during the turbulent period of the Second World War. The story is set in Ukhrul, a Tangkhul Naga village imbued with all natural ambience and idyllic charm which is seen as going through cataclysmic changes.

The impact of the Second World War was of great severity in that small village as it was right on the eastern front, close to the Dimapur-Kohima axis of the Allied Army. The village bore the brunt of both the Japanese attack and the Allied counter offensive. Some young men appearing in the novel took part in the war as armed volunteers on the side of the Allied while all others suffered the harrowing experience of the war. The war struck the traditional village with all its severity, first through a Japanese occupation and then as a result, due to the Allied bombing which destroyed everything in sight and
rendered the villagers homeless. The novelist has been able to grasp the impact of the war in its totality making the small Naga village a microcosm of the larger reality. The novel covers a span of five years beginning with the invasion of the Japanese Army and ending by the time the most catastrophic event of Indian history occurred: the killing of the Mahatma.

In the very first chapter of the novel we have the Japanese soldiers fleeing, hotly pursued by the Allied army. Sharengla an innocent Naga girl, broken and desolate, is cruelly abandoned by the Japanese soldier who had kidnapped her earlier and forced her to live with him. She is bearing the unknown soldier's child. With the droning of the aeroplanes overhead, the soldier runs away and the hapless young woman, with the shrapnel flying all about her, falls unconscious. Rishang, her former lover rescues her and brings her to the village where her house, like her life, lay ruined by the war. Every one in the village shuns her as the fallen woman. But Rishang is an exception. Khutingla, even now a rival for the affections of Rishang, says to her 'had I been in your place, I would have committed suicide' and Sharengla turns to the Bible for consolation.

Sharengla tells Rishang of Videsselie and his dream of freedom for the Nagas and of her conversation with him in the Japanese war camp. Rishang speaks to her of his disillusionment to find his village destroyed by Allied attack, notwithstanding his being a volunteer of the Allied. Villagers now blame Rishang, Khating and Phanitphang for all that happened. Rishang speaks of his path as being different from Videsselie's for he: believes in building the life of the community anew through constructive work.

"Videsselie was full of ideas when I met him at our cottage. Those ideas were however beyond my grasp. He wanted to liberate the Nagas like Subhas Bose. He has a fertile brain" Sharengla concluded. "However, I feel your way is easier to understand and follow. It is crystal clear." Rishang felt that Sharengla had grown mature.

Back in the village, Sharengla meets Khating, son of Ngazek, the Tangkhul elder who is about to join the Army. The father and the son do not see eye to eye. Ngazek's views on Naga ethos, tradition and the desire for freedom of the Nagas are more in tune with those of Videsselie but Khating stands for changing Naga society. Ngazek tells him bluntly. "The Nagas need a different kind of freedom. The Christianity and the modern education are taking us on the wrong path. I want neither the white men nor the black men. I have no love
for the Japanese either. The Nagas were happier when they were naked." Ngazek also does not like his son marrying a Christian girl nor does he approve of his joining the Army.

It is time of transplantation in the field and the girls are singing a love song. But discontentments in the village are growing over the matter of war compensation. There are other problems too. Smallpox is breaking out in virulent form and the old guards oppose anti-smallpox vaccination. Ngazek is totally opposed to it but his brother Ngathinkhui who saw action in the First World War advocates it. There is also a raging debate over the construction of a Church in the village. Yengmaso, Rishang's father and Dr. Brock plead for building the Church in their chosen place but this is bitterly opposed by the non-Christians led by the same Ngathinkhui.

The War soon comes to an end. Rishang and Sharengla join in a prayer for peace as soon as the news reach them. This arouses jealousy in Khutingla. But Rishang is in love with her and they become betrothed. Soon Rishang has to proceed to Calcutta for higher studies. Dr. Brock has arranged for Rishang to take up evangelical work after his return. Meanwhile Rishang and Sharengla go on a relief mission to treat the smallpox infected people in a distant village. Phanitphang, the wayward youngman joins Videsselie.

Sharengla's miseries have no end. Staying in the house of Ngathinkhui as her own house is destroyed, she has to resist his indecent proposal to her to be his co-wife. She shifts to the vacant house of Phanitphang but she can not live in peace there either. Her sympathy is misunderstood by a wayward young man who comes to her craving for her affection. She does not approve of his ways but the circumstances force her into an uneasy relationship with him.

In the second part of the novel the narrative is placed in Calcutta. Rishang is now a witness to the tumultuous political happenings of the freedom struggle now in its last phase and suffers the communal holocaust in which Amulya one of his intimate friends—an idealistic youngman and a poet—dies. He also attends the meetings addressed by Mahatma Gandhi trying to restore sanity to a mad world. The relevance of Gandhian ideas to the Naga situation is brought to the fore in the novel through Rishang's experience in Calcutta and that includes his changing perceptions about the INA, communalism and terrorism which he rejects and Gandhian ideas which he absorbs. His advice to Avinash, his terrorist friend, is quite direct:
“May be I don’t know”, Rishang retorted. “But it seems to me that the unarmed struggle of Gandhiji has contributed more to the movement than this kind of barricade fighting.”

Meanwhile disturbing reports of the Naga underground movement with Videssellie marshalling his forces in strength in Manipur and the Naga hills reach him in Calcutta. But he sees quite clearly that the politics of his terrorist friend Avinash is as ‘destructive as that of Videssellie’. In contrast he sees Gandhi in action in those critical days of Hindu-Muslim riots and his political education is complete. Finally, Rishang returns home to attend to his father who is critically ill, hurt by those opposing the construction of the Church. At Ukhrul he meets Jeevan, a young Assamese teacher married to a Naga girl who had passed away, leaving a son behind. Their friendship is established by a typical Ukhrul evening, which Rishang comes to experience after a long long time.

In the village, Rishang is all for reconciliation. He finds that Ngathingskhul is not responsible for the wound, to which his father succumbs after sometime. When he sees the village church, he thinks that it no longer symbolizes Christian love. Rishang decides not to devote himself to evangelical work, as Dr. Brock would like him to do. He chooses to serve the cause of Christ in a different way and Dr. Brock thinks it unfortunate that politics should come in the way of every good thing in Naga society. Dr. Brock does not realize that Rishang is in search of an alternative path in politics. He is deeply worried that Videssellie who professes the politics of the gun is getting stronger every day and Naga youths are getting fascinated by the romantic appeal of a guerilla war. Rishang could see clearly that a confrontation with Videssellie was imminent. He was also growing somewhat indifferent to his personal life. When his mother resists his idea of marrying Khutingla he does not react strongly. But the humaneness in him asserts itself sharply when Shrengla meets him to convey Phanitphang’s forewarning that the October meeting should not be held as Videssellie in that case would take recourse to violence.

Sharengla and Phanitphang share an uneasy relationship but it is a subject of gossip in the village, particularly whenever Phanitphang comes to his house. Rishang too is not happy about it though he is aware of her deeper spiritual craving which transcends her personal suffering. As for Rishang’s love for Khutingla it is warm and human. It has innocence and is tinged with sadness and idealism. But the day Khutingla arrives back at Ukhrul, Rishang is seen leaving for
Huining village. Jeevan too gets ready to go with Rishang. To Jeevan it seems like an epic journey. “The journey upward appeared to him to be almost other-worldly. It resembled the poetic journey of the Pandavas in the company of a dog. His heart leapt up as he thought about it. To Indians the journey symbolized the search for being. The climbing symbolized man’s becoming.” When they were about to reach the village, Videsellie’s armed men ambush them and take them as prisoners with eyes blind-folded for detention. In the detention camp Rishang and Jeevan meet Videsellie who speaks to them of his firm resolve to liberate the Nagas and make them free, when only the ‘life will be worth living’. Soon after both of them are rescued by Khating’s men.

Rishang’s personal life takes on a happy turn as he soon gets married to Khutingla in an Ukhrul Church. They have a happy time together and it is not easy for Rishang to get away from his idyllic world and continue the struggle. Fresh unrest is reported towards the beginning of the New Year. Videsellie’s men are starting a violent no tax campaign in the border region and the issue of war compensation is also agitating the mind of the villagers. Rishang realizes the gravity of the situation and feels a sense of guilt for not responding to the people’s need promptly. So, he along with Jeevan leaves for the village immediately. Meanwhile, the rebels warn the elders against following Rishang. The situation is becoming tense, because Rishang and those who follow him appear to be surrounded by Videsellie’s men. Rishang is thinking of returning early as he has to concentrate on a rally that was planned to be held at Ukhrul and also because his wife wanted him to be back. So, continuing his journey Rishang and his friends visit Cinjiroy, the last Tangkhul village, a rebel stronghold on the Angami territory. They are told to stop there and not to proceed further. Disregarding the warnings, they move and as they are proceeding towards the Phek village, there is a sudden shoot out. Jeevan dies on the spot. Rishang is injured seriously.

The scene now shifts to Ukhrul. Sharengla comes to see Phanitphang at the Police lock-up. Outside, there was Rishang’s rally and villagers are shouting and protesting. Soon they became restive. Police arrest some of them, mostly poor and ignorant villagers who did not know why they came to take part in the rally. Sharengla is aghast at the cruelties unleashed all around. She runs to her home. But before she could cross over to the courtyard, dizziness overtakes her. She sees darkness enveloping her and she falls down
unconscious. When she wakes up after regaining consciousness, she finds herself in a hospital with her faithful dog and Jeevan's son whom she had taken as her own. That night, one of the armed men of Viddesselie shot Phanitphang dead as he was being taken out to board a police van. That bullet pierced Sharengla's heart. Despite the external turmoil and a raging political debate, Sharengla's experience evokes the tragic depth of broken human ties reinforcing the human core of the novel. There is a suggestion of a solidity of innocence, a residual purity of emotion against the onslaught of time and circumstances.

While the character of Sharengla has a tragic significance in the context of the war, *Yaruungam* is a political novel, going into all the aspects of the Naga struggle as the novelist saw them along two different paths that diverged both in respect of the goal as well as the means to achieve that goal. Rishang is the main protagonist; his gradually evolving vision of a Naga future is embodied in the novel and at the end it is given a Gandhian mould, no less radical than Viddesselie's vision, which is not only based on militancy and violence but also on some kind of primitivism. This complex interweaving of two themes in the novel is the reality of Naga life and it will continue to be so till they merge into a single line of a creative human stream abjuring wasteful violence. On the one hand, Shangrela's wrecked life is the author's comment on the war. Naga life in transition is also the microcosm of the larger political reality of India.

With regard to the situations in the novel—the actualities of war, insurgency and the overlapping nationalist struggle for freedom, the novelist has a clear vision. His engagement is neither entirely ideological nor academic. He has neither mystified identity nor has situated it in the story in other than human terms but there is no doubt that a strong awareness of it emerges from a sustained dialectic of different political ideologies in the novel. An understanding of the larger ethos of the political struggle within the Nagas leads one beyond identity affiliations or its overt political ends. The vision of the 'People's Rule' has ultimately to be embedded in the concept of a larger or more universal human agency. This is the core of a vision that directly runs counter to colonialism as well as other kinds of political or cultural hegemonism often imposed on the smaller identities by the nation-state.

The exploration of identity could be multi-layered: it can have more than one kind of relationship with truth or social reality as


embedded in a novel. It depends on the particular historical context as to which of the identities the novelist would settle for in respect of foregrounding it or foreclosing it in terms of the human situation in the novel. Anti-colonialism or the anti-imperialist struggle is an important preoccupation in this particular novel and in the later novels. It is manifest in the novelists' exploration of political identities in retrospect, emerging out of the freedom struggle (Mritunjoy: 1970) and a significant working class movement (Pratipad: 1970) of the thirties of the last century. These novels are artistically satisfying because they effectively and concretely embody social and political identities. Indeed the three major Assamese novels across a century, namely Miri Jiyari (1894) with its eco-cultural background, Jivanar Batat (1944) as a mirror-image of Assamese culture and society with a deeply authentic tone and Yaruingam (1960) depicting the struggle for the political rights of a small Naga community have brought out the issue of identity and difference more concretely and demonstrably than perhaps in any other tradition of the regional novel in India. The entire process achieves certain fruition in Mamoni Raisom Goswami's Dantel Hatir Unye Khow Howda (1988), a novel in which gender identity has emerged as the central issue.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. His earlier novels dealt with authentic historical material. Miri Jiyari has not only 'problematised' the bonding of the ethnic with the social in so different a manner that it could not have been situated within the traditional mould of the nineteenth century Assamese society. In a more traditional Assamese society, the levers of power, caste, class or gender would operate differently.

2. Banikanta Kakati, the foremost literary critic of the earlier literary period and a contemporary of the novelist, extolled the 'the writer’s wide and intimate acquaintance with all phases and features of Assamese social life in their light and shade, giving it the stature of classic'. Also see Lalit Kumar Barua, Birinchi Kumar Barua: Makers of Indian Literature, New Delhi, Sahitya Akademi: 1999, p. 20.


4. The inner meaning of the opening lines of a folk song points significantly to a girl’s plea to her father not to send her in marriage to a place faraway
from home against her wish; this is actually something that happens in the story.

6. Ibid., pp. 49-64.
10. Ibid., p. 11.
12. According to the noted critic R. K. Dasgupta the novelist presented the Nagas 'as part of the human situation in the country’ with ‘imaginative sympathy and understanding which go into the making of a great work of art’. V. K. Gokak, another distinguished critic commented Yaruingam deals with the problems and beliefs of the Naga people and the Naga revolt for freedom. It also gives an incidental picture of pre-partition communal riots in Calcutta. It opens a new world of customs and behaviour pattern even to the Indian reader’. Cf. Yaruingam: ‘People’s Rule’, Christian Literature Centre, Guwahati, Christian Literature Centre, 1984.
15. Ibid. p. 31.
17. Ibid. p. 209.
The Ideology of a Peripheral Religious Cult and the Subaltern Quest for Identity
A Study of the Rites of Dharmathakur in West Bengal

RITA BANERJEE

Worshipped in many districts of Bengal, for example, Purulia, Birbhum, Bankura, Midnapore, Burdwan, Hooghly, Howrah, and the Twenty-four Parganas, the deity Dharma or Dharmathakur, as he is called, comes down to us supposedly from pre-Vedic times. Niharranjan Ray claims that Dharmathakur was originally a pre-Aryan or non-Aryan deity who gradually “merged with Varuna, the chariot-borne Sūrya, Kūrma, the Puranic tortoise avatāra, and Kalki, the last incarnation of Viṣṇu, eventually achieving transformation as Dharmathakur”. However, despite later accretions and amalgamations Dharmathakur retains a non-Brahmanical, pre-Vedic character in many ways.

The early Bengalis were proto-Australoid. They were predominantly cultivators by occupation. Bengal had significantly lesser contact with the Vedic civilization than the northern states. According to R. C. Majumdar, Bengal was outside the pale of Vedic civilization, as is shown by the absence of all references to Bengal in the Rk-Samhitā: He says:

“... We cannot but attach due significance to the absence of all references to Bengal in the Rk-Samhitā and in later Samhitās and Brahmans, barring a few casual notices in the Aitareya Brahmana, and possibly the Aitareya Aranyaka, all of which reveal an attitude towards the country and its people which is not one of approbation.”

The Aryan people had come from outside India, and although their material conditions were not very advanced, their superiority, claims Suniti K. Chatterji, “lay in the superiority of their language”. The Aryan language made the Dravidian and Austric languages appear relatively dull. Moreover, the religion of the immigrants—the Vedic religion with its ritual and sacrifices—seemed superior to that of the...
indigenous, native population. At the time of the later *Samhitās*, the Vedic Aryans were gradually coming into contact with Bengal. Aryan infiltration began around 1000 BC.

Ray contends, "Aryanization began the history of caste in Bengal." Before the incursion of the Aryans, although various prescriptions regarding eating, marriage, religion, etc. had prevailed among the Austroic-speaking people, Brahmanical caste patterns, customs and hierarchy were not prevalent in Bengal. An important stage in the development of Aryanization as well as caste development began with the advent of the Gupta rule in northern Vaṅga and elsewhere in Bengal. From the Gupta times Vedic and Puranic Brahmanism and its culture started flowing into Bengal. Eventually, the Varman-Sena period, *i.e.*, the period from the eighth to the twelfth century AD saw the spread and consolidation of Brahmanical rule in Bengal. During this period one notices a conscious effort towards the superimposition of Brahmanical ideas, laws, and rule in Bengal. The Brahmanical *Smṛti* and *Vyavahāra* edicts and law in accord with Puranic Brahmanism were established throughout Bengal during the Varman-Sena regime. As Ray says,

> The desired intention of the age was the autocratic supremacy of one caste, one religion, one social ideology. That caste was the Brahmanas, the religion was Brahmanism and the ideology was that of the Puranic Brahmanical society. 6

Unlike North India, Bengal is characterized by the virtual absence of the Kṣatriya and Vaiśya castes. While the Brahmanas placed themselves at the top of the hierarchy, the Śūdras stood between them and the community of the assimilated, untouchable, lowborn outcastes without any rights. Intermarriages between the Brahmanas and Śūdras eventually led to the rise of intermediate subcastes like the Vaiḍyas and the Kayasthas. At the bottom of the social scale were the Vaiḍhas, Haddis, Doms, Jolas, Bagatitas, Candalas, Mallas, etc. who were probably indigenous aboriginal communities.

The dominant religion in Bengal was Brahmanism. The indigenous religion of the proto-Australoids after a losing battle became totally subservient to the dominant religion although the native cults sometimes succeeded in modifying the content of the codified, 'higher' religions. These subaltern cults practiced by many of the indigenous, low-caste or untouchable people could neither enter into the mainstream nor gain any recognition. Yet, as Ray emphasizes, the vitality of such ancient and popular religious practices was
considerable even as they differed from the dominant Aryan, He says,

Concealed behind the Aryan exterior in the practices of Brahmanism, Buddhism and Jainism, there is a religious and cultural life extending to the depths of the Bengali people and into every corner of the village cottages, the householders' courtyards, the peasants' plots, the fields of harvest, and the temple pavilions and the public meeting places of the rural communities. The history of these indigenous cults in Bengal shows an interesting combination of two contrary tendencies—on the one hand, an attempt to surrender and assimilate into the Hindu fold and, on the other to preserve their distinctive identity. That they continue to survive today evinces their enduring power.

The Dharma cult is one such popular, indigenous cult practiced by a number of low castes but chiefly by the Doms in some districts. Like many other popular cults, the practice of the Dharma cult produced a sense of solidarity among the worshippers and helped them in maintaining their distinctive identity within the Hindu fold. Emile Durkheim's views are quite pertinent in this context. He states:

... religious beliefs are always common to a determined group which makes a profession of adhering to them and practicing the rites connected with them ... they are something belonging to the group and they make its unity."

From the time of the inception of the cult, the Dharmites were perhaps aware of their exclusive identity. In pursuing their beliefs in a non-Brahmanical god they suffered persecution, and the trial ultimately bred solidarity among them. A manuscript entitled, Dharmer Bandana contains the narrative of such a persecution and its resolution. We are told, "when the Brahminic people of Maldah began to tax the Saddharmis (i.e., the Dharmites), to persecute them and kill them, Lord Niranjana got very angry in Vaikuntha and revealed himself as the Khoda (God) of the Muslima in the village of Jaipura". The narrative demonstrates that the Dharmites not only felt a sense of alienation from the dominant, hierarchical Hindu religion but also, at times in facing it, they identified with the devotees of an egalitarian religion like Islam. Thus, with Brahmanical religious culture picturing them as the 'other', they sought to create their own identity as members of an exclusive sect.

The Aryan-Brahmanical society often sought to incorporate and integrate the outsiders within a socio-economic system that would suit its own interests. Nirmal K. Bose writes in Hindu Samajer Garan:
According to Indian social theorists, the caste system is suitable for every society. Wherever many races come together, by placing them in four castes and incorporating them in the social structure, it is possible to build up a larger society. It would be in the interests of society if a person who is engaged in a particular work according to his ability and talent continues to do the same work. And if the society can also ensure that such a person and anyone who follows the same occupation after him/her will not starve to death, and everyone will cooperate actively with others, then the society that grows up through their cooperation will become firmer and stronger.

The ‘outsiders’ in Bengal belonged to several indigenous tribes. According to Ray, before the beginnings of Aryanization in Bengal, the native inhabitants, the majority of whom spoke Austric languages, were “divided into numerous tribes and dwelled in caves and forests.” With the incursion and predominance of the Aryan-Brahmanical culture, gradually, the indigenous tribal societies were incorporated into the larger caste society although the process was marked by struggles and conflicts while remnants of the native culture survived in popular religions and customs.

The process of transformation from tribe to caste involved changes, institutional as well as those specific to identity. Dev Nathan designates the transition from tribe to caste as an epochal change and argues, “... the result of this process was the formation of institutions like private property, the caste system, the state and patriarchal family.” These institutions differ substantially from tribal institutions. Moreover, incorporation into the caste system involves the acceptance of one’s identity as a member of a caste with a specific role and a specific place in the hierarchy. But despite the compulsion of the caste hierarchy, many of these people, who were relegated to the positions of the low castes and untouchables, retained a sense of their erstwhile tribal identity, and their religious practices derive, to a large extent, from these indigenous tribal religions.

Thus, the rites of the Dharma cult, like those of other such cults, differ materially from that of Hindu Brahmanical practices and ideologically align the cult with tribal religious practices. The ideology of the Dharma cult shows its potential for subversion of the dominant, authoritarian religion and, through their adherence to the worship of a non-Brahmanic god, the worshippers retain their distinctive identity, thus resolving the conflict in their favour. Partha Chatterjee's views are relevant here. He says, "We see the history of religion as constituted by two opposed tendencies—one the attempt to articulate a universal code for society as a whole, and the
The Ideology of a Peripheral Religious Cult

other the struggle by the subordinated to resist the dominating implications of this code.\textsuperscript{13}

The practices of the Dharma cult vary to a certain extent from district to district, and the differences are often due to varying degrees of 'sanskritization.'\textsuperscript{14} Yet, despite assimilation through this process of 'sanskritization', the distinctive identity of the cult and the commonness of the religious tradition persist, the differences as preserved in different districts notwithstanding. These issues may be examined in some details below on the basis of the case studies that we have made in the districts of the Twenty-four Parganas and Howrah.

Rajpur, Twenty-four Parganas

In the Dharma temple at Rajpur, Dharmathakur appears as an anthropomorphic deity, moustached, possessing thick black hair, sitting upright with a mace in hand and with the upper part of his body uncovered. A stone-shaped tortoise is placed by the side of three such clay and wooden images, and the Dom priest claims precedence for the kurma, saying that it is the oldest figure recovered from the river in accordance with a divine dictum. Although the anthropomorphic image suggests a departure from the cult practices found in Birbhum and Howrah, the priest's assertion shows his knowledge of the original practices of the Dharma cult. Suniti K. Chatterji argues that the use of the tortoise as a symbol must have arisen among sea-people or fisher folk.\textsuperscript{15} In the worshippers' affirmation of Dharma as synonymous with the kurma, the cult's association with tribes stands confirmed.

Many worshippers including the Brahmans and upper caste inhabitants of the area told the author that Dharma here is recognized as synonymous with Yama (the god of death). The upper castes, however, largely associate him with the Dom community. In the rural and suburban areas of Twenty-four Parganas, Dharma worship, on the whole, seems restricted to the lower castes. In our survey, some upper-caste devotees were also encountered. The family of the priest as well as the families related to them acknowledged that they considered Dharma as their god and that all the Doms participated in his worship in a way the other castes did not. The Doms in the multicaste Rajpur village (there are residential divisions in the village along the caste lines, for example, Kaibartapara, Dompara, Ghoshpara, Chakravartypara. etc.) consisted of about
fourteen families and about a hundred people. All of them are devotees of Dharma and his worship produces a sense of group identity among the members of the caste.

The Dharma temple at Rajpur is built partly of clay and partly of cement. It has a tiled roof and is situated in the ground adjacent to a sprawling bazaar, which sells fish and vegetables. The location of the temple indicates the deity's marginalized status even as it asserts an unabashed connection between the deity and the material fulfilment of daily needs which pragmatism may demand. According to Durkheim, every religion maintains a distinction between the sacred and the profane:

Since the idea of the sacred is always and everywhere separated from the profane in the thought of men, and since we picture a logical chasm between the two, the mind irresistibly refuses to allow the two corresponding things to be confounded, or even to be merely put in contact with each other.\footnote{16}

A fish market and a temple are recognized as clear opposites in Brahmanical religion, and their conjunction is scarcely conceivable. A Śiva temple could not be located even on the outskirts of a fish market. The closeness of the Dharma temple to the fish market, therefore, subversively confounds the distinction between the sacred and the profane as maintained in Brahmanical religion.

The duties and assumptions of priesthood in Dharma worship demonstrate a desire to conform to the religious codes of the Brahmanical tradition, while, as we hope to show, it simultaneously challenges certain doctrines of the Brahmanical religion. The Doms manifest a desire to establish that Dharma is also the god of the upper castes and by virtue of being priests of Dharma, they get elevated to the status of Brahmaṇa priests. Certain rituals seem significant in this regard. The ritual of purification (a day before this annual pūjā, the priest would make the bare ground his bed, fast, and keep himself śuddha) and the practice of wearing a sacred thread during the ceremony, which apparently enables the Dharma priest to rise to the status of Brahmaṇa priests, align the cult to Brahmanism. During our survey we came across the claim that the Dharma priests occasionally get calls to perform the Durga pūjā, Kali pūjā etc. when there is a dearth of Brahmaṇa priests. But, as members of the upper castes told us later, the claim has no basis in reality. More importantly, the priests of Dharma seemed to lack knowledge of the relevant mantras of these pūjās. The claim however, contains an implicit challenge.
By officiating as priests and wearing the sacred thread even for a limited period of time, the Doms of Rajpur assume prerogatives not assigned to their caste. In that they transgress the boundaries and challenge the institution of hierarchy based on division of labour as determined by birth. Kumkum Roy argues, "... the creation of alternative power relations is embedded in attempts to contest varṇa identities through the appropriation of specific varṇa attributes by the inappropriate (for instance a śūdra staking claim to the privileges of priesthood) or through the explicit questioning of the validity of varṇa identities."¹⁷

A Dom officiating as a priest of a non-Brahmanical god poses a challenge to Brahmanical religion as well as to the institution of the caste. The practice would negate the sense of fixity and absolutism as regards the pantheon, values, and caste positions, and suggest relativity in the status of gods as well as in the positions of priests and devotees. To a certain extent, this effort on the part of the Dom priest, to elevate him to Brahmanical status by following essentially the precepts of the Brahmanical culture with a tacit approval of the upper castes (a few upper caste devotees acknowledge him as the priest) suggests the process of 'sanskritization.' However, the assumption of the rights of priesthood would be construed as a form of challenge since the adoption of certain restricted Vedic rites still kept them away from the general Brahmanical way of life that remained with the twice-born castes only. There are several such cases where we see the co-existence of a dual tendency on the part of the followers of the cult, on the one hand, of trying to raise themselves within the hierarchy by imitating the ways of the Brahmanas, and, on the other hand, of asserting their distinctive identity by proclaiming their loyalty to a god not recognized by the Brahmanical pantheon and departing from the prescribed Brahmanical ritual practices. The ambiguity that characterizes the subaltern search for identity is reflected in this dual tendency.

The question of identity is closely linked not only to the prerogatives of priesthood but also to the rituals they practice. In a manifest desire to conform to Brahmanical rituals, some Dom priests have omitted bali or animal sacrifice. In the Twenty-four Parganas, on the whole, Dharma worship does not require bali. Instead of this, the offering includes fruits, sweets, milk, rice, etc. But the dual tendency to conform and deviate is here shown in the significant departures from the Brahmanical tradition in some other respects. The nitya or everyday pūjā consists of oiling the tortoise-shaped
stone or Dharma and bathing it. The bathing of the deity is the main ritual associated with Dharma worship here. The nitya pūjā requires only a simplified version of an invocation to a deity: the ritual of bath is performed while chanting the solitary phrase “Ong Dharmaraja nama”. Dharma worship does not require arti, which to the contrary, is important in the pūjā of Brahmanical deities. Bathing suggests a very human, everyday activity, bringing the deity close to the daily life. Use of water in Dharmathakur’s worship may have other implications too. For instance, Dharma’s association with fertility makes his connection with water imperative. In Rajpur, a family legend has it that the founder-priest in the family had retrieved the image from the river that flowed by the village, the river supposedly being a tributary or a channel of the holy Ganga. As in many other cases, so also in this instance, the founder, it is claimed, received the information of the Dharma-sīlā in a ‘divinely inspired’ dream. The connection between the discovery of the Dharma-sīlā in the water and the emphasis placed on bath (both in nitya pūjā and in the annual pūjā), as stated above, define Dharma’s ‘sanskritized’ links. So do the association with Yama, the god of death and the cremation ground which is adjacent to the river and only a short distance away from the site of the pūjā. The god of death can also hold death in abeyance. So, the worshippers look at Dharma as a curer of diseases and also as one who ensures material well being.

The Dharma cult has several such deviations and departures from the practices that obtain in Brahmanical religions. The absence of mantra-s in nitya pūjā and the relative brevity of the chanted ‘mantra-s’ in general, align the Dharma cult with tribal religion. The lack of mantra-s also suggests a lack of formulaic codes, which otherwise dominate in the codified religions like Vedic religion, for instance.

Women’s position in the cult practices also needs some explanation here. We have the instance of a woman member of the priestly family, the sixty-five year old Chitubala, performing the ‘nitya pūjā’ although her brother Sona Pandit holds the honourable and official position of the Dharma-purohit. The right of presiding over the annual pūjā belongs to him. In many places of Dharma worship there is no restriction on women officiating as priests. Nanigopal Bandyopadhyay speaks of a Dharmaraj temple in Bodojan (Bardhaman district) near Bāluka River where the pūjā seems to have originated. The temple Bodojan has broken down, but Dharmathakur has been placed in a building nearby.
Bandyopadhyay say that Mukhi Thakurani or Mokshada Pandit, a Dom priestess had the prerogative of performing the *nitya pūjā* there. By contrast, in upper-caste Brahmana, Kayastha, or Vaidya families, when the older members of the families are absent, often the rite of 'nitya pūjā' of Narayana has to be performed by a younger son, or even a dependent of the family who has had his 'upanayana'. And this is ritually significant for, according to the *Encyclopedia of Religion*:

> The Upanayana, involving the investiture of boys of the upper three social Classes (varnas) with a sacred thread, conferred on them the status of the 'twice-born' (dvija, a term first used in the *Atharvaveda*) and their 'second birth' permitted them to hear the Veda and thereby participate in the śrauta rites that, according to the emerging Brahmanic orthodoxy, would make it possible to obtain immortality.

The right of women to officiate as priest in the cases that we have mentioned suggests the origin of the practice in a relatively non-patriarchal society. The higher position of women is a distinguishing feature of tribal society. The persistence of such egalitarian practices among the untouchable Dharmites suggests their closeness to tribal practices. According to Nathan, "The dalits have the greatest extent of gender equality and come closest to the gender situation among the hunter-gatherers".

Likewise, the annual fair associated with Dharma-pūjā in Rajpur as in many other places similarly aligns the Dharma cult with tribal cults and, also, as we would argue, with the carnivals. During the month of Vaiśākha, on the Buddha Purnima day, when the Dharma *mela* or fair is held in Rajpur, hundreds or even thousands come to participate in the *mela*. About a week before the auspicious full moon night, the drummers set out to announce the occasion, and word is sent to all the "swajāti" (people of the same caste) in various villages. The annual *mela* attracts a large number of participants. Upper caste worshippers also visit the fair, but it is of special significance for the community of Dharma worshippers. The *mela* also serves as a temporary marketplace for exchange of goods and merchandise. These fairs, often associated with Dharma worship, suggest that he is an everyday god, connected to the daily needs of the people. The *lokāyata* tradition is based on the material needs of the people, their problems, their fears, and their aspirations. Therefore, worship of Dharma remains connected with the collective material needs of the people, of trade, exchange of goods, of buying and selling, much in conformity with the popular tenets of the *lokāyata* tradition.
As the Dharma cult centres on the mela, the latter aligns it with the carnivals and distances it from the strict decorum and order of a codified religion even as it emphasizes the material aspect over the spiritual nature of worship. According to Mikhail Bakhtin, "liberties were fully revealed in the festive square when all hierarchic barriers were lifted and a true familiar contact was established." 22

The 'liberties' extend a Dharma worshipper to reach out to other more egalitarian religions. Chitubala, mentioned earlier, talked of the similarity between Ratan Gaji's mela and the Dharmanathakur mela and the participation of both communities (the Dharmites and Muslims) in each other's festivals. Dharma pūjā in many places witnesses the free and friendly participation of both Hindus and Muslims. For instance, in Jamalpur, Katwa, we heard of the symbolic sacrifice of a cow (without actually killing the cow the worshippers just offer it to the deity in a prayer and release it afterwards) by Muslim worshippers. The solidarity of class, over communalism or religious divide displayed in such cases takes us back to the references in the Dharmer Bandana, cited earlier, where, in order to stop the exploitation and ill-treatment of the lower castes by Brahmanas, Dharma Niranjana took the form of Khoda and punished the tyrannical Brahmanas.

The Rajpur pūjā suggests that Dharmanathakur is associated chiefly with the material welfare of his devotees. He has curative properties and ensures fertility. Although one perceives in 'sanskritization' a desire towards acceptance by caste Hindus, the simplified rituals, the absence or the relative brevity and simplification of mantra-s and the relative equality of women as far as rights of worship are concerned, the emphatic association of the spiritual with the material and the celebrations in the carnivals—all point to the predominance of elements of the tribal religion from which it derives. On the one hand, the worshippers show their desire to belong and to be accepted by the larger society; on the other, they tend to assert their independence by reverting to their tribal identity.

**Burrogachi**

In Burrogachi (Howrah), about thirty-five kilometres from Calcutta, there is a pukka Dharma temple, where Bagdis or Barga Kṣatriyas perform Dharma pūjā. In the Dharma temple, there is a tortoise-shaped stone or kūrma mūrti at the centre, flanked by images, icons, and pictures of Śaṅkhī, Śītalā, Olabibi. The rites of worship, like nityapūjā, snāna, annual pūjā are very similar to those practiced in Rajpur.
However, in certain respects, we noticed the prevalence of a higher degree of 'sanskritization' in Burrogachi. The priest here is male and his full-time occupation seems to be priesthood. He performs both the everyday rites and the more elaborate rituals of the annual pījā. In what seems to be a gesture of conformity with the patriarchal ideals of the Hindu religion, the women of the household, on enquiry, professed ignorance about mantra-s and rituals. The annual pījā, here, seems to involve a more elaborate chanting of mantra-s, with some borrowings from Śiva mantra-s. It seems, therefore, that at different places, Dharma worship presents varying degrees of 'sanskritization' as regards the practice of rituals.

However, in a significant manifestation of the dual tendency already noticed, despite the prevalence of a higher degree of 'sanskritization', Dharma worship also reaches out to popular cults and establishes Dharma's fraternity with goddesses of the lokāyata tradition. The goddesses who are placed by Dharma's side in the Burrogachi temple are all goddesses belonging to the popular tradition, associated with diseases common in rural Bengal—Śaṭṭhi, goddess of childbirth or children's well-being, Śītalā, goddess of small pox, measles and their prevention, Olabibi, goddess of cholera and its prevention. Placing Dharma by the side of these goddesses suggests the similar character of all these popular deities. Like his sister goddesses, Dharma is assigned curative functions, and like Śaṭṭhi, he is associated with fertility as he is supposed to cure sterility. He is, therefore, credited with procuring material weal rather than aiding in any spiritual insight. This is as it should be because popular religion does not conform to the abstract concepts of codified religions and evolves its own religious practices in response to people's needs.

Significantly, Olabibi and her sisters are worshipped by Muslims as well as by the lower classes of the Hindus. In the Hindu dominated areas, they look more like Laxmi and Saraswati even as their headdresses and ornaments show some Islamic influence. However, in Muslim-majority areas, they wear sa/war, kameez, etc., and look more like Muslim girls. But, they are called by the same names everywhere, both by Hindus and Muslims. Such practices suggest that the deprived sections of the two communities have similar needs and attitudes towards popular religion. That Dharma is aligned with such goddesses suggests, again, a reaching out towards egalitarian religions on the part of the Dharma worshippers.
Mahishagoat. Domjur

About thirty kilometres from Calcutta, in the Bagdi-dominated village of Mahishagoat, Dharmathakur is worshipped at the house of Safal Pandit, who presides over the pūjā. The deities are housed in a semi-pukka building, in front of which is a natmandir, or a square, open space, covered with a tin roof. Inside the temple, there are a number of tortoise images in stone—all of them manifestations of Dharma in various capacities, e.g., Dhairya Narayan Dharma, Kalu Ray Dharma, Yatra Siddhi Dharma, Swarup Narayan Dharma. The images of Śiva (the lingam), Panchanan śilā and the goddess Śitalā also occur there. Numerous clay horses or pictures of horses, including their embroidered representations, lie around. On the left side of the temple is a Śiva lingam of white marble. The connection between Śiva and Dharma is close and both are worshipped in the same temple in many places. Significantly, wherever Brahmana priests and worshippers prevail, the mantra and rites of Śiva pūjā seem to be superseding the rites of Dharma pūjā. For example, the Śiva mantra is chanted during Dharmapuja at the temple in Jamalpur, Katwa, where the priest is from a Brahmana family. However, in places like Mahishagoat, Dharma worship takes precedence over Śiva as the officiating priest is Bagdi.

The rites of the pūjā and the attendant practices—feats of endurance, dancing and singing—are, on the whole, similar, with minor variations, to those observed in other places of Dharma worship, although such feats are more elaborate and lengthier here than what is practiced in Rajpur (Twenty-Parganas). Daily pūjā as well as the annual celebration are also held here. For the annual pūjā, from the first Tuesday of the month of Falguna, the śilā would be bathed in the pond of the village regularly for eleven days. The various tests of endurance that the worshippers undergo include dandi kata, (also called astanga in some places), which would mean covering a considerable distance by alternately lying down and then, getting up and standing on the spot where one’s head was, and lying down again. Sessions of recitation of the Dharma Mangal tales accompanied by singing and dancing continue for twelve days. The feats of endurance, story-telling and dancing, etc. take place in the adjoining covered space in front of the temple. There is a small tank at a corner of the natmandir, and wooden planks are placed on either side of it. Two people stand on each side and tap the planks with their feet to keep time, while others recite tales from the Dharma
Mangal, in the manner of tales told of Ranjabati, Harish Chandra, etc. They also improvise a makeshift stage on one side from which they jump over, in imitation of Ranjabati’s ‘sale bhar deoa,’ an act of penance to procure Dharma’s blessing to attain her wish. The tests of physical prowess of skill and dancing are all associated with bodily activities and have affiliations with the lokāyata tradition. Even the practice of reading from the Dharma Mangal, in which the audience and the speaker share a common enjoyment of adventurous and romantic narratives in the vernacular, belongs to the popular religious tradition. Such narratives differ significantly from esoteric, Sanskrit religious texts.

As in the other places, ‘sanskritizing’ gestures and practices coexist with elements of tribal cults. The priest here displayed an intimate knowledge of the Dharma Mangal and sought to justify the prevalence of religious rites by drawing parallels from the text and associated the animal sacrifices, which took place during the twelve days of the annual pūjā, with mutilation and deaths that the Dharma Mangal tells us about. His desire to show that the actual rites derive from written literature is perhaps in keeping with the Brahmanical tradition, but, interestingly, he seeks to defend animal sacrifice, which, on the whole, is restricted in the Brahmanical culture. Sacrifice of goats, pigeons, and ducks takes place, one on each of these twelve days. Although nitya pūjā involves the offering of non-boiled rice and sugar cubes (batasa) to the deity, animal sacrifices are indispensable during the annual function of twelve days. The choice of ducks and pigeons for sacrifice suggests an affinity between tribal religions and the Dharma cult.

In a curious instance of ‘sanskritization,’ the priest appeared reluctant to mention the sacrifice of any animal other than goats, but other sources mention that Dharma pūjā involves sacrifices of birds and other animals. If we go back to the practices of the Brahmanical religion, we see that animal sacrifices entailed primarily the sacrifice of a goat. Non-animal sacrifices involved offerings of milk and vegetable substances or even of mantra-s. In Brahmanical culture, sacrifice has a complex symbolic value. The śrāuta rituals require that as dikṣita (one undergoing dikṣa), an individual must make an offering of himself (ātman). In dikṣā, through acts of asceticism (tapas), the dikṣita “takes on the aspect of an embryo to be reborn through the rite. This then prepares him to make the sacrificial offering proper (the yajña “sacrifice”) as a means to redeem or ransom this self by the substance (animal or otherwise) offered”.
By contrast, animal sacrifice seems to take the form of a gesture of appeasement of the deity in less sophisticated tribal religions, and sacrifice in Dharma worship carries predominantly the overtones of appeasement or propitiation. Even the tales of Dharma Mangal, on which the priests generally draw as justification for the practice, have this significance.

The status and duties of priesthood in Dharma worship evince a mixture of Brahmanical practices and indigenous rites. Although the Bagdi priest does not wear the sacred thread common to Brahmanas, he and others intimately associated with the performance of the rites are supposed to attain some special status during the twelve days of the annual pūjā. The priest’s wearing of a symbolic copper ring or bangle tamra dharan indicates that ritual status. He also has to observe a fast. Śiva-, Kāli- and Mansa pūjā-s are performed in the Mahishagoat village with a population of two hundred Bagdis. Earlier, even Durga pūjā used to be performed there. Brahmana priests officiate in all the pūjā-s except that of Mansa, in which generally Bagdi priests preside. Dharma pūjā, is of course, the most important pūjā in the village. Significantly, the Bagdi priest performs the pūjā-s of the relatively marginalized non-Vedic deities like Dharma and Mansa. By contrast, Śiva and Kāli, although not necessarily Vedic (because Kāli is non-Vedic, and Śiva, in his popular form, is not quite Vedic), are deities of the orthodox system. The status-divide between mainstream Vedic and marginalized non-Vedic deities prevails, and the Dharma worshippers remain as the ‘other’ in Hindu society.

Again, as an indication of the difference between the Brahmanical religion and the Dharma cult, we see that women, if they choose to wear the copper ring like men, acquire the rights accorded to a priest. This concession points to the contrast between the relatively egalitarian attitude towards women among the worshippers of Dharma and the extremely subordinated position of women among the upper caste Hindus as far as rites of worship are concerned. Only a male Brahmana is entitled to wear the sacred thread and undergo the upanayana ceremony in Hindu religious systems.

Religion reflects the attitude prevalent in social practices. As such, if we analyse the reasons for the egalitarian status of men and women among the low castes and outcastes, mentioned earlier, it may take us back to the cult of “mother right” current among the indigenous population in non-Vedic Indian society. The Vedic society was pastoral in nature, while the non-Vedic indigenous societies of India
were, by and large, agricultural. By comparing different societies at their earliest stages, Debiprasad Chattopadhyay proves that "agriculture was the invention of women. Therefore, the initial phase of agricultural economy witnessed the social superiority of the female." According to Thomson, "shifting tensions in the relations of the sexes to the mode of production explain the rise of patrilineal descent. The process began with hunting, and was intensified by cattle-raising, but in the initial phase of agriculture it was reversed". There are some differences between this theory and the theory of Dalit alignment with the hunter-gatherer tribes that Nathan has suggested (see above). However, since the tribes in Bengal were mostly cultivators, the contention regarding gender-equality among the proto-Australoid tribes as opposed to the more patriarchal nature of Vedic society remains valid. It is possible to argue that the shift from a predominantly agricultural to a pastoral economy led, to a large extent, to the degradation and subordination of women in Vedic societies.

These case studies show that the Dharma cult has elements of Brahmanical religion as well as of tribal religion. The two imply two different worldviews. The first is hierarchical, doctrinaire, esoteric, inaccessible, characterized by complex and sophisticated rituals. The second is egalitarian, spontaneous, accessible, characterized by the popular logic of simplicity and unabashed materialism. The subaltern search for identity in a society which incorporates the indigenous tribes into its fold while relegating them to a position of perpetual dependence and inferiority is characterized by two conflicting inclinations—one, to conform to the accepted mores and to win approval by the larger society, and two, to assert their deviant yet distinctive identity, the sense of which they have retained. The contradictory tendencies in the Dharma cult that they practice symbolize the divisive nature of their identity appropriately.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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1. Dharmathakur is generally regarded as the deity of the Rarh region. Asutosh Bhattacharya demarcates the area where Dharmathakur is worshipped as bounded in the north by Birbhum district's northern side, in the west by the Bhagirathi River, in the south by the Twenty-four Parganas and Midnapore, and in the east by Santal Pargana's eastern boundary. Asutosh Bhattacharya, Banglar Lokshruti, Calcutta: Amartya Prakash, 1985, p. 79.
14. M. N. Srinivas, in *The Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India*, has referred to 'sanskritization', in the following way:
   A low caste was able in a generation or two, to rise to a higher position in the hierarchy by adopting vegetarianism and teetotalism, and by sanskritizing its ritual and pantheon. In short, it took over as far as possible, the customs, rites, and beliefs of the Brahmins and the adoption of the Brahminic way of life by a low caste seems to have been frequent, though theoretically forbidden. This process has been called sanskritization in this book, in preference to Brahminization, as certain Vedic rites are confined to Brahmins and the two other twice-born castes.
Reflections on Language, Consciousness and Mass Media

RANA NAYAR

This paper investigates the interrelationship present in three constituents of discourse, namely, language, consciousness and mass media and then locates this entire question within the overarching framework of contemporary Indian reality. As this investigation is not possible unless a definitive, critical position is sought strictly with respect to the paradigmatic relationship of language and consciousness, an attempt shall be made to do so. Apparently, this in turn pre-supposes that the archaeology of the philosophic tradition be excavated so as to historicize this whole question. In the first section of this paper therefore, an attempt is made to hypothesize a philosophical position specific to this question of fundamental importance. In the second section, this relationship will be historicized by presenting a bird’s-eye view of the different philosophical positions available to us. In the third section, the relationship between language and mass media shall be considered with special reference to some of the developments in India in recent times. And finally, we shall locate the ideological grids of both the English medium and vernacular newspapers so as to establish how as the purveyors of mass culture namely: newspapers, often indulge in linguistic distortions, resulting in grotesque portrayals of reality. Following this logic, the contradictions of mass culture and the dangerous ideological implications of this for both language and consciousness will be examined.

I

One of the epistemological questions that has frequently intrigued philosophers has to do with the way in which the relationship between ‘consciousness’ and ‘language’ is to be negotiated. Beyond doubt, though philosophers have repeatedly been engaged with this question,
somehow the result of their investigation has been less than satisfactory. There are several reasons for this. First, both consciousness and language are often mediated as absolutist, abstracted categories, constituting two distinct, well-differentiated discourses with only peripheral contact and/or intersection. Second, this tends to introduce a sense of essentialism into our understanding of these two categories, which comes in by way of binarism, even dualism, setting one category off against the other as an oppositional discourse. So long as the debate remains mired in one kind of binarism or the other, it is almost impossible to avoid the pitfalls of 'either-or' reasoning.

What is needed here is not the structural but the relational understanding of these two categories, in which each serves to delimit, define, demarcate and constitute the other. From this standpoint, the real question is not whether it is the language that precedes consciousness or vice-versa, but rather how and under what conditions the intersection or interpenetration of both language and consciousness becomes possible, if at all. Third, it leads the entire discussion into the most familiar trope of Western epistemology that aims at constituting or re-constituting hierarchical structures out of these two categories, often making it difficult, if not impossible, for us to perceive them in purely relational terms. (Hierarchy, to my mind, doesn't really help constitute a relationship; it simply decomposes it.) Fourth, it pushes us deeper into that classic impasse (from where there is no escape perhaps), of whether it is consciousness that is a priori to language or it is the language that could be said to delimit the nature and function of consciousness. This question of a priori-ness further brings us up against the all-too-familiar epistemological impasse, sealing off the limits of the discourse, and blocking off all possibility of arriving at definitive positions.

II

My purpose in enumerating these epistemological problems in relation to both consciousness and language at the beginning is simply to underscore the problematic of this complex issue that we try to address, examine and perhaps interrogate in different situations. Now I shall proceed with a brief overview of Western philosophy in an effort to identify the shifting paradigms of this problematic relationship. However, my effort here would not be so much to initiate
an extended debate on each of these paradigms but merely to sketch out their outline or contours, as anything beyond that could easily take this essay off at a tangent.

We could start off by looking at the rationalist construction of consciousness, as has been put forward by Rene Descartes. For it was he who believed that nothing could really exist outside the mind or consciousness and went so far as to say that "Cogito ergo sum" i.e. "I think, therefore, I'm." Not only did he over-value consciousness, but also assigned to it an all-enveloping, all-subsuming function. In his scheme of things, language is no more than a necessary adjunct to or an attribute of consciousness; it has no extensionality of its own and exists only to facilitate its multiple functions.

For John Locke, the English empiricist, more than the mind and/or consciousness, it was the idea of self-consciousness that was extremely important. His concept of mind, which he described as a kind of tabula rasa, emphasized not only its transparency but also its accessibility to the 'thinking subject.' It is a well-known fact that Locke's model did not make any allowances for 'unconscious thinking,' (which could be said to carry the imprint of the language as well as culture), and which later had to be schematized and hypothesized by Freud in his writings some three centuries later. Despite the essential ontological and epistemological differences between the two ideological perspectives, the Locke's empiricist model appears to be as much a product of Euro-centric binarism as Descarte's model is.

Though Husserl is often recognized as one of the main proponents of modern phenomenology, another name for the science of consciousness, it was Hegel's Phenomenology of Mind that kick-started investigations in this field as early as 1807. Conceiving reality as a living, evolving and a dynamic process, Hegel sought to identify logic with metaphysics or ontology, thus emphasizing both the differentiated as well as unified nature of both thought and being, subject and object. In a manner of speaking, it was Hegel's 'phenomenological model' that offered a real possibility, which had long eluded the Western thought, of overriding the ever-present dualism and seeking a relational, synthesized understanding of language, consciousness and reality. However, what really stood in the way of its realization was Hegel's own ontological position that posited that 'essence is the appearance' or 'God is the universe.' By thus absolutizing the transcendental reality, he created another
binarism in terms of spiritual and material reality, without actually providing the apparatus for working out their mutual symbiosis or dialectics. And that possibility had to await realization until Karl Marx appeared on the scene with his 'materialist model of consciousness.'

I would like to sketch out this particular model in a somewhat detailed fashion as I intend following it up to comprehend the precise nature of connectivity in all the three categories, viz., language, consciousness and social reality. The materialist view perceives consciousness as "a sum total of mental processes that participate in man's understanding of the objective world and of his personal being." This view obviously postulates that it is man's attitude to the world, reflected in his understanding and knowledge of the objects that constitutes his consciousness. Moreover, this model offers a real possibility of connecting language and consciousness, as apart from being historically constituted, both are perceived as instruments of collective social and psychological transformation.

If I have been somewhat partial to this materialist understanding of consciousness, it is not because I take it to be the final statement on the subject, but only because I find its functionalism extremely serviceable, even efficacious for my own analysis. Somewhere when we do reflect upon this relationship of language with consciousness, we have an unstated expectation that the transformative power of each in relation to the other should not only be recognized but tapped as well. The materialist model does not just posit language as an extension or an attribute of consciousness but as a separate sub-system that has the potential to transform consciousness as much as it could effectively be transformed by consciousness in turn. In this kind of schematic conceptualization, language, consciousness and social reality truly become relational categories, intersecting, interpenetrating, defining, delimiting and demarcating the boundaries of each other. Language becomes an intermediate category, mediating between consciousnesses on the one hand and social reality on the other. Once this intermediate quality of the language is realized, it is possible then for us to start exploring the middle ground, which makes a reasonable plea, should I say, no, not for self-limiting 'either-or' but more inclusive and encompassing 'both-and' logic?

Though Husserl's model has not quite figured in this discussion, it might be interesting to point out that his reflections on phenomenology appeared when Germany was passing through an unprecedented internal crisis. It was the growing influence of
fascism upon the popular mind that had split the German society almost vertically. Though it might be somewhat difficult to look upon Husserl's phenomenology as a potent weapon of resistance or a strategy of overturning the existing patterns of thought, it could certainly be perceived as the refuge of those tormented in consciousness or as the mainstay of bruised intellects. Perhaps reflections on language and consciousness become absolutely necessary, when our consciousness is as much under an assault as are our powers of thought, expression or language?

III

By its very nature, mass media makes egregious concessions to the prejudices, biases, bigotry and stereotypical ideas of the masses. To put it in another way, the mass media plays a conformist and not a critical function in shaping or determining the consciousness of the people it purports or claims to serve. If mass media were to assume the critical function and seek to interrogate, attack or overturn the established opinions of people, it would perhaps cease to be a tool of communication and instead would become a purveyor of selective, critical information. This, in turn, would impose severe limitations upon the media especially in terms of its wider acceptability among the people. For any mass media to circumscribe itself would be nothing short of hara-kiri or suicide. Therefore, mass media can never afford to run against the grain of the popular opinions and prejudices, most of which need to be corrected or critiqued.

It is no coincidence that in the post-liberalized economy, newspapers in India suddenly went through a frenzied shift, not necessarily in terms of redefining their role or function but, in assuming a brand-like quality. If we look at the way in which newspapers like The Times of India and The Hindustan Times have undergone a radical face-lift, it becomes apparent that large scale concessions are being made to the overruling, overarching logic of market forces. For some inexplicable reason, it was believed that this was the only way in which newspapers could have possibly survived in a consumerist culture with its ever-shifting gaze and a fragmentary, spliced up reality reducible into a million splintered micro images. It was this basic Darwinian impulse for survival in the market that has brought newspapers in line with other disposable consumer products such as tooth pastes, hamburgers and cokes. What makes the matters worse is that this has put a big question
mark over the credibility of the newspapers and the news being purveyed by them. Under such circumstances, newspapers are almost compelled to give a sense of legitimacy to the uncritical, conformist, standardized language for purveying or communicating whatever information has to be given.

To give a concrete example of this—in any newspaper or magazine writing on fundamentalism, terrorism or communal riots, one rarely reads an analysis in which attempt is made either to go into the history of fundamentalism, terrorism or communal riots or to define the terms of reference. More often than not, the conceptual framework of ideas is left undefined in the hope that such terms are so deeply embedded in popular consciousness that they need no further investigation or critique. I cannot recall having read even a single article in which a systematic attempt was made to differentiate between such terms as Hinduism and Hindutva, an all-important distinction that ought to be made, as each constitutes a different discourse.

Needless to say, our English newspapers do not in the least suffer from the burden of “anxiety of influence” and often tend to view Indian reality in exactly the same way in which either The Guardian or The New York Times would view it. Not many self-conscious attempts are made to see how the burden of the language could also, in certain cases, become the burden of the ideology and, therefore, of representation. No wonder, often enough, our newspapers begin to perceive our domestic situations and events through the eyes of foreign correspondents. Once I remember having read a front-page, four-column news item in The Herald Tribune about how, on the demise of Mother Teresa, Sister Nirmala had been appointed as the head of the Sisters of Charity Mission. What indeed shocked me about this report was the way in which it had tried, very painstakingly, to privilege and foreground the fact that Sister Nirmala was essentially a Hindu, who had later converted to Christianity and was now being installed as a head of a Christian mission. I wonder how many of us would actually be bothered with the religious identity of Sister Nirmala! I'm not suggesting that this kind of “divisive consciousness” about religious identity is the creation of the mass media. All I'm saying is that the Orientalist project of (mis) representation that started during the colonial rule has still not ended in the academies and institutions of the West. And further that they continue to create stereotypical structures of knowledge and consciousness about us, that too, in a language, whose dominance over our own languages is unquestionable.
What is worse, oblivious of its ideological implications, our newsmen, especially in the English media, through their refusal to critique such representations, often end up showing complicity with this project. This is how the Euro-centric view of India as a primitive, undeveloped society, still struggling with its archival combination of violence, bigotry and religious identity gains both popularity and legitimacy, eclipsing and obscuring in the process its multifarious economic successes and development activities.

If our English language media has failed to liberate itself from the hegemonic influence of the ideology of the language in which it operates, our media of the regional languages has largely been hegemonized by our English language media. One of the marketing strategies that Dainik Bhaskar, a Hindi daily that claims to have a readership close to 15 million, adopted during its launch in the Punjab region (in September 2000) was to emphasize that it offers everything that a good English newspaper can, plus it is in Hindi. It was as if apologetic of being a regional newspaper, Dainik Bhaskar suffered from some anxiety of donning a national identity, not by competing with the best of Hindi dailies, but rather with the best of English dailies available in the market. Is it not, once again, a case of internalizing the ideological burden and thus indulging in self- 'inferiorization', rather than self-promotion?

One might turn around and say that it is not for the mass media to interrogate and critique the inferiorization of both language and representation. Rather, its function is to give legitimacy and sanction to it. After all, why should it be left to the mass media to make an all-important distinction in terms of a great literary work by Shakespeare or Kalidasa and a popular brand of cigarette? As far as it goes, both are to be understood as two manifestations of a "classic." This kind of anachronism, I dare say, is built into the very nature of mass media and all other organs of mass culture as well. Not only does it trivialize the serious but it also vulgarizes it, sanctifying at the same time, something that only deserves little or perhaps no notice or attention. This is how the mass culture ends up giving a covert sense of legitimacy to what Shestakov, a Russian literary critic, very appropriately, chooses to describe as the 'aesthetics of the trivial'.

Another anachronism that the mass culture first brings into play and then legitimizes has to do with the overturning of the classic dualism of 'quality' versus 'quantity.' The strongest impulse of mass culture is to make more and more goods and products available for the consumption of more and more people. As mass culture is a
quantity-oriented system, quantifying goods, products and people with the same kind of eagerness and urgency, often it becomes a pre-text for the 'commodification' of people and 'humanization' of lifeless objects such as computers, television sets and other appurtenances of consumerist haute coutre. It is the result of this kind of quantification that human beings are often denied a sense of reality and subjectivity, and thus fall easy prey to the multiple processes of objectification.

In such a situation, gender often does not matter as both men and women are as readily subjected to the processes of objectification as goods and objects intrinsically are. And when attempts at objectification become overbearing or overwhelming, the threatened subjectivity often re-orders its strategies of survival by escaping into the self-structured worlds of fantasy, mythology, narcotic pleasure or narcissistic contemplation of the self. This aspect of the mass culture has been very convincingly analysed by the American writer Christopher Lasch in his book *The Culture of Narcissism.*\(^1\) Analysing all the aspects of contemporary culture—politics, art, literature, sports, advertising and education—he comes to the conclusion that each of them is characterized by the phenomenon of narcissism. All of this, in his view, is linked with the appearance of a new type of an individual for whom the world is nothing but a mirror in which he is reflected. “Narcissism remains at its most precise a metaphor, and nothing more, that describes a state of mind in which the world appears as a mirror of the self.”\(^1\) Needless to add, that this kind of ‘narcissistic self,’ living as it does in a perpetual state of flight from the reality, is certainly exposed to a greater danger than anyone else to the multiple processes of self-mutilation, self-destruction and gradual dissolution of being. Although Christopher Lasch has essentially made the American mass culture of 1960s the target of his attack, his analysis assumes an alarming significance for our understanding of contemporary Indian society.

IV

In my modest opinion, in the first decade of the 21\(^{st}\) century, we in India are definitely in the vice-like grip of the psychological, cultural crisis that had assailed America and its peopel in 1960s. If we do go along with this proposition, then in our consumerist culture, mass media has only one consideration and one function namely, its growing concern to stay in the market. Its losing battle of survival,
Reflections on Language, Consciousness and Mass Media

its narcissistic pre-occupation with its own fantasies and mythologies. As its propensity to perceive the world in terms of its own struggles and survival has increased manifold, mass media's potential to become a mirror to the society has proportionately diminished and decreased. Only a media free from the clutches of the market forces can possibly serve the cause of democracy; not a media whose ideology is already underwritten by the multiple grids of various forces, economic, social and political. Media that is obsessed with its own angularities and distortions cannot afford to take upon itself the onerous task of reflecting, mediating or analysing the angularities or distortions of the society it operates within.

With the exception of two newspapers in India, one located in the northern and the other in the southern region, which are run by a public trust, and a family owned trust respectively; all other big, small and marginal newspapers in India owe their existence either to the corporate houses, business barons or the political parties. For business barons, the motive of profit maximization or power brokering clearly supercedes all altruistic considerations of objectivity and neutrality. Whereas such a laudable aim does not even appear on the agenda of those ideologically inclined newspapers that unabashedly serve as the organs of various political parties.

Where does it all lead to us, ultimately? Perhaps, nowhere. As we stand at this crucial juncture of history, and look at this mish-mash of language, consciousness and mass media, all thoughts of their individual or collective redemptive powers seem to desert us. Perhaps, for us, there is nothing more than this long, extended sigh of despair or these puzzling reflections, which may not leave us any wiser, after all.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. In his famous work, Discourse on the Method (1637) Rene Descartes initially developed this notion of the non-corporeal, non-material nature of the 'thinking self.' It's another matter that the term 'consciousness' was used in his writings only implicitly and indirectly. According to him, 'thought' was not only restricted to cognitive activities but included everything we often attribute to 'consciousness.' This idea, which otherwise constitutes the core of the Cartesian system, became the foundation of his epistemology, as it postulated a neat division between mind and body, thereby giving rise to the problem of mind-body dualism. However, Descartes propounded the notion of 'Cogito Ergo Sum' in his Meditations (1641), wherein he clearly emphasized the primacy of
consciousness. His views on language did not emerge until he wrote his *Principles of Philosophy* (1644), wherein he described language as non-material nature of the 'thinking self.' Since my understanding of these ideas is derived largely from my readings of different works of Descartes, no specific reference is being made here.

2. My understanding of the 'empirical model' of the relationship between the 'language' and 'consciousness' is essentially based upon John Locke's famous work *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* Ed., John W. Yolton, London: Dent, 1961. In this work he also develops the idea of human mind as 'tabula rasa'.


7. This phrase is derived from the title of Harold Bloom’s book *Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973). In this particular work, Bloom has interpreted the whole process of creativity in Freudian terms. According to him, the creative process is a way of overcoming the anxiety that literary influences create in the mind of the creative writer. The process of writing is, therefore, a process of outgrowing one’s influences, and often involves the 'ritualistic killing of the father principle' (with its specific Oedipal overtones) and is seen as the only way of coming to terms with this ‘anxiety.’ What is significant about Bloom’s conceptualization is that he places this paradigm specifically within the matrix of Western history, thought and philosophy.


Dynamism of South Asian Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA)

G.S. KUSWAHA

The international economic environment is changing fast. Liberalization, globalization and rationalization are taking place rapidly in the world economy, in which so far South Asia is lagging behind. In this context, SAPTA may be considered as a landmark in the process of trade cooperation among the SAARC countries. It will, on the one hand silence the critics that SAARC is only for resolutions and recommendations and on the other hand, it will pave the way for intensive trade cooperation. SAPTA, using Rostow’s terminology, can be considered as a ‘take off stage’ in the process of trade cooperation. It will gradually and smoothly lead not only to a free trade area but beginning with a free trade area and moving to a common market, it will ultimately result in the forming of a South Asian Economic Union. This will fulfill the aspirations expressed in the 11th SAARC Summit, held in January 2002 at Kathmandu.

SAPTA occupies a crucial place in the South Asian Regional Trade Cooperation. We will give the salient features of SAPTA in brief.

Basic Principles and objectives

The basic principles and objectives of SAPTA are given in the Agreement. The Preamble of the Agreement rightly points out,

... that the expansion of trade could act as a powerful stimulus to the development of their national economies by expanding investment and production, providing greater opportunities of employment and help, securing higher living standard for their population.... Bearing in mind the urgent need to promote the intra-regional trade, which presently constitutes a negligible share in the total volume of the South Asian Trade, [it was rightly recognized in the Summit that] preferential Trading Arrangements is the first step towards higher levels of trade and economic cooperation in the region.
Article 3 of the Agreement states the basic principles—

'SAPTA shall be based and applied on the principles of overall reciprocity and mutuality of advantages in such a way as to benefit equitably all contracting State'. (3a).

SAPTA shall be negotiated step by step, improved and extended in successive stages with periodic reviews'. (3b). SAPTA has taken care of the special problems of least developed members of the SAARC also.

Article (3c) states, 'the special needs of the Least Developed Contracting States shall be clearly recognized and concrete preferential measures in their favour should be agreed upon'.

Article (3d) further states that SAPTA 'shall include all products, manufactures and commodities in their raw, semi processed and processed forms'.

Thus, the purpose of SAPTA is not only well defined and broad based but is according to the needs and requirements of South Asian Countries. SAPTA is the step in the right direction.

'Components' and 'Additional Measures' of the Preferential Agreement

Articles 4 and 6 are important in the Agreement as they contain 'component' (Article 4) and 'Additional Measures' (Article 6) for the preferential agreement. SAPTA will include arrangements relating to tariffs, para-tariffs, non-tariff measures and direct trade measures. It is obvious that the inclusion of all these aspects in the preferential agreement will give a boost to trade expansion and trade may become a leading sector in the South Asian economies. In addition to these, as is clear from Article 6 (1), 'the adoption of trade facilitation and other measures to support and complement SAPTA to mutual benefit' will further help in expanding trade.

Special Consideration to the Least Developing Members of the SAARC

Article 10 of the SAPTA provides special Treatment for the least Developed Contracting State and Annex 1 provides 'additional measures in favour of least developed contracting States'. This is important in any arrangement/agreement for cooperation in general and trade cooperation in particular. As all the member countries are at different levels of development, it is necessary and important that precautions must be taken to avoid any harmful aspect or distortion in their markets as a result of equal or proportionate tariff cuts applicable to all members. Besides, some preferential treatment has
to be given. In fact, the policy of non-discrimination requires discrimination between least developed and other members. This alone will ensure non-discrimination. SAPTA has adopted this attitude so that the benefits are equally distributed among member countries to enable all member countries to move onto a higher level of development. Article 10 of the SAPTA outlines the measures regarding 'special treatment for the least developed contracting States.

Besides special treatment to Least Developed Members, Article 12 is very significant as it will accelerate and intensify the process of cooperation for mutual benefit and advantage. South Asia, geographically speaking, is almost compact and therefore any agreement will require an efficient and economical system of transport and communications including transit facilities. According to Article 12, ‘Contracting States agree to undertake appropriate steps and measures for developing and improving communication system, transport infrastructure and transit facilities for accelerating the growth of trade within the region’. In fact, this is a pre-condition for any scheme of regional trade cooperation. As almost all the South Asian countries have common boundaries, it is necessary that the transport and communication system must be very efficient.

*Tariff Negotiations*

Tariff Negotiations are the most important as liberalization of trade will open up vast opportunities for developmental cooperation in the SAARC region. Article 5 deals with negotiations for the preferential arrangement among the SAARC countries. The Agreement has left the option to member countries to follow any one or a combination of the following approaches and procedures. There are four alternative approaches, namely: Product-by-Product basis, Across-the-Board tariff reductions, Sectoral basis and Direct Trade Measures. It was agreed upon by the South Asian Countries to negotiate tariff preferences initially on a Product-by-Product basis.

*Rules of Origin* are important and significant as the determining factor for the success of the Preferential Agreement. Article 16 deals with the rules of origin, which are set out in Annex III of the Agreement. Products can either be wholly-produced or Not wholly-produced. The real issue is about ‘Not wholly-produced or obtained products’. The basic rule is that 50% of the Free on Board (F.O.B) value of the products, is added within the territory of the exporting member countries.
SAPTA has been ratified by all the members and as per the provisions of the Article 22 Entry into force, the SAPTA agreement entered into force with effect from December 1995, on the eve of the Completion of First Decade of SAARC.

Operationalising of SAPTA in the New Millennium

Towards the close of the last century, SAARC members have taken a momentous decision, which will show results in the new century. Thus, the SAPTA must be considered as an outstanding achievement of the South Asian countries. It is neither a transitional approach nor a historical necessity—transitional approach in the sense of tiding over certain problems and historical necessity as there is trend towards regionalism. It is however a means to an end. The end is rapid economic development. A Preferential agreement will increase the overall efficacy and productivity in South Asia on the one hand, and will enable these countries to face external competition, on the other. Technically speaking, keeping in the mind the different stages of Trade Cooperation, it comes very close to the formation of a free trade area. In a free trade area, goods and commodities move freely within the area and in this case preferential treatment will be given to the South Asian products to increase intra-regional trade.

SAARC’s intention, rather determination to form a free trade area by 2005 will depend upon the successful outcome of SAPTA. We must admit, and there is no doubt, that SAPTA marks the first major initiative towards enabling South Asia to emerge as a trading block.

Gamini Corea, former Secretary General of UNCTAD at a country Seminar on SAPTA held in Colombo on 3 August 1994 expressed his opinion as follows:

I greatly welcome the SAPTA agreement. I think it is a milestone in the evolution of SAARC. SAARC was set up in 1985 and it was surely in need of some evidence of concrete progress. Now with the SAPTA agreement, with the initiatives taken on poverty alleviation and in the realm of other activities, . . . I think that the logic of SAPTA is essentially to provide what I would call a transect within a liberalisation process that is in any case under way, but which, by virtue of its concentration on the region will help to speed up and intensify that process. SAPTA is not a defensive programme as it might have been ten or fifteen years ago. It is one, which is now trying to incorporate the SAARC region itself in its own interchanges with processes and trends that are taking place on a wider canvas.

It is important to quote the inaugural address of P.V. Narasimha Rao, the then Prime Minister of India in the SAARC Commerce
Ministers Meeting held in January 1996. His observation is important. 'More than everything else, our aim should be to develop that indefinable yet very palpable, SAARC Personality both for our own purpose, and for the whole world outside the region'. The term 'SAARC Personality' has very important and significant implications. In trade, it can be interpreted to imply SAARC goods, i.e. goods manufactured in SAARC region without naming any member country for example, SAARC Tea, SAARC Jute, SAARC Steel and so on. It can be experimented in some select goods to begin with. The world market will consider the quality and the standard of the product. SAARC has to ensure this. SAARC’s chambers of Commerce and Industry can take initiative in this regard.

**Tariff Negotiations/Concessions**

Three rounds of tariff negotiations have taken place and the Fourth Round is almost complete and may be announced any day. Regarding the Fourth Round, it has been decided that the negotiations would, as far as possible be conducted on a Chapter-wise, Sectoral and Across-the-Board basis. The Tenth Summit (Colombo 1998) decided in favour of deeper tariff cuts for products, which are being actively traded or are likely to be traded among members. Further, discriminatory practices and non-tariff barriers should also be removed on the items included for tariff concessions. Attempts should also be made to remove structural impediments to facilitate the goal of a South Asian Free Trade Area. The First Meeting of the Inter-Governmental Group on Trade liberalization to initiate the Fourth Round of Trade Negotiations was held at SAARC Secretariat (Kathmandu) on 27th and 28th March 2002. Member Delegates from all SAARC countries participated and exchanged request lists (for Tariff concessions).

The Colombo Summit also gave directions to prepare a text for creating a Free Trade Area. A committee of experts for drafting a comprehensive Treaty Regime on a South Asian Free Trade Area has been constituted. The Committee, in its first meeting, which was held in July 1999 at Kathmandu, worked out its Broad Terms of Reference. The Treaty will include binding time frames for freeing trade and measures to facilitate Trade. The First Working Draft of the SAFTA has been prepared and is under consideration of the member states.

In the First Round, 226 commodities were taken up for concession, in the Second and Third Round, tariffs were reduced on 1868 and 3456 commodities, totaling to 5550. While making concessions,
SAARC has taken care of the needs of the least developed countries (LDCs). There are concessions, which are made to all countries, and there are concessions made only to LDCs. Concessions made to all countries are applicable to LDCs also but concessions made to LDCs are not applicable to other SAARC members.

**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Least Developed members only (LDCs)</th>
<th>All Members</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Depth Of Tariff Concessions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>155 (04.5)</td>
<td>564 (26.9)</td>
<td>719 (12.9)</td>
<td>10% and 15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhutan</td>
<td>188 (83.4)</td>
<td>64 (03.0)</td>
<td>182 (03.2)</td>
<td>10%, 13%, 15%, 18% and 20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>2450 (70.8)</td>
<td>477 (22.8)</td>
<td>2927 (52.7)</td>
<td>10%, 15%, 20%, 30%, 40%, 50%, 90%, and 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maldives</td>
<td>20 (0.6)</td>
<td>370 (17.7)</td>
<td>390 (07.0)</td>
<td>5%, 7.5%, 10% and 15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>208 (06.0)</td>
<td>228 (10.8)</td>
<td>436 (07.9)</td>
<td>10% and 15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>417 (12.1)</td>
<td>271 (12.8)</td>
<td>688 (12.4)</td>
<td>19%, 15%, 20% and 30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Srilanka</td>
<td>88 (02.6)</td>
<td>120 (05.7)</td>
<td>208 (3.8)</td>
<td>10%, 15%, 20%, 30%, 50%, 60%, and 75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>3456 (62.3)</strong></td>
<td><strong>2094 (37.7)</strong></td>
<td><strong>5550</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source – SAARC Publications.
Note: Figures in brackets are in percentages.

Out of 5550 concessions, 2094 concessions are for all member countries and 3456 of those are for LDCs only. Thus, 62.3% of concessions are for LDCs only. If we analyse this country wise, India accounts for 52.7% of the total concessions and more than 70% of all the concessions made to LDCs only. LDCs among the SAARC are actively participating in tariff concessions. Bangladesh and Nepal have granted concessions to a large number of commodities. In fact, Bangladesh occupies the second place in total concessions and the first place in concessions given to all members of the SAARC. The Maldives occupy the third place in concessions given to all members. Pakistan comes after the Maldives and is closely followed by Nepal.
It is not only that a maximum number of concessions are granted to LDCs in SAARC but all members also make higher reductions in tariff for LDCs. India again heads the list in terms of tariff concessions granted to LDCs that range from 10% to 100% on different commodities. Further, the number of commodities involving tariff concessions to LDCs has increased in the successive rounds of tariff negotiations. SAPTA has, therefore, taken care of the needs and requirements of Least Developed Members of the SAARC.

If we examine these concessions commodity group wise, we find that Food and Live Animals (SITC-0), Chemicals and Related Goods (SITC-5), Manufactured Goods Chiefly classified by Material (SITC-6), and Miscellaneous Manufactured Goods (SITC-8) account for more than three fourth (¾) of the total concessions. It is interesting to add that Least Developed Members have given concessions in the commodity group of Crude Materials Inedible except Fuels (SITC-2). The percentage share of this group is higher among the LDCs as compared to other members.

Thus, it can be said that the progress of SAPTA in tariff concessions is harmonious and equitable. In some cases, LDCs account for a higher percentage share. This explains its gradual and steady progress. This is true that SAARC achievements in the first decade prior to SAPTA were not outstanding. But the fact remains that it was never dormant for many years like the ASEAN. There was no crisis, as in the case of European Economic Community (now European Union) in the initial stages of tariff cuts. SAARC's existence was never in doubt as was the case with the EEC when France boycotted its meetings. SAPTA has considered all products, and is not limited to industrial products only as was the case with the European Free Trade Area and European Economic Community. This aspect of SAPTA makes it an entirely different and separate example of Regional Trade Cooperation.

This built in stability has imparted dynamism to SAPTA. It is necessary that SAARC should also consider trade-related problems and minimize its limiting effects to make SAPTA effectively operational. Two points need immediate attention.

1. **Value addition in traditional and other commodities**

   (a) There are a number of commodities, (Tea, for example), which
are exported in bulk or at an early stage of processing. South Asian countries export tea in bulk and its processing, blending and packaging is done elsewhere. As a result there is low realization of export value. Similarly, much of the value addition in garments takes place at the place of branding and marketing. These are the areas where individually little can be done. SAARC country exporters can take joint action. It will avoid mutual disadvantage. This should form a part of regional strategy (cooperation) and will enable South Asia to move to higher stages of regional cooperation.

(b) Moreover, ‘Upgrading the Technology Profile of South Asian Exports’ is a necessity. The RIS ² has rightly pointed it out. Most of the SAARC countries’ exports consist of labour intensive goods, using simple technology. The crux of the problem is that SAARC countries in general have paid little and inadequate attention to Science and Technology and Research and Development. This needs greater attention.

2. SAARC’s planning and cooperation:

This is necessary to meet the challenge in a Post MFA era. Under the Multi Fibre Agreement, quotas were allotted to regulate imports of textile and clothing into developed countries from developing countries. It may sound strange but the fact remains that MFA quotas have helped many SAARC countries like Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka. The South Asian countries’ share of textile garments in their manufacturing exports is relatively higher. But as per the WTO Agreement on Textile and Clothing (ATC), MFA has to be phased out from January 1995 in four stages within ten years. It means by 2005, these quotas will not be there. As a result there will be greater competition for exports. SAARC must take early action to face this challenge because South Asia will have to face ASEAN, China and other developing countries in the export market.

SAARC must give serious and immediate consideration to these problems. Thus, the advantages of freeing of trade will be limited unless accompanied by changes in production structure. The fact is that tariff reductions and changes in production structure go together. SAARC countries require both, otherwise not only will the gains be limited from Tariff Concessions, it will also not lead to further intensive trade cooperation. The crux of the problem is that tariff concessions will increase the size of the market and provide greater opportunities to increase investment and induce technological
change. Induced technological change may follow autonomous change. In fact, tariff concessions have short-run and long-run effects. The immediate advantage of tariff cuts will give a price advantage. But to utilize this price advantage, technological changes are necessary. Unless these changes take place the immediate gains of tariff cuts will be limited and may not be sustained over time. The immediate gains are sometimes called static effects while the later gain are called dynamic changes. These dynamic changes are necessary for the success of tariff preferences. SAPTA will become dynamic only if followed by these changes/improvements. Therefore, dynamism in SAPTA consists in taking a comprehensive view of these short-run and long-run changes in the structure of production as also of the interdependent changes in the economies of SAARC countries. Dynamic changes are necessary (rather a precondition for the success of tariff preferences). SAPTA will become dynamic only if followed by these improvements. It is only in this way Viner’s ‘Trade creation’ will be maximized and ‘Trade diversion’ will be minimized.

Last but not the least, Article 12 of SAPTA must be considered on a priority basis. South Asia must undertake and pay active attention to developing and improving the communication system, transport infrastructure and transit facilities for accelerating the growth of trade within the region.

SAARC has taken another important decision in the implementation of SAPTA by reducing the percentage determining the Rules of Origin. The agreement provided that the domestic content of intra-regional exports should be 50%. Now it has been reduced to 40% for all members and for LDCs from 40% to 30%. This decision of the SAARC council of ministers in March 1999 will give a further boost to increase intra-regional trade.

Some Myths about SAARC’s Intra-regional Trade

Among the South Asian countries political considerations often tend to dominate economic decisions. It is sheer commonsense that political differences should not stand in the way of economic relations particularly where crores of people will benefit economically. Of course, there should not be any political motive to trade relations among the participating countries. Mahbub ul Haq had exploded many myths about Indo-Pak trade. The unfortunate fact is that there is a small legal and sizable illegal trade. It shows that even as
government is restricting trade, people are trading. The estimates of illegal trade ranges from $100 million to $1 billion. This is unfortunate. Recent estimates show that consumers in Pakistan can decrease their food bill by 20% to 30% through increased trade with India. For every agricultural product sold for Rs. 100 in Pakistan, it can be made available at less than Rs. 40. There will be economy/saving in transport/freight charges because of geographical proximity. For example, if wheat is imported from India by Pakistan instead of from Canada/America, there will be a saving of at least $25 on every ton of imported wheat. It is pointed out that the combined producer and consumer losses in Pakistan alone are estimated to Rs. 800 million. This can be used elsewhere and will increase the overall welfare of the people. The same logic will be applicable to India. Official trade between India and Pakistan is barely $200-250 million a year, less than half of India’s $600 million trade with Nepal. Indian and Pakistani business groups estimate bilateral trade could swell to 8 billion a year if all restrictions were removed. We have the example of America and China. Despite political differences, economic relations have assumed new dimensions between these two nations. The argument that India being a big country will gain advantages is not true. In the case of the North American Free Trade Area, America is economically very strong yet there is a trade deficit with Canada and Mexico.

In fact between neighbours trade is a natural phenomenon that benefits both the partners. Restrictions will lead to corrupt practices particularly when there is a long boundary between the countries. Let us take another example of price advantage. If Sri Lanka imports the India–made Hero-Honda or Kawasaki Bajaj bike, Sri Lankans will be paying almost half of the Japanese price.

Thus, economic considerations require greater cooperation among the SAARC members. Non-economic considerations should not restrict or neutralize the economic well being of crores of people in South Asia. SAARC members have suffered from common misfortunes in the past. Culturally and socially they are close. The most important problem of all the SAARC members is poverty. Although the percentage of the poor (having income less than $1 a day) has decreased from 45% in 1987 to 40% in 1998 yet, the number of poor has increased from 474.4 million in 1987 to 533.0 million in 1998. It is expected that they will join hands to eradicate poverty. History should not stand in the way of prosperity. It is futile to quarrel over history that we cannot
change. But we can make History. Let us move forward in this direction. South Asian politicians must realize it.

It may also be added that Asian countries have greater links in economic, social and political terms. The similarities of the societies emanate from the concepts of family. It is observed that the western self is egocentric. The differences of East and West can clearly be found out in every walk of life. The different identity of the East makes a workable case to substantiate the concept of 'Asianization'. The diversity of the resources base of Asia further substantiates Asianization to be a complete world. There is a need rather a necessity to explore the opportunities of Asianization to speed up the process of 'catch up' between all developed and developing economies of Asia. Trade can act as a leading sector in this direction and through SAPTA, South Asian countries can initiate the process for restoring the pride, prestige and prosperity of Asia.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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3. Source HDC, 1999, based on speeches and statements of Mahbub ul Haq, quoted in Box, pp. 168-169, RIS.
The Crisis of the State
An Analysis of the Institutional
Changes of the State System in the Third World

V. MURALLEEDHARAN NAIR

The threats to the sovereignty of the nation-state are nothing new. The emergence however, of a new world order in the form of globalization has deepened the crisis of the state. The end of soviet communism, and the hurried adaptation of Chinese communism to global capitalism, has resulted in the development of a new brand of capitalism in the form of globalization. It has shown its capacity to use efficiently the networking logic of the information age to induce a dramatic leap forward in productive forces and economic growth. It has also displayed its exclusions, as millions of people and large areas of planet are being excluded from the benefits of the information revolution, both in the developed and developing world. Along with this new phenomenon, modern technology, ethnic wars, population, poverty and environmental degradation are but the major political fallout of the state system. Europe, which is considered to be the home of the modern state system, finds itself divided into smaller ethnic entities even as it is trying to unite economically. While the politicians struggle with the baggage of history, a new generation is emerging from the digital landscape, free from many an old prejudice of nationhood. The globalization of commerce and communication, of economic production and finance, of the spread of technology and weapons, and above all, of ecological and military risks, poses problems that can no longer be solved within the framework of nation-state or by the traditional methods of agreement between sovereign states. Today, we have to acknowledge that the World is in a mess.

Geography has shifted from under our feet within a single generation. The world has been interconnected in ways unknown in the past. The nature of transactions between people has changed dramatically, first with the fax machine and now with e-mail. It is
not just technology that has changed. The last vestiges of competing ideologies have disappeared, and with them the elements of Cold War. The new order lacks a clear balance of power. Many new nation-states have come into being, while some other states have begun to relinquish their sovereignty. Global capitalism has marched apace. More than 500 active satellites are sweeping the globe with the spiral of modernity. Even in areas denied electricity, such as the Niger in West Africa, satellite dishes and solar panels have launched millions of people “from their village life into a planetary dimension”, as Bertrand Schneider, general Secretary of the Club of Rome, puts it.  

Five hundred corporations control nearly half the world’s resources. Of the hundred biggest economies in the world, 49 are nation states and 51 are transnational companies.  

The gap between the rich and poor has widened throughout the world and there are now 19 countries whose per capita income is lower today than it was in 1960. At the same time massive increase in foreign aid to poorer countries has failed to free them from the vicious circle of poverty and debt. The welfare state everywhere is in retreat.

The security mechanism of the state is in a vulnerable position with regard to its most basic function namely, the maintenance of order, stability and safety. Ethnic conflicts and low-intensity warfare are the order of the day in the Third World. As a result of immigration and emigration, 80 million people now live in countries where they were not born. Another 20 million live abroad as refugees from disasters and political oppression.  

Terrorism in the form of dubious ideologies or fundamentalism in the guise of religion continues to shape the politics of contemporary societies. Extensive conflicts of this nature may cause cleavages in relationships among governments, armed forces and peoples. Conditions such as rapid population growth, the incidence of serious diseases that take on an epidemic proportion, unchecked criminality, scarcity of resources and the activities of drug cartels, can force the Third World today to sink into a quagmire of chaos and anarchy. Colonial capitalism was replaced by neo-colonial capitalism without presaging any significant development for a majority of populations.

External non-state actors including private armed groups have stepped into the void left by the colonial masters, sometimes as proxies and sometimes as independent agents. The economies of the poor states have been restructured to serve the needs of foreign capital. There have been instances where the state could not pay local and foreign contractors and the suppliers simply refused to do
The Crisis of the State

business with states that were rapidly becoming bankrupt. As a result, the state could not conduct national census, could not maintain peace and order, lacked a capacity to maintain a rural-urban balance and could not protect the environment. With corruption and waste spreading all over, the state in such a situation remained helpless, increasingly becoming "totally irrelevant" to the people. As far as their daily lives and survival were concerned, the state became useless, irresponsible and weak. The crisis seems to be so serious in Africa that in at least some states, the most unthinkable solution e.g., 're-colonization', is being propagated by some experts.

State in the Third World

Any comparative study of the state in Third World countries requires a distinction between the situation in Latin America and that in Africa and Asia. In the vast majority of Latin American countries, the classic colonial period came to an end more than a century and a half ago, followed by the gradual development of the nation-state. In most African and Asian countries (with exceptions such as China, Japan and possibly India), a similar process did not begin until the mid 20th century. However, the term 'Third World' is used generally in analysing the problems of both the underdeveloped and developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. The prototypical Third World state can be seen to possess certain basic characteristics. The most important of these are: a lack of internal cohesion in terms of both economic and social disparities; major ethnic and regional fissures coupled with a lack of unconditional legitimacy of state boundaries, state institutions and governing elites. Many of the Third World states today are easily susceptible to internal and inter-state conflicts; distorted and dependent development, both economically and socially; marginalization, especially in relation to the dominant international security and economic concerns and easy permeability by external actors, whether they are developed states, international institutions or transnational corporations. In the real world, individual Third World states exhibit different degrees of vulnerabilities, weaknesses, and insecurities.

Problems of State Building

Political institutionalization is one of the most significant dilemmas of the governments of the Third World. Institutionalization requires the effective establishment of government authority over society through political structures and organs. In its most elementary form,
political institutionalization is a state-building process. The institutionalization involves more than the mere mechanical penetration of society by various governmental organs and institutions. It carries with it an implied emotional and ideological acceptance, whether forced or voluntary, of the credibility of institutions, which emanate political power. In other words, institutionalization, determines solidity of the nexus between state and society. Institutionalization cannot take place when political institutions are either not strong enough or do not have a single and identifiable social mass to penetrate. In such societies, deep communal divisions and conflicting allegiances prevent the effective domination of one group over another and result in the emergence of community-exclusive authority structures. Thus, in places like Mandatory Palestine, Northern Ireland, Cyprus and Lebanon, ‘political authority is divided between the sovereign political centre on the one hand, and the institutionalized political centres of the constituent communities on the other’. For institutionalization to take place, there needs to be a dominant centre of power that is capable of enforcing its authority over other social forces. Without such domination by any one group, political institutionalization cannot occur and a ‘stateless society’ similar to that of Lebanon in the 1970s and 1980s emerges.

Many researchers strongly believe that Third World politics is a mystery that is not properly understood because many of the theoretical proposals that aimed at explaining politics and government issues have proved to be a complete failure since their independence.

State vs Civil Society

It can be seen in many African states that the institutions of civil society as well as its real leadership are fragile and ineffective. There is no doubt that these institutions, which include labour unions, intellectual groups, student organizations, business societies and places of worship, play a pivotal role in defending the special interests of these groups and in confronting the domination of despotic authorities. The experience in the post-colonial period in Africa has proved that the downfall of the economy and loss of legitimacy and respect on the part of state institutions has led to tensions in state-society relations. The downward slide in the economy makes the state fragile, and incapable of organizing society and executing public
policies efficiently. Thus, the state in this case could not be strong enough to meet social needs of the society. It is known that when the society-state relations are tense, the state often resorts to the use of suppressive means and transforms itself into a despotic state. All of this affects the state’s legitimacy, and then it becomes an alien and unrepresentative institution to the people.

New public management reforms pose a number of challenges to the developmental and nationalist mission of the state. Downsizing, for instance, threatens the viability of public sector unions, which in the Third World context are known to have played major roles in the evolution of civil society. The density of public sector wage employment, union membership, and contributions to union funds have suffered considerably as a result of the macroeconomic crisis and the state sector reforms.

African countries, such as Uganda and Ghana, have reduced the size of their civil service staff by 40 and 50 per cent. Public sector unions were central to the anti-colonial struggle of the 1950s, in the Third World. They retained much autonomy and vigour in advancing livelihood, equity and governance issues. They were also at the forefront of the wide-ranging campaigns against structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s. But now they have been forced to accommodate the logic of retrenchment and privatization in exchange for severance pay or “the golden handshake”. In other words, the central pillar of civil society—organized labour—has been on the retreat in most of the Third World countries. It is important to note that labour unions constitute one of the few non-state institutions that have been national in composition and character. Historically, they have articulated and embodied civic values. Their current decline under the new public management reforms may weaken civil society in the direction of a civic-based as opposed to an ethnic-based social order.9

The Civil-Military Relation Dilemma

One of the prominent trends in Third World politics during the post independence period is that of frequent overthrows of civil governments by the army. In this context, the military leadership too became politicized, as in Pakistan or in many other African states. Today, they form the most important challenge to democratization. The ruling elite that tightly holds on to power in some states still fears the emergence of pluralistic democracy. Therefore, the elite
offers different insights and explanations that would allow them to
continue in power as long as possible. The One Party system has
proven to be a failure in all the Third World countries, whereas the
emergence of Multi-Partyism has been linked to the rise of caste,
communal, tribal, ethnic and geographical loyalties.

The state is entirely tuned into patrimony by political elites for
their own personal profits. The crisis of state in the Third World,
or more specifically, the crisis of sovereignty in African states,
derives from many upsets and conflicts. But the root of the
problem lies with a disempowerment of institutions. ‘Predatory
rule’ characterizes most of the military’s conquest of the state
apparatus and the rise of national defense budgets have produced
an exponential growth in the numbers of men and women under
arms in Africa. Current estimates put the number of soldiers in
sub-Saharan Africa at well over 8,000,000 at the cost of almost 58
billion. The real figure may well be over one million if armed
rebel groups, which have proliferated in the 1990s, are included.
The military is seen in most of the African and Asian countries
as an obstacle to the growth of civil society and democratic
politics: Indeed, a large number of military rulers have been able
to adjust their strategies of dominating the state system by
embracing the prevailing wind of democratization. They have
organized elections and manipulated their outcome to their
advantages, as in Pakistan. Despite the process of
democratization there have been 15 military coups in Africa since
1990. The reform programme in fact failed as part of structural
adjustments in the context of military in Africa. In other words,
when political and civic institution are found weak or unstable—
as in many countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia—the
military may ask for more concessions and may ultimately,
appropriate the state itself.

African states have engineered a process of individualization
of ruling classes. This seems to apply to bloody dictatorial rule
such as that of Mobutu in Zaire or of “Emperor” Bokassa in the
Central African Republic, as well as several pseudo-democracies.
Since the state control is personalized, the institution is basically
separated from the population, access to state power means access
to wealth. It follows a pattern of violent confrontation between
various sections in the society, which has ultimately resulted in the
emergence of military hegemony in most of the African states.
Globalization and the Changing Role of Government

It is important to stress that the economic crisis in the Third World constitutes a crisis of the state, a frightening reminder of the political consequences of the failure of government. It may also be noted that the state in the Third World has basically failed to choose among current options in terms of either political structures or economic strategies. The failure of civil society to ensure accountability of the state has resulted in a concentration of power exercised for narrow self-interests and not for the development of the country. Self-aggrandizement, corruption, clientele-ism and patronage politics have become rampant. It is also to be noted that most of Africa's corrupt and oppressive leaders such as Col. Mobutu of Zaire came to power and were maintained in power with the overt and covert support of their western patrons. As Ali Mazormi has rightly noted,

The African State since Independence has been subject to two competing pressures—the push towards militarization and the pull towards privatization. In the capitalist western countries state ownership is regarded as an alternative to or even opposite to private ownership. In post-colonial Africa, on the other hand the question arises whether the state itself can be privatized or become privately owned. With the new international trade regimes of the 1980s and 1990s, a globalized economy is taking root throughout the world. As capitalism reaches across borders in search of markets, raw materials, and lower labour costs, transnational corporations are beginning to have an even more profound impact on the economies of individual nations. In this new economic era, when corporations rule the world, what is the role of government in setting a nation's economic agenda and ensuring the economic security of its citizen and communities? The reduction in state autonomy at the economic level is the most striking feature of this regeneration. Major decisions about the organization of production are now taken by TNC's. Capital flows and investment decisions, fiscal and even monetary policy are increasingly determined by the actions of international banks, commodity brokers, currency speculators, market makers and the like. Debtor states must submit themselves to policies and programmes imposed by the international financial institutions. As a consequence, in many cases, national rules and regulation have lost much of their traditional meaning in controlling and developing the market. For instance, national legislation to control monopoly makes less sense in the face of international economic competition.

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As a result, the state's ability or competence to meet demands of its citizens for employment, welfare services and basic necessities is severely affected. This may take the form of its declining ability to collect taxes, enforce statutes, control crime and violence or prevent rebellion or secession. In extreme cases, the "no-go" areas or even proto-states (for instance in Mexico, Peru and South East Asia) have developed in the Third World.\textsuperscript{16} External dominance, competence and capacity tend to undermine the state's legitimacy to the extent that it is unable to provide even basic services to its citizens or to protect them from the depredations of the powerful groups.

The state in the situation ceases to command allegiance. Inasmuch as national governments blame global economic forces or international organizations for their own failure to satisfy citizen demands, their own credibility is substantially eroded. The cases of Mexico, Argentina, Brazil and Chile are contemporary instances which illustrate the point further.\textsuperscript{17} The Third World states with their undeveloped economy, and fragmented society, is unable today to accommodate the market changes, which are increasingly going on in the name of globalization. In that they are also at a serious risk of losing control of their boundaries, both actual and ideological. The World Bank itself has emphasized this loss in its annual report for 1997, entitled \textit{The State in a Changing World}. “Without an effective state” we are told, “sustainable development both economic and social, is impossible”\textsuperscript{18}

\textit{Decline of Welfare State}

The dismantling of the welfare state is on the agenda everywhere. Flexibility has been mentioned as an advantage of economic globalization. But it often proves to be the reverse of stability and security. Certainly, the state may not be needed in all those areas in which it presently intervenes but the idea of marginalizing the welfare state is patently regressive. In the name of globalization today, is a destruction of the content of the welfare state that developed in the middle of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century on the notion of social solidarity. The privatization of social protection creates new mechanisms of inequality accentuating the growth of “winners-take all, losers-lose all” markets and income patterns. It leads to worries about accountability.

Privatization of public enterprises and resources has reached massive proportions in the Third World. Every sector of the economy
has been affected including for example: highways, natural resources, zoos, parks, steel plants, utilities, and telecommunication networks. Privatization is a part of global strategy, but it has its impact on civil society, the welfare state, and democratic politics. Today privatization is carried not solely to alleviate the socio-political and economic conditions of the state but in accordance with the orders of imperially controlled international banks. The time frame and scope of privatization is dictated by the economic super powers. Privatization thus seems to represent a clandestine strategy of capturing the economy of the poor state by destabilizing its economic structure. The privatization process relegates social organization, movements and citizens to marginal roles. It is almost associated with the de-nationalization of an economy. It is also a process of undermining social organizations, labour, popular power and it reverses social welfare. Privatization brings two basic changes—both negative—to the development of a national economy. Firstly, privatization deprives a national economy of a lucrative source of accumulation, particularly when the new investors send their earnings abroad. Secondly, and most important, it affects the state system and its priorities on education, employment and health. Private investors are only too happy to proclaim that "the economy is doing great, only the people are doing badly".

This type of privatization of the state and its resources by the rulers in its train sets the stage for militarization of the state. In the past, armed forces have often justified their intervention in politics by abolishing private privilege and suppressing the civilian leaders. The consequent militarization of the state has often led to further impoverishment, deprivation, misery and poverty for the people. Colossal amounts of money have been spent on the import of arms and for military budgets. Such wasteful expenditure has led to an ever-mounting debt burden on many of the Third World countries making them highly vulnerable to external intervention and domination.

To sum up, the Third World states currently suffer three major crises: a crisis of capacity, a crisis of governance and a crisis of security. The capacity crisis relates to the fiscal basis of the state; administrative inefficiency, corruption, unfavourable work ethics etc. The governance crisis involves the failure to develop institutions for a competition that would encourage politicians and pressure groups to conduct politics through constitutional as opposed to violent methods. The security crisis highlights the social and physical effects of organized and random violence as in the 1990s. These have taken a high toll of the social fabric and civic culture of many
societies, both in rural and urban areas. They stem from the high levels of militarization of both the state and society and the continued interference of the army in public governance of many states. The condition of global competitiveness coupled with social disintegration is not favourable to the system of democracy and liberty. Freedom and confidence go well together. When confidence (about the system, law and order) begins to crumble, freedom soon turns into a primordial condition: the war of all against all. People begin to doubt the wisdom of the fathers of their constitution if liberty leads to anarchy. They look for a way out, for authority.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

4. Ibid., p. 71.
5. Ibid., pp. 72-83.
10. Ibid., p. 23.
11. UNDP, 1996.
Architectural *Trivenī* of Allahabad and Asphyxiation of a Monumental Dream (P.K. Acharya and his *Mānasāra*)

R. N. MISRA

The city of Allahabad has many histories and one of these relates to the making of its external appearance as seen in its monuments and building—both public and residential—which were constructed over a fairly long span of time from the time of the Mughals, including the colonial, down to the contemporary. Altogether, these seem to make up a *trivenī* in the enterprise of architectural forms representing the Mughal, the colonial, and the classical Indian tradition. Of these, the last one got snuffed out in the city even before it could appropriately materialize, hence the *trivenī* metaphor in which a stream that represented Indian classical forms cascaded little, except in fancy.

One may however, perceive the varying tastes of builders in the architectural works accomplished at Allahabad or, even the intentions that are visible in the forms of their making. Except for both the strategic expediency of having a fort and the necessity of providing a resting perch to a Mughal prince (Khusro), there is little source material discussing the circumstances which made the different architectural enterprises possible in the city during the Mughal phase. Similarly, a rapid look at the source material on colonial Allahabad indicates little of any debate about a consensual architectural programme for the city, the choice of its design or the latter’s compatibility with the conflicting colonial and indigenous attitudes. As the city grew, both British rulers and their Indian subjects then, apparently in total isolation from each other, made their respective attempts, to embellish the city with mansions, monuments or buildings that would reflect the power, glory and pride of the one and the subservience of the other!

Elsewhere, at Lucknow for instance, one finds undercurrents of a reactive response by the locals to the colonial attitudes of the
superiority. That is best illustrated in Sharar’s (1860-1926) work, *Mashriqi tamaddun ka akhiri namuna*—“the last phase of an oriental culture”,¹ a work about Lucknow, its rulers and the culture that they represented.² But the early eighteenth century Allahabad does not seem to offer any glimpse of such protestations, which however, surfaced in the writing of Prasanna Kumar Acharya much later.

Prasanna Kumar Acharya, of whom there will be more in the second part of this essay, did strongly advocate introducing Indian architectural forms in public and private buildings. But by the time he appeared on the scene, the dye had already been cast in favour of an architectural programme that suited the British power. Today, however, many of the buildings of colonial vintage stand re-used here, with their original contexts substantially lost or forgotten. But an inquiry into making of the different localities and their settlements along with their architectural profiles at Allahabad from the eighteenth century onwards sheds light on the imposition of a different aesthetic in the wake of new realities that manifested the changing power structures in colonial Allahabad. So, first we discuss here the making of the colonial Allahabad, followed by Prasanna Kumar Acharya’s work on the *Mānasāra* and its advocacy and his unfulfilled desire to usher in an architectural resurgence in Allahabad and elsewhere in India in conformity with classical Indian wisdom of which the *Mānasāra* according to him was the ultimate authority. The first part of this essay thus serves as a background to Prasanna Kumar Acharya’s academic and structural works after the colonial patterns in architecture had already taken shape in Allahabad.

I

There is no dearth of references pointing to the emergence in the eighteenth-century Allahabad of what Bayly calls ‘rulers, townsmen and bazaars’.³ And such evidence tends to fit people into those and many other categories as, first under the East India Company and later under the Crown, the British gradually wrested control registering their dominant presence and power in different capacities—personal, official, commercial and military. In his two volumes, Bayly (1975,1983) has analysed the process of emergence of state control and the different institutions its workings from 1770 to 1920. But there is little in this analysis to indicate how the spaces where the activities that shaped the destinies of the people or the communities, were designed, lived or sequestered? Or, how the
work-places and their choice or even the facilities made available there, pandered to the hierarchies that were imposed under the compulsions of the ruler-subject dichotomies? Or, for that matter, how the British attitudes changed before and after the holocaust of 1857 and how these changing attitudes are reflected in the buildings and architecture they devised for themselves and their subjects?

Some of these points are discussed below but we may also emphasize here the democratic transformation today of almost everything in Allahabad, that once defined exclusivity of its colonial masters. For instance, what used to be the jail is now turned into SRN Hospital; the Secretariat is now converted into the Public Library; the Governor’s residence that used to be, houses now a Medical College. The old Colvin Hospital stands as Motilal Nehru Memorial Hospital. The High Court building of yesteryears (1834,1868) is the office of the Director of Education today. And, the Gora Hawalat (Workhouse for European vagrants), built opposite the Collector’s court then, is Vikas Bhavan now, with certain additions made to expand it. The once European Club building that was built in 1871, houses the Public Service Commission. The Knox Hall that used to be District Magistrate’s Library stands as the Holy Trinity School. Similarly, the DM’s bungalow is now turned into Annie Besant School. The Pioneer Press building of 1869 is in the hands of the Fertilizer Corporation of India. The Kotwali of 1874 survives on the south side of the GT Road. These changes amply explain the re-use and also that the old centres of power have lost their significance.

As regards the colonial attitudes about the nature and bearings of the habitations, settlements and their architectural forms in the then Allahabad and their merits or inadequacies, they are best seen in the early Europeans’ comments relating respectively, to: (a) the Mughal monuments that they appreciated and/or re-used; and (b) the general scene of settlement that did not find their favour. We propose to highlight them briefly. So, first about what did not find their favour and why so? We will return to the other point later.

Much of the early European understanding of Indian architecture and settlements in the eighteenth-century Allahabad seems to conform to Edward Said’s constructions on “Orientalism”, defining or constituting the Orient as non-European ‘other’—”the ante-type against which Europeans defined themselves.” In that light, it is not difficult to find their response to people and habitations in Allahabad rendered in terms, which are less than complimentary. Impoverishment and squalor is the leitmotif of these descriptions. Hodges (1782) has
described Allahabad as consisting of "merely thatched huts worth scarcely a vestige of any house remaining". In 1815, "nine out of ten houses" noticed were kaccha in construction. The comment may not surprise us considering that immense destruction was perpetrated on Allahabad between 1720 and the 1770s, caused by raids on Allahabad by the Pathan rulers of Farrukhabad (1720-29, 1750), the Marathas (1736,1739) and the Bundelas with or without the Marathas; or, by the Nawab-Wazirs of Awadh (1747, 1753) and their rivalry in wresting control over it. Nawal Kishore of Awadh and his ally raja Prithipal of Pratapgarh also caused destruction in their effort to regain it from the Pathans. But the city is said to have returned to some semblance of peace, thanks to the efforts of the Awadh-appointed Governor Kripa Dayal who re-laid it by 1775 and brought succour. But after the Battle of Buxar (1764), the Fort of Allahabad came to be garrisoned by British forces.

Bayly indicates an increase in the wealth here as the ascetic orders of Allahabad, Banaras Mirzapur, etc., emerged as the biggest property owners in 1780s. But things were not yet quite promising and Hodges (1782) underscores poverty in Allahabad, due to which he preferred to re-christen the city as "Fakirabad". Or, the expression may signify that the city earned that name because sadhu-s and fakir-s lived here, in plenty. Apart from its abject poverty, the city did have a magnificent fort on the Yamuna, the tombs at Khusro Bagh, a garden and a serai laid by Jahangir who lived in Allahabad from 1599 to 1609.

Striking a somewhat different note from Hodges, Fanny Parks (1850) evinces interest in the aesthetic bearings of the "picturesque" in Allahabad. But, the poverty of settlements in Allahabad inhabited by non-Europeans surfaces in her writings also. These settlements stood in contrast to the profligacy of the life style of East India Company’s officials whose households employed a large contingent of servants—fifty-four in case of Fanny Park’s household for which she spent Rs.250 per month. Fanny Parks, wife of an influential European, made a record of her times in her book of 1850 which has pictorial sketches of the contemporary buildings in Allahabad including the temple on Dashashvamedha ghat in Daraganj and that of Alopshankaridevi at Alopibagh.

Subsequent to Hodges (1782) and Fanny Parks (1850), the derisive refrain recording the poverty and squalor of Allahabad continues in other European notices too. Reginald Heber (1854), the Bishop of Calcutta, writes of the city as an ill-built, poverty-stricken place, "a
small city” with “very poor houses and narrow, irregular streets confined to the bank of Jumna”.13 In 1854, certain structures of Allahabad are similarly described as having no visual distinction. We have the description of a square and pillared “subterranean temple (below the fort) entered by a large passage sloping downwards” containing “a linga at one end” and “a dead forked tree, continually watered with great care”, at the other end. The place is described by Tieffenthaler as a “closed loathsome den rendered more hideous by obscene and monstrous figures of Mahadeva, Ganesh and other objects of worship...”.14

Such condemnations continued in British writings till the early twentieth century and form the subject of discussion in many a significant publication on early European response to Indian art.15 But that is another story. As for Allahabad, its “wealthy quarters” were now developing in the Daraganj area to which Fanny Parks makes a reference. Ascetic orders also played their role in the creation of wealth in the city to which a reference has been made above. The dairas of the Muslim saints and the akhadas of the orders like the current day Niranjani and Nirvani, etc. might have contributed to the weal of the city through the institution of pilgrimage. But the austere way of life of these establishments yet precluded the possibility of grand buildings for their seats.

An account of the early eighteenth century settlements—some of them going back to still earlier times—may not be complete without a reference to the Ganj localities, which, with the Chowk at the centre, dot the entire city of Allahabad even today. From 1751 onwards, Kripa Dayal, the Awadh Governor of Allahabad re-settled certain Ganj localities where one may plausibly read the hints of battleworthy encampments besides the habitats of the trading communities. The Kydganj-Muthiganj area was thus turned into a ‘civil station’ with defense gates at Chowk Ganga Das and Lok Nath. There is a reference to an 1872 dispatch from Fort Williams (Calcutta), about the defense system of this locality. It notes, “in case of emergency these gates were closed to make the entire locality into a fortified compact”.16 According to the above-mentioned dispatch, this provided the “inner second defense” to the town. Such a protective fortification, secured by gates, indicates the defensive planning in the central habitation complex where Indians carried out their commercial and other activities.

Other Ganj localities perhaps followed this model. Lucknow of 1857 had several ‘Ganj’ localities in the city, which owing to their
military character, served as a bulwark against the marching British columns in 1857. By that analogy, it may be surmised that right from the pre-British days, particularly after the Pathans' incursions, Allahabad came to have clutches of soldiers of fortune and their entourage in specific Ganj localities. Ganj may be derived from _ganjavāra_, a Sanskrit term for the royal encampments in the battlefield. Some of the Ganj-s, as their names suggest were named after reputed personages, including saints or religious leaders. Others indicate the possibility of some acts of valour (e.g. Himmatganj) or may refer to an administrative settlement (e.g. Subedarganj). Yet others (Lashkar Lines or New Lashkar Lines) have definite military implications. Interestingly, some of the Ganj localities of Allahabad offered stiff resistance to the British forces in June 1857. This is especially true of Kydganj and Mutthiganj. Kydganj also came to have many old monuments dating back to 1798, which have been described as made in the “florid and massive style that prevailed in England in the Victorian era”.

In contrast to indigenous patterns of living, Europeans lived in opulence and glory. But living in Allahabad was a torment for them due to the oppressive heat and squalor. The city has been mentioned as _chhota jahannum_, “a mini inferno”. The Anglo-Indian travellers moved in palanquin (palki) and the “Memsahibs of that period (1850s) were less exclusive persons and mixed familiarly with her Indian friends”. Bayly describes the settlements of the mid nineteenth-century Allahabad in terms of ‘three concentric rings’ with the old town and the commercial district of Mirganj with its cloth and grain merchants forming the centre. Around this centre developed a ‘complex of trading and residential quarters’ with Chowk Gangadas and Rani ki Mandi being predominantly the ‘trading areas’ and Yahiyapur (‘which lay close to the administrative centre of the Mughal town’) being ‘inhabited by old service families’. Weavers and artisans lived to the north and south of the Chowk area. All this formed the ‘first ring’ around the central habitation. Outside this ring lay the villages of Sadiapur to the south and Serai Salem and Niwan to the west. Bayly tells us that these villages remained ‘distinctly agricultural until the end of the nineteenth century’. They were also ‘notoriously turbulent’. The ‘third ring’ of settlements grew up on the banks of Ganga and Yamuna where Daraganj, Kydganj and “the adjoining mohallas of old town known as Mutthiganj” made a conspicuous presence. Daraganj was inhabited by respectable Brahmana families.
and traders and the other two localities were gradually populated by people who came to offer services to the British military cantonment and Civil lines which developed after 1865. This happened with the coming of the railways as the British hold strengthened in the capital of the NWP. Bayly says these riverside townships 'served the dual function as entrepot points for the river borne trade in cloth, grain and indigo and also as service points for Hindu religious activities'.

This was the general pattern of settlements at Allahabad as the Europeans started re-planning the city and commandeered the areas north of the railway line for themselves.

We had, in at beginning, made two points about the early European reactions to the settlements and monuments in Allahabad, referring to what they appreciated and re-used and what they abhorred. Having briefly discussed structures which did not find their favour, we may now return to the monuments that they appreciated and/or re-used. Of the Mughal monuments, at least one namely, Jumma Masjid has disappeared now. An account of 1854 graphically describes this monument. We are told:

The Jumma Masjid...is a solid, stately building, but without much ornamentation. It is advantageously situated on the banks of Jumna. On one side it joins the city and on the other side it joins an esplanade before the glacis of the fort. After the conquest of the province by the East India Company it was filled up as the residence of the general of the station; subsequently, to the purpose of an assembly room; ultimately, (it was) resumed to its former destination. Mussalmans, regarding it as polluted displayed a contemptuous indifference on the subject.

The forces of the East India Company took hold of the Mughal fort of Allahabad and the British speak eloquently of its merits. In 1854 it is described as "nearly impregnable" or as a "noble castle" which has 'suffered in external appearance' with the passage of time. It has been described as "having gained in strength" through "modernization" thanks to its "present masters". This "modernization" was achieved (possibly in 1798) by pruning down its "lofty towers". These were further "reduced into bastions and cavaliers. And its high stone rampart was topped with turf parapets and obscured by a green sloping glacis". The renovations were complete by 1838. A document of 1867 from the Qanungo of Chail Pargana describes its twelve palaces, three khwabgah-s, twenty-five gates and twenty-three domes (burj-s) besides other components that together constituted this magnificent structure.

To the British, the fort was indeed a "striking place and its
principal gate surmounted by a dome with a hall beneath, surrounded by arcade and galleries” and ornamented with “rude but glowing paintings”, presented an excellent sight. Heber (1824) regards the gate of the fort as “the noblest entrance that he ever saw to a place of arm”. Between 1798 and 1854, the exterior of the fort had been modernized in “Italian” style. The officers of the East India Company made many more alterations in the architectural design and elements of the fort. We are told that,

...an ancient spacious palace, overlooking the Jumna has been fitted for the residence of superior officers and the rest of the Europeans are lodged in well constructed barracks. The arsenal, situated in the Fort is one of the largest in India. Altogether it is a place of great strength, probably impregnable to the Native powers and requiring for its reduction a regular siege according to European tactics.

Yet another monument—the tomb of Khusro—also evoked a favourable response of Europeans. The location is mentioned both as a bagh and a serai and both designations are true. At least till 1858 its character as a Mughal caravanserai was not in doubt. The monument and its surroundings are described as follows:

Among the finest structures of Allahabad is called a serai of Khusro, the ill-fated son of Jahangir. It is a fine quadrangle surrounded by an embattled wall along the inside of which are a series of lodges for gratuitous reception of travellers. Adjoining is a garden of pleasure ground, some fine mango trees and three mausoleums in a rich, magnificent yet solemn style of architecture.

The grandeur of these tombs is once again praised in 1908 when they are described as “plain but massive” and that the “interiors of the principal mausoleum is adorned with painted flowers and birds”. The Khusro Bagh was obviously the site of a Mughal garden combined with a caravanserai apart from the three original tombs with one more added later, raised respectively for Khusro, his mother and sister with the fourth one for Tambolan Bee (Tambolan standing for Istambul in Turkey).

It may thus be summed up that European response to the pre-existing architectural monuments and works was sometimes adulatory (as in the case of Khusro Bagh and Fort), sometimes ambivalent (e.g. Jumma Masjid) but often condescending or even downright critical and deriding (e.g. the temple near the Fort and the sculptures there). “Loathsome”, “hideous” and “monstrous” are the terms that they used in their criticism of the last category of works. But their greatest admiration was for the Khusro Bagh. They exulted
in its' serenity, which was both fit and worthy of its character. Similarly, they glorified the Fort for the security it offered to them.

Europeans as a rule did not like to interfere with the religious structures but at Allahabad, in their early encounters, they appropriated the Jumma Masjid, debunked a temple and totally ignored the Maratha works. For instance, they passed over the temple of Ahilya Bai and Bhoole ka Bada that existed at Daraganj or, the temple built by Baiza Bai at Kotha Parcha. We may here hazard a surmise that Allahabad lost the opportunity of turning into a city of ghats like Banaras when the British refused to Baiza Bai, the self-willed and rebellious ex-ruler of the Scindia house of Gwalior, the permission to build a ghat at Triveni.32

Of the Europeans' own habitations and life style, one does find references to their living in opulence and power, amply served by a troop of servants. But their segregation from the Indian community was more or less complete after 1857, with their exclusivity appropriately defined. One of the earliest instance of the Europeans' intention to build something after their own taste and persuasions at Allahabad is to be seen in 1839 when a government grant of a sum of five thousand rupees was sanctioned for building a church for which private contributions were also solicited.33 Emerson's cathedral (Patthar ka Girjaghar) in Gothic style “based on the thirteenth-century choir of Canterbury Cathedral”34 also came up at Allahabad (1871-1887). In certain circles in Allahabad today, it is believed to have been planned for Australia but due to a postal lapse it got assigned to and raised at Allahabad, simply by chance.

In any case, by 1908 many noteworthy European buildings had come up at Allahabad. These included government offices, high court and the bar library, district courts, European barracks, Anglican and Roman Catholic cathedrals and several churches, Muir Central College, Mayo Memorial Hall and the Thornhill and Mayne Memorial which contained the Public Library. The Government House, among these, receives a mention in 1908 for its agreeable surroundings and the complement of its buildings. It “stood in a fine park-like enclosure on a rising ground and had a central suite of public rooms with a long curved wing on either side containing private apartments”.35

The beginnings of colonial architecture thus have an interesting history in Allahabad. A list of some important works at Allahabad and their chronological succession, is as follows:

1801: Awadh ceded Allahabad district and the adjoining regions to the British.
1834: Allahabad became the headquarters of the NWP, and the High Court (reconstructed further in 1868) was established here.
1835: Allahabad ceased to be capital of the NWP (till 1859).
1837: Board of Revenue located at Allahabad.
1850: Railways (station and offices) established at Allahabad.
1857 (to 1860): Civil Lines – Barnett Hotel and Bar constructed.
1858: Alfred Park (Company Bagh), Secretariat, and Public Library (1863-64) were constructed.
1861-1869: Colvin Hospital (1861); Government House (started functioning under Lieutenant Governor, Sir Alfred Muir (1868-1874) in a building previously used by the 107th Regiment as Mess. A central suite of public rooms was added to it in 1869. Muir’s predecessor, James Thompson (1843-1853) lived in the Lowther castle, rented from a local nawab. Pioneer Press (1869).
1870-1887: European Club (now, Public Service Commission Building) and Mayo Hall (1871) built.
Emerson’s Cathedral (Patthar ka Girjaghar: 1871-87), Muir College (1872 or 1874?) and Kotwali (1874); Thornhill Mayne Memorial (1878), Allahabad University (Founded 1887).
1901-1910: Vagrants’ Home (for Europeans), Eveing Christian College (1902), Muirabad (a colony of “native Christians”, 1902).
Churches: Anglican Church in Fort (1826); Holy Trinity Church (1839); Churches of St John and St Peter 1872, 1875; Presbyterian Mission: Church 1877, in Katra (1900); Roman Catholic: St Joseph’s Cathedral 1877.

Bridges: were constructed on Yamuna 1865; Curzon Bridge (opened 1905).

Both architecture and planning were serious business and the colonial rulers of India performed their job accordingly. A look into the debates abroad about what kind of architectural design—indigenous or European—should the colonial masters choose for their colony indicates their concerns for power. The colonial expansion of Europeans across the continents by the eighteenth-century had created in the colonial mind certain perceptions of a hierarchy where Europeans as the inheritors of classical Greek and Roman architectural tradition and technological and industrial advancement, stood at the top. Africa was somewhere deep down the ladder, and India, with her Buddhist and Islamic monuments and Sanskrit learning, stood somewhere in the middle. In recommending a blue print for architectural projects in India, opinion in England was divided in respect of the choice of an appropriate style. The classical Indian modes received only a marginal support in this debate.

The British are said to have paid little attention to architecture till
they began feeling secure after the victories at Plassey (1757) and Buxar (1763). However, the Presidency capitals had started developing at Madras, Bombay and Calcutta prior to this. Metcalf therefore has made an attempt to trace the formalization of European interests in architecture at these capitals for, the experiments there, subsequently impacted their architectural activity elsewhere. His survey of architectural works at these capitals indicates,

As for the stylistic preferences, Nilsson (1968) regards both Calcutta and Madras as projecting Greece and Rome. During (or even before) the regimes of Robert Clive at Madras (1798-1803) and, of Wellesley (1798-1805) at Calcutta, Europeans had already resorted to different Orders in the buildings at these places and elsewhere between 1780 and 1850. The baroque classicism of Sir Christopher Wren was tried out at Madras (1760) in St. Fort George and the Banqueting Hall, the latter with a high podium and its Tuscan-Doric pillars (1802). The “Doric classicism of the Greek revival” is seen at Bombay (Town Hall, 1833) and the Calcutta Mint (1824) and in Metcalf Hall (1840). The same style mixed with the ‘Palladian’ occurs in the Calcutta Town Hall building (1807-13). The Palladian style is seen again at Hyderabad and Lucknow in the British Residency buildings, built around 1800. Thus, the British in India fostered a style of the Greek Revivalism reinforced with Wren Inspired Renaissance architecture besides the Baroque, Doric and classically proportioned works at Calcutta and a predominantly Gothic style at Bombay. All these architectural orders and the buildings patterned on them were indeed meant to project British power even as they supported exclusive European living and catered to their security and administrative requirements.

But things started changing after 1857. Fergusson (1808-1886), R.F.Chisholm (1839-1915) and Major Mant (1830-1881) had already emerged as chief protagonists in the debates on alternative architectural designs and the style suited to European buildings in India. A debate among the Europeans was still on where alternative options were discussed or debunked. This debate reflects the colonial concerns about the kind of architecture that Europeans preferred for their colonies. Europeans, in any case, intended to cover themselves in glory through architecture. This was specially so because the
“classically educated Briton, as he built his empire, invariably conceived of himself as following in the footsteps of ancient Romans”.

It is also apparent that wherever the colonialists built their structures or whatever, they built not for their subjects but for themselves. The subjects were chiefly to be impressed and awed.

Of the advocates of the design and choice of architecture, Fergusson was originally an Indigo planter but was considered later an expert on Indian architecture; Chisholm and Mant had their respective options and preferences; while others like Röger Smith (1873) advocated that "... our building in India ought to hold up a high standard of European art". Pleading for the use of Doric and Gothic orders in India he wanted the European buildings to be significant enough to inspire colonial rulers even as they would evoke the ‘admiration’ of the ‘natives’. On the other hand, William Emerson pleaded for emulating indigenous forms and designs. In the end, for residential purposes, the Europeans settled for residential accommodations that offered relief from the heat of the Indian climate besides allowing a colonial style of life. For public buildings, a rich fare was available to choose from. And that included classical styles and their revivalist forms—Baroque, Byzantine, Palladian, Italian Renaissance, Doric, Gothic and others. Europeans confined themselves largely to their own tastes and aesthetic while occasionally making concessions to incorporate some Indian designs drawn mainly from the Mughal, Pathan, and Rajput repertoire. The Indo-Saracenic mode, which stood rejected as a ‘style’ later, was thus born out of a debate among the British on a possible choice for European buildings in India.

It may be relevant to examine how all these developments translated into the works that were commissioned at Allahabad. Allahabad district and the adjoining regions were ceded to the British in 1801. It became the provincial seat of the government of the North West Provinces in 1834. After some administrative changes (when the centre was shifted to Agra), it was finally secured as the capital of the province in 1859. The Board of Revenue started functioning in the city in 1831 and the railways arrived here in 1850. The British forces of the East India Company held on to the Fort, securely ensconced there till 1857 but the holocaust of the year made it imperative for the British rulers to dig in for safety and governance. Hence started a vigorous programme of building Allahabad in the image of a provincial seat of British power.

A massive repression that included killings and a destruction of
the defiant villages by the forces of the Company in 1857 led to almost a total subjugation of spaces by them. People in the city stood totally reduced. Soon, the new government succeeding the Company set out to plan the habitations in the city. J.C. Harper (1859) prepared a city plan, which was personally supervised by Lord Canning. A committee of three engineers presided over by Swinburne decided to develop an exclusive European settlement at Allahabad in the area north of the railway embankment from Railway station to the Fort. The eastern boundary of Cannington was extended up to the Government House on Lowther Road. The Queen’s Road (now, Sarojani Naidu Marg) and Hastings Road were laid to connect Civil Lines to the Government House.

These arrangements became necessary as a separate residential area was carved out for European Civil servants who were settled in the Civil Lines, which came up on the debris of eight villages. These villages had been razed to the ground in June 1857 as its inhabitants perished or were dispossessed. Alfred Park (1858) was carved out on the ruins of the two erstwhile villages—Samdabad and Sultanpur Bhava, burnt down in 1857. These two villages were deserted after Col. Neill and Col. Havelock quelled the uprising while hanging most of their inhabitants to death. Those who survived moved to Khuldabad.

Segregation was effected between the city and the Civil lines, as is stated in a dispatch of the government, which also mentions a destruction of the places “occupied by dirty Indian niggers”. Instances however are known when the British administration tried to placate segments of the city’s population by offering land to the elites to build their house. Thus, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was invited to settle at Allahabad and a large plot of land was allotted to him for the purpose. The move was apparently made to placate the Muslims who had been brutalized in Allahabad during the holocaust of 1857. Sir Syed came to Allahabad only for a short while. Yet, out of this dispensation, a beautiful building—Mahmud Manzil—got built where Justice Mahmud came to live, as Sir Syed, his father repaired to Aligarh. Even this dispensation did not last long and Mahmud Manzil changed hands soon. It became ‘Pathak Mansion’ till it was taken over by Motilal Nehru who made Anand Bhavan of it.

Architecturally, in the private residences the colonial rulers adopted the style of a ‘... single storied bungalow with pitched roof and expansive veranda, set in a spacious compound ringed with servant quarters’. For public buildings and monumental structures,
indigenous designs were accepted after providing alternatives to suit their comforts and aesthetics. These buildings almost invariably had certain common features like, walls of ample thickness and constant horizontal cornices. This was done to ward off heat, which to Europeans was oppressive. For the same reason, they rejected 'vertical buttresses that might interrupt free flow of air'. The Europeans' buildings came to have large and frequent openings consisting of doors and windows. In them we invariably see ample use of balconies and corbelled projections, with "roofs sometimes flat, sometimes domical." The buildings also came to have 'ample surrounding spaces'. These were the features recommended for public buildings.

The public buildings at Allahabad reflect what came to be termed as the "Indo-Saracenic" style of architecture. This style is reflected in the Senate Hall and Vizianagaram Halls of the arts and science blocks of the Allahabad University. The Muir College, planned by its architect William Emerson, came up around 1873 with 'large bell towers' in conformity with its 'Saracenic' design. Its tower was made with a grant of ten thousand pounds from the maharaja of Vizianagaram. The Governor of the NWP requested the grant of the maharaja who readily obliged. Emerson, its architect, was "determined not to follow too closely Indian art" (in designing it). He wanted "to avail of an Egyptian phase Moslem architecture, and work it up with the Indian Saracenic style of Beejapore and north west, confining the whole in a western Gothic design". And this he was to achieve in the work eminently.

Despite re-appropriation by the government and by the public at large, there is enough in the surviving buildings of colonial phase, now in re-use, to show the progressive stages of architectural development in Allahabad during the nineteenth century. They indicate the exclusivity of the colonial elite and their predominant aesthetic. Architecture served here as an instrument of British power.

II

Thus grew up the European settlements and edifices in Allahabad where certain locations remained marginalized while others took shape in glory, without any local debate on their choice or imposition. In these developments, except for a feeble protest, this new architectural dispensation by the Europeans eminently came to govern the public taste in colonial Allahabad out of an administered imposition. Alternative options seem to have neither been tried nor
offered, nor even debated. As a result, since 1858, the external appearance of colonial Allahabad kept on changing, with a host of European buildings springing up on the streets extending from Cannington to the Government House, on Queens Road and Hastings Road. Cannington grew up as an exclusive European settlement with residential quarters for Europeans. The university buildings in Allahabad, as they were commissioned one after the other, also came to imbibe the same European-cum-"Indo-Saracenic" style, sans any debate.

The protests in favour of Indian forms in architecture surfaced much later (1927-1946) in the writings of Prasanna Kumar Acharya, long after the town had already developed with mutually exclusive colonial and indigenous settlements. Muted and circumspect at the beginning, they grew trenchant in time, appropriately bolstered up by Acharya's deep understanding of traditional forms of architecture acquired through his concerted research into the traditional wisdom of Indian architectural forms as contained in the *Mānasāra*, an inspiring and definitive ancient Indian *śilpa* text. Some alternative was thereby offered as being a 'right' choice for public buildings in the city, long after the conclusion of European ventures.

Acharya's statements that implicate the validity or otherwise of Indic or non-Indic forms of architectural programmes grew out of his involvement with the *Mānasāra* text. These statements seem relevant in respect of civil architecture as it did or did not develop in Allahabad. And they also indicate how Acharya despaired—a despair, which turned out to be as monumental as was his work on the *Mānasāra*.

It will perhaps be conceded that the statements of protestations by Acharya tend to reflect the peculiar dialectics of his consciousness in making, sometimes marked apparently by the veneer of bureaucratic compulsions of conformity or even by his subservience to European patrons. They also reflect the imperatives of what may be termed as "Swadeshi" (of Bengal vintage of early twentieth century) notwithstanding his initial training as an officer of the elite Indian Education Service.

The materials in the *Mānasāra*, mainly textual and academic, persuade us to believe that while colonial tastes determined the emerging architecture in Allahabad under the British Raj in the nineteenth century, in the perceptions of Acharya an alternative choice based on architectural models from the relevant Indian tradition could have been possible. Acharya seems to have believed
that there was enough scope in contemporary India to promote traditional wisdom on varied kinds of works in civil architecture. He thought that the Indian tradition could offer guidelines for the building of forts, regulating the dimensions and features of buildings of one or more stories, courts, temples, pavilions, mansions, dwelling houses, royal palaces, and a host of other elements of architecture. He derived these formulations from the wisdom of the *Mānasāra*, "the essence of standards and measurements", which he published in seven volumes researched since 1914 in Europe (in Holland, London, Oxford and Cambridge), printed at Allahabad and published originally by the Oxford University Press between 1927 and 1946.

Acharya believed that *Mānasāra* was as efficacious in architecture as medical works were so in their domain; that it was the "most practical of Sanskrit treatises", and that "a trial may be given to its methods and principles, its rules and regulations, because the foreign imitation in architecture for a millennium has proved more or less unsuccessful and un-economical".57

We also find in Acharya's writings a rejection of non-Indic forms along with his pride in rehabilitating the architectural modes, design and theory of a text, which till then, had appeared to be conspicuously ignored. Using strong words to explain his motivation in pursuing his *Mānasāra* studies, he once satirically spoke of his quest in terms of the "peculiar pain of giving rebirth to a once fully grown "barbarian" child of unknown origin".58 It appears that in criticizing the use of Islamic forms of architecture in India he was indirectly indicting Europeans who accepted these in the "Indo-Saracenic" style, utterly disregarding the classical Indian principles and forms of architecture. And, he therefore is found critical of the attitudes that fostered prejudices against traditional Indian forms.

At times he rejects non-indigenous forms of architecture saying, "our architectural policy of past few hundred years, based as it has been on a foreign imitation ... has not proved quite successful".59 He rejected the forms of Persian architecture denying any "similarity" between the Persian and Indian modes, and even lamented of the missed opportunity in developing a new 'Indian' style during the Mughal times for, he thought that the forms that came with the Turkish and Mughal styles were incompatible with those Indian. He thus believed that the "culture and art that (the Mughals) brought could have been merged into the Indian one only to cause it to seek out a new path of development if there were any noticeable modifications of Turkish and Mogul architecture in India far better than it was in
the land of its origin". He further says,

These works of foreign architecture unsuitable for Indian climate and soil have been rendered possible largely for political reasons. This is mostly due to the natural desire of the conquerors firmly to establish their domination and culture ... by removing the traditions of the conquered as far as possible; and, partly, on account of the ignorance of the scientific method of Indian architecture or a dislike to apply them in preference to their own.

He criticized the so-called "Indo-Saracenic" architecture, which the Europeans had advocated and prescribed in India for in his opinion, it only led to "materially dispossessing" the "Hindu" style.

Some of his arguments might not stand scrutiny or may sound intolerant, sectarian and 'dated' today, but it will be conceded that they have to be weighed against the vigour of his highly competent and scholarly work and his extraordinary insight. We quote them nevertheless to show his disregard for the "Indo-Saracenic" style, which ultimately turned out to be a non-style, propped up exclusively by Europeans at Allahabad during the nineteenth century. Acharya rejected it and so did others like Havell, etc., before him, regarding it only as 'academic'. Acharya rejected it for its being an alien transplant:

Thus in Muslimised structures of India are seen in abundance the Saracenic domes and arches introduced by the Mohammadans of Syria and Palestine known as Arab-Berber races of Northern Africa, who conquered Spain and Sicily and invaded France. *In fact this style had materially affected the Hindu style ... in civil buildings.*

He further says that "Byzantine architecture introduced by the Turks of Byzantium or Constantinople [and which "materially dispossessed" the Hindu style] is marked by 'the round arch springing from columns or piers, the dome supported on pen dentine, capitals elaborately sculptured, mosaic and other encrustations, etc.' which are largely visible in India where the architectural tradition of Hindus are entirely forgotten". These modes were not in accordance with the materials he found in the Mānasāra or in the monuments of India that he was describing. Even as he indicted British and pre-British architecture which "dispossessed" the Indic forms one can read in his rejections a muted criticism of the Europeans who had espoused and introduced them at Allahabad.

Some of his comments besides the nomenclatures proposed by him in terms of 'Hindu', 'Mussalman', etc, seem patently outdated today. They betray prejudices with little appreciation of forms and the aesthetic and judge alien architectural forms largely in respect of
their roots in the land of their origin. One can also read in his text the dilemma of a (loyal) civil servant in him as he oscillates between criticism and a rejection of Indo-Saracenic while expressing a sense of loss for the indifference in promoting what his Mānasāra stood for by the administrations of that period. Thus, he says:

The object here is not to recount the blessing following from the advent of English nor to make a contrast between different conquerors of India in their destructive or constructive efforts or in the matters of modifications, presentation and reconstruction. The critic will be justified in accusing the English people or the British Government in India that they had not done all that they could do for us.65

Acharya’s outrage against the European experiments in architecture is thus seen prefixed or suffixed by an unqualified praise of British. He found them responsible for introducing forms that were not to his liking because: (a) those forms were alien; and (b) they did not conform to Indian climate, soil, ethos and principles of architecture. Acharya criticizes the European’s experiments in architecture but stops short of putting the rulers in the dock. Yet, he does seem to emerge as an ardent advocate of Indian architectural forms trying to uphold these through the perspective of the Mānasāra. Such an attitudinal proclivity shown by Acharya surfaces time and again in the text, specially in the sixth and seventh volumes of the Mānasāra series, as for instance, in the lament that the Raja of Darbhanga did not emulate the Mānasāra designs and prescriptions in the buildings of the rule (1934), or, that the precious opportunity of rehabilitating the victims of Bihar earthquake (1934) in the manner of Mānasāra architectural tenets was lost by default as a result of apathy towards those tenets or, that while his Mānasāra volumes were sold out in Europe there were only limited buyers of them in India.66

This situation existed despite his perceptions that he had “proved” the efficacy and practicability of the Mānasāra tenets by building certain temples and mandapa in his hometown (Tipperah district in the Bengal of the period) which were in conformity with the Mānasāra tenets. Apart from these, he had also constructed in 1935 at Allahabad a grand mansion—the Swastika mansion—on the principles and forms recommended in the Mānasāra. In doing this he was attempting to set an example, which could be profitably emulated and universalized by others. But that was not to be, which endlessly disappointed a pioneer who first researched the Mānasāra and then, apparently started living by it.
Since the *Mānasāra* shaped both the sensibilities and dilemma of Acharya in promoting an appropriate agenda for public and private architecture in colonial Allahabad and in India, it might be relevant now to introduce this text, which was so dear to him and which, in not being emulated, caused his outrage. In the details that follow, first we examine the *Mānasāra* and then dwell on Acharya, its ardent exponent and promoter.

Several ancient Indian *śilpa* texts dealing with architecture and the arts are known today. But in the early nineteenth century, the *Mānasāra* occupied a unique position as the only known Indian text on architecture. This *śilpa* text was first noticed in 1834. It happens to be a manual of traditional Indian architectural forms with materials considered amenable to practical application. Acharya considered it as applicable to the buildings in the north and recommended its emulation in the contemporary buildings everywhere, including the training programs of engineering education in India, or in public and private edifices and so on.

The *Mānasāra* first came to light as a posthumous publication of Ram Raz in 1834. Ram Raz was a judicial officer in Bangalore and, in editing this text, he took the help of traditional *śilpi*-s who were building edifices on its prescriptions. Ram Raz’s *Mānasāra* was based on a fragmentary manuscript and it was published as a text of sixty-four pages with forty-eight plates. The situation materially changed when, in 1914, Acharya started his research on the *Mānasāra* and its application. For all this, he had in hand eleven badly preserved manuscripts—eight of them in southern scripts—written in Granth, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Nagari. When it came into Acharya’s hands, the text had undergone five recensions and all told, it comprised of 10,000 lines of a language rightly considered by Buhler as “most barbarous Sanskrit”. The magnitude of the colossal labour by Acharya in editing and publishing the volumes on the *Mānasāra* from 1918 to 1934 was exemplary by any standard. Two other volumes of the series were published in 1946. Thus, the following volumes of the *Mānasāra* series emerged as a result of researches from 1914 to 1946 in the following order where the first date indicates completion and the last date, the year of publication.

1918: *Summary of the Mānasāra* (doctoral thesis, University of Leiden (Holland),
1927: *Dictionary of Hindu Architecture* (1934);
1927: *Indian Architecture according to Mānasāra Silpasatra* (1934);
1933: *Manasara on Architecture and Sculpture* (1934);
(4) 1933: *Architecture of the Mānasāra* (1934);  
(5) 1933: *Architecture of the Mānasāra* (sketches and Plates), (1934);  
(6) 1946: *Hindu Architecture in India and Abroad* (1946);  

Of these, the *Mānasāra* corpus edited and translated by Acharya in 1934 consisted of the ‘Sanskrit text with Appendices, Index and Critical Notes (altogether more than 800 pages), the English translation with a copious Index (another volume of some 800 pages) and the fifth volume of partly coloured plates’. These plates were not a part of the original text but were prepared by three modern draftsmen, namely S.C. Mukherjee, a Civil Engineer, R.L. Bansal, a draftsman and Sri Siddhalingaswamy, a śilpi who did the job on the basis of Acharya’s interpretations, making conjectural representations of the textual materials in visual mode. The sheer enormity of the task performed and achieved by Acharya in preparing the volumes was bewildering. It is small wonder then that, after publication these volumes (from 1 to 5 above) received raving reviews from scholars and Indologists like Rabindranath Tagore, Vogel, Keith, Hargreaves, Frederick Grubb, Ramanand Chatterji, Abanindra Nath Tagore and a host of other scholars. The *Mānasāra* thus made an exceptional presence which was to stay for several decades and its author received accolades which will be enviable anywhere.

The magnitude of the task of preparing these volumes has been summed up by Acharya himself in his Foreword to the seventh volume with a sense of achievement tinged with the frustrations of one who was more or less like a long distance runner but who runs alone! In 1946 in the Foreword to his book he states: “This is the seventh and last volume of the Manasara series so far as the present writer is concerned.... In fulfillment of the fateful prediction of ... late Professor E.J. Rapson ... the whole of official career of the present writer commencing in the fateful year of 1914 has been fully occupied”.

We may now turn to the editor-translator of the *Manasara* and the zeal, which drove him to this work. Prasanna Kumar Acharya of Indian Education Service was an officer-turned-scholar with his Master’s degree in Sanskrit from Calcutta University in 1912. One may make a guess that his studentship at the University fell at a tumultuous time of the Swadeshi movement, which was launched following the division of Calcutta in 1904 and its political revocation by Lord Hardinge (1912). This was also the time when Havell and Coomaraswamy “led a verbal attack on the English planners of New
Delhi, urging them to use Indian architects and masons in construction of Government buildings for reasons of economy, excellence and suitability as a much needed example of state patronage of indigenous industry.\(^1\)

In 1914, Acharya was “induced by a youthful enthusiasm” to undertake the gigantic task of editing and translating the *Mānasāra*. He first carried out his research on it at the University of Leiden (Holland). In 1918, as a preliminary study of the text, he published a *Summary of the Mānasāra* as his doctoral thesis at Leiden. Then, as a Government of India State Scholar he started working at the University of London on the *Dictionary of Hindu Architecture* after the University changed the title from ‘Encyclopaedia’ to ‘Dictionary’. Later, it became a point of despair for him after Ganganath Jha in his review of Acharya’s work questioned this alteration. Jha called it a “freak of fortune” by which the work, which was characteristically encyclopaedic in content, was reduced to a mere ‘dictionary’ in its emended nomenclature. The irony of this change in the title dawned upon Acharya only after Jha’s pointed comments about it in 1934.

Acharya became sensitive to the expression “freak of fortune”, a phrase of Jha that dogged the path of his work in many other ways. In 1946, he mentions it to underscore his travails in other contexts too.

Acharya was deputed to the University of Allahabad where he worked as a Professor of Sanskrit, Head of the Oriental department and Dean, Faculty of Arts. The trials and tribulations that Acharya encountered for four decades from 1914 to 1946 are encoded here and there in the mass of more than 5000 pages that constitutes his *Mānasāra* volumes. He plodded through the terrains of scholarship where challenges were often in conflict with duties of his office. His work took him to vast geographical expanses of the then India as well as across the Continents, from Landikotal on the borders of Afghanistan to Rameshwaram in the South, from Mohenjo-Daro in Sind to Shillong in northeast, or to Leiden, London, Oxford and Cambridge.

Reading between the lines of his monumental work, one may comprehend his restlessness, ambiguities and ambivalences when sometimes he tends to reject all non-Indic architectural implants on Indian soil even as he reservedly offers some praise to his European peers and patrons who commended his work or ridiculed it, sometimes even relegating its application to the level of a “schoolmaster’s exercise book meant to illustrate the rules and
regulations of Hindu architecture in a pleasing manner". Yet, we see Acharya upholding Indian architectural forms in a sea of frustrations. His frustrations stemmed from many reasons, e.g: from the apathy of Indian elites and European bosses and the latter’s criticism; from insufficiencies of the methods of indexing and interpretations that his seniors like L. D. Barnett and F.W. Thomas recommended; from his advocacy of architectural forms which did not elicit the desired response; his failing health and a partially lost eye sight; from the mishaps of losing the pages of the manuscript in transit and having to re-write the whole with a consciousness of the inadequacy of the second attempt at writing, and so on. In 1946, he rues over the apathy of the University system, writing that,

The difficult Indian conditions presented the familiar dilemma either to give up the self imposed task altogether as is usually done by us after securing a degree and an appointment on a permanent post or to carry it through without encouragement and assistance from any quarter, shouldering in addition, to the peculiar duties of an occasionally unfortunate Professor of an Indian University, the heavy burden of research. In 1946, he does not desist from criticizing even the government administration for his misery in serving a University, which he had discovered to be apathetic to his contributions. The “youthful enthusiasm” that egged him on during the period from 1914 to 1927 was at a low ebb in 1933. It plummeted further in 1946 due to his frustrations with the University of Allahabad on account of the overburdening responsibilities of teaching and administration as also because the University and the Government were tardy in settling the “royalty and rewards” that accrued to him. To the author of the Mānasāra—a text that explained architecture not only in India but also in what had come to be addressed as Seri India and Insuli India covering the vast continents overseas—it appeared debilitating that the University and the Government should be tardy in settling, among other things, even the small matters of finances. The shock was aggravated when an Indian successor of Sir Claude in the Education department of the Government actually questioned in an official correspondence “the public importance of printing Indian architectural researches”.

But by 1946, his frustration over public and institutional apathy towards the Indian traditional architectural form was complete. He admits “...there is not much hope either that the governments and the various corporations, municipal boards and other authorities who sanction the plan of a private building or erect a public structure,
will interest themselves in introducing an Indian policy in architecture...." He was expressing these sentiments post the Second World War and it appeared to him that even "rebuilding the devastated nations" did not hold any promise to his dream. He rues that, "Perhaps a time will come in countries like India when it may be considered as "barbarous" to question "the public importance of architectural research". And even in that he advocates valorizing architectural projects saying that they are important markers of civilizational advance for, the "...art and culture of a people are reflected and presented in monuments" and that "they sustain and stimulate natural pride". He further asserts that, "... is necessary to settle the architectural policy of each country in its own way. For India, no better authority containing the experience of generations and experiments of cenuries will ever be available than what is revealed by the Mānasāra series". These laments and protestations stand in total contrast to what he was advocating in 1927, which we quote here in full.

In the Vāstu-sāstras architecture is taken in its broadest sense and implies what is built or constructed. Thus, in the first place, it denotes all sorts of buildings, religious, residential, military, and their auxiliary members and component mouldings. Secondly, it implies town planning; laying out gardens; constructing market places; making roads, bridges, gates; digging wells, tanks, trenches, drains, sewers, moats; building enclosure walls, embankments, dams, railings, ghats, flights of steps for hills, ladders etc. Thirdly, it denotes articles of house furniture, such as bedsteads, couches, tables, chairs, thrones, fans, wardrobes, clocks, baskets, conveyances, cages, nests, mills etc.

Architecture also implies sculpture and deals with the making of phalli, idols of deities, statues of sages, images of animals and birds, It includes the making of garments and ornaments etc.

Architecture is also concerned with such preliminary matters, as the selection of site, testing of soil, planning, designing, finding out cardinal points by means of a gnomon, dialing; astronomical and astrological calculation.

In conclusion, one may recount that four decades of studies devoted to the Mānasāra by Acharya had their high point in the beginning from 1914 to 1927 or even in 1934, followed by an abject despair of the protagonist by 1946. The entire venture, its academic value notwithstanding, seems to represents a phenomenon that failed, except academically, in the end because Allahabad got seized with other pressing challenges in which the question of a preferred architectural profile and project for the city found no takers. The
British rulers who had once yielded to the possibilities of Acharya’s studies got involved in other pressing matters. Acharya’s early elation turned to annoyance when his schedules misfired; to despair when Allahabad failed to get enthused by his prepositions. It was a sad end to his effort of forty years when ultimately he sold out his residence—the Swastika mansion, built according to the prescriptions of the Mānasāra—a dream project, once considered to be a companion volume of the Mānasāra series, and left the city lock, stock and barrel, chastened by disappointments and failure!

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

2. Ram Prasad Tripathi, in his introductory remarks in Shaligram Shrivastava, Prayag Pradeep, (in Hindi) Allahabad: Hindustani Akademi, 1937, p.5, refers to Asarussanadida Lakhnau as a work on the history of Lucknow. Studies are required of other localities and provinces in understanding architectural history of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. At Banaras for instance, we have the Sampurnanand Sanskrit University (formerly Queen’s College), which was designed by Major Kittoe and inaugurated in 1853 by Lt. Governor of NWP, James Thomson. It is a building in Gothic style and resembles a Christian church in its architectural form. This long structure has a “high vaulted ceiling and a large stained glass window in the wall opposite the main entrance door”. The walls and the doors of the building have several inscribed verses referring to the donors who contributed in construction of this building. Cf. Michael S. Dodson, “Re-Presented for the Pandits: James Ballantyne, ‘Useful Knowledge’ and Sanskrit Scholarship in Banaras College during the Mid-Nineteenth
Architectural Triveni of Allahabad


4. Public pleas for providing such a college were made early in the nineteenth century. The Hindi journal, Pradeep (1904) describes how a public delegation’s plea for a hospital was turned down by the then administration even as it secured its concurrence to name the then newly-constructed railway bridge after Lord Curzon. Thus came the christening of the Curzon (railway) Bridge.


11. Fanny Parks’s pictorial sketches may probably be the first essays in European painterly tradition in the Allahabad of the 1840s. It might be interesting to compare them with the products of the art scene in the contemporary Bengal where, from 1780 onwards, British gentry and the emergent colonial class were increasingly patronizing European painters. And Indian artists, in the circumstances, looking for a lucrative career, had started changing over to western idioms in painting, through academic training. In Calcutta, traditional patuas, Kalighat and bazaar painters were being replaced, making room for the artists like Sheikh Mohammad Amin of Karraya (1845) who worked for a European businessman Holroyd. Others in the same line of transformation included E.C.Das who became famous for painting pictures of different kinds of Indian servants. Nityalal Dutta, Madhuv Chandra Das and Ramdhan Svarnakar, the Kalighat artists, were changing over to other medium of work, trying their hand as wood and metal engravers. Cf. Tapati Guha Thakurta, The Makings of a New Indian Art, Cambridge, 1992. Later, at Allahabad (1924-36), artists like B.K.Goswamy, B.K.Das, H.Bagchi, Shamshu Nath Mishra, D.Banerjee (?), U.K.Mitra, Kamla Shankar and others produced paintings to illustrate literary magazines e.g. Sarasvati, Chand, Madhuri, Manorama, Hansa, etc. These literary magazines, reproducing their work, were printed in the Naval Kishore Press (Lucknow), Belvedere Press, Indian Press, A.L.J.Press and Fine Art Painting Cottage (Allahabad), among others.

12. For the Bishop and his perceptions of India cf., George P. Bearece, ritish Attitudes towards India 1784-1858, London: OUP. Heber was the author of a book: A Narrative of Journey through India 1824-25.

16. Cf. Pandey, op.cit. (We have lost the exact reference to the page number.)
17. Today, the Ganj-s of Allahabad stand divested of their original character but their presence, in plenty, defines the character of early non-European Allahabad. We may here mention some of these Ganj localities like, Daraganj, Nur Ali Ganj, Ahmadganj, Qaziganj, Magaharganj, Fakirganj, Lukarganj, among others.
18. For a different interpretation of the Ganj-s, see, Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen...*, pp. 96-100.
22. Ibid., p.43.
24. Ibid., pp. 22-23.
28. Ibid.
29. For a comprehensive detail of the tomb including the highly punning verses inscribed at different locations of the structure, cf. Shrivastav, op. cit., pp. 241-250. In 1891, two large water tanks were built to the north of this area for water supply through the Water Works.
30. Gazetteer of India, 1854, p.22.
32. Baiza Bai was the widow of Daulat Rao Scindia, a contemporary of Wellesley. The British Resident at Gwalior got tired of her assertions of freedom during the period of her regency when she issued (Scindia) coins in gold bearing her portrait. She was eventually exiled from Gwalior. She repaired to Prayag where the Marathas, sometimes in concert with the Bundellas, remained active in pursuing their territorial ambitions repeatedly from 1720 to c.1729, 1751, 1765-1771. In 1739, they mounted a raid on Allahabad and between 1765 and 1771 they were on the verge of wresting Allahabad on Shah Alam’s grant if it had transpired. Afraid of this dispensation, the British intervened to pass Allahabad on to Awadh by a Treaty of 1773.
33. Gazetteer of India, 1854, p.23.
35. Cf., also Mark Bence-Jones, *Palaces of the Raj: Magnificence and Misery*
of the lord Sahibs, London: George Allen and Unwin, pp.149-160. Originally, the Lowther Castle, a rented accommodation was used for the Lt. Governor. But, during Muir’s time, when that castle could not be bought from its owner, it was decided to buy the adjoining property from a bank. This property consisted of “an impressive single-storey block dating from eighteen thirties or forties, in the traditional British Indian classical style with portico on each side”. Two wings were added to it in 1869, “... joined to the main block by curving corridors”. Ibid. pp. 150-151. The plan for building a Government House, according to the design made for it by Lieutenant Cole of the Royal Engineers, got delayed. So, the property near the Lowther Castle at Allahabad was acquired and the Government House invested at Allahabad. In time it hosted several important persons including Lady Dufferin, Lt. Governors Sir William Muir, Sir John Strachey, Sir George Cooper and Sir Alfred Lyall (and his sisters). The Prince of Wales lived here with his entourage during the Winter of 1875-76 and Viceroy Lord Ripon was “obliged to stay (here) ... much longer than had been originally intended”, due to his illness during his visit to Allahabad. Ibid., pp. 149-160, also, p. 213.

39. Ibid., p.39.
41. Ibid.
42. Metcalf, An Imperial Vision “...”, p. 9.
44. Ibid., p. 38.
45. Ibid.
46. Quoted by Metcalf, “Architectare and ...”, p. 37
47. Ibid., pp. 37-39.
49. Pandey, op. cit. p. 38.
50. Ibid., pp. 3-37.
52. Smith quoted in Metcalf, Architecture and “...”, p. 38.
53. Ibid.
54. Metcalf, The Imperial Vision, p. 89.
55. Pradeep (an Allahabad Journal, in Hindi), Vol., V.
56. Prasanna Kumar Acharya, Hindū Architecture in India and Abroad, Manasara Series: Vol. VI, (Rep.) Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, pp. 410-411. He says that the Saracenic style “... materially affected the Hindū style in the lay out of villages, towns, forts as well as in civil buildings”. Ibid., p. 415.
62. Ibid., So strong is his opinion in this respect that he says: “If therefore, in order to modernize Indian architecture, the British patterns are to be excluded, it will be necessary to demolish and rebuild not only the Viceregal palace at New Delhi and all Council halls, secretariat buildings and offices in central and provincial towns, but also the bridges, railways, schools, colleges ... down to the prison house and lunatic asylums.” Ibid. p. 421.


69. These reviews have been appended in the sixth volume of his Manasara series. Appendix III. Cf. Acharya, Hindu Architecture ...”, pp. 422-449.


78. Ibid., p. xi.

79. Ibid.

80. Ibid.

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