

Humanism

Revivalism and

The Indian Heritage

M. N. ROY

Humanism, Revivalism and The Indian Heritage

M. N. Roy

RENAISSANCE PUBLISHERS PRIVATE LIMITED

15 Bankim Chatterjee Street

Coffee House, 2nd Floor

Calcutta 700 073

Humanism, Revivalism and The Indian Heritage
Collection of essays by M. N. Roy

First Published : 1999

© **Copyright :** Renaissance Publishers Pvt. Ltd.

Price :

Hard Cover Edition Rs. 190.00 ; US \$ 15

Soft Cover Edition Rs. 140.00 ; US \$ 12

Laser Typesetting at :

LASER WRITER

10, Madan Mitra Lane

Calcutta 700 006

Offset Printing at :

ANULIPI

180, B. B. Ganguly Street

Calcutta 700 012

Published by :

Kanai Paul on behalf of

RENAISSANCE PUBLISHERS PVT. LTD.

15, Bankim Chatterjee Street

Coffee House, 2nd Floor

Calcutta 700 073

PREFACE

From the earliest years of his youth M. N. Roy was committed to the overthrow of the British empire and the attainment of India's full independence. At the age of 18 he joined the underground revolutionary movement in Bengal (1905); ten years later he tried unsuccessfully to organise an armed insurrection against the British. Later he went to Mexico, was converted to Marxism, founded the Communist Party of Mexico (1919) and was invited by Lenin to Moscow. During the twenties he was one of the topmost leaders of the Communist International, founded the émigré Communist Party of India in Tashkent in October, 1920, represented the Communist International in China (January-August, 1927), edited and published *The Vanguard* (1922-24) and *The Masses* (1925-28), and wrote several Marxist classics on India and China. After his break with the Comintern in 1929, he returned to India (1930), spent six years in jail (1931-36), and on release founded and edited the journal *Independent India* (1937-49). He worked incessantly till his death in 1954 to invest the struggle for political independence with the programme of a fullfledged social and cultural revolution.

Roy's dramatic political career has sometimes tended to overshadow his originality and greatness as a thinker. He wrote over a hundred books and pamphlets (see the *Preliminary Checklist of the Writings of M. N. Roy* by Patrick Wilson, University of California; also *Selected Works of M. N. Roy* vols. I-IV, edited by Sibnarayan Ray, Oxford University Press). I am inclined to think that atleast five of them would place him among the major social thinkers of our times— *India in Transition* (1922), *The Future of Indian Politics* (1926), *Revolution and Counter-revolution in China* (1930/1946), *New Humanism* (1947) and *Reason, Romanticism and Revolution* (1952-53). The journals which he edited, *The Vanguard* and *The Masses*, *Independent India* and *The Radical Humanist* (1949-), *The Marxian Way*

(1945-48) and *The Humanist Way* (1949-52), bear witness to his acute analytical powers and deep insight, his understanding of historical processes, his bold vision of a society totally free of all kinds of exploitation, his unassailable commitment to freedom, truth, justice, rationality and universalism, and his great faith in man's ability to shape history.

Roy never considered politics in isolation. Even in his nationalist and Marxist writings politics was always seen in the context of history and social organization. In the humanist phase he laid a great deal of stress on the cultural dimension of human existence. A revolution does not take place *in vacuo*. Tradition and the cultural heritage in which an unjust socio-political order has ensconced itself require to be critically examined and thoroughly undermined with the help of reason and knowledge. At the same time a new set of values and styles of thinking suited to the ushering and sustenance of a free, just and egalitarian society has to be formulated and propagated. Roy used the words renaissance and cultural revolution inter-changeably, and held that political independence without a cultural revolution in the minds of the people would only continue the old inequitable order under a new set of rulers. The experience of the last five decades confirms the correctness of this view.

The following articles collected from the pages of *Independent India* and *The Radical Humanist* bring out Roy's stress on the urgent need for a renaissance in India, and his critique of the obstacles in its way. In contemporary India where we are witnessing the rise of revivalism *contra* renaissance, these essays, although written half-a-century ago, have lost none of their relevance. I have selected the articles, but they have been seen through the press by Sri Kanai Paul on behalf of Renaissance Publishers.

October 25, 1999

Sibnarayan Ray

C O N T E N T S

Indian Renaissance	9
The Study of Indian History	23
Indian Culture	37
Hinduism and Modern Thought	48
Religious Reivalism and the Danger of Fascism	61
Gandhism and Humanism	69
Shankaracharya and Modern Religious Revivalism	75
Planets and Human Destiny	80
Indian Heritage and the Task of Renaissance	90
Renaissance Movement	100
Renaissance and Radicalism	115
The Failure of Philosophy	127
Science and Society	143
The Rights of Man	149
The Individual and Society	153

INDIAN RENAISSANCE

Until recently, the country was preoccupied with more immediate problems. Therefore it was quite natural for it not to take so much interest in matters which appeared to be of rather remote importance. But now, the political object of national independence having been attained, the attention of a larger and larger number of the more serious-minded men and women of our country is being attracted to the more important, greater and more fundamental problems of economic reconstruction and cultural and social progress of the country. This growing interest was bound to come. Although during the period of the political movement for independence very few people thought of the problems which would confront us immediately the political objective was attained, yet, we can recollect that the pioneers of the nationalist movement placed before the country the necessity of attaining political freedom as the means to an end. They maintained that in recent times India had not been able to keep abreast with other nations because foreign rulers kept her in economic backwardness, which caused social stagnation and the corresponding intellectual sloth; that, in order to remove those deficiencies, it was necessary for India to attain political independence. It is quite clear that the founders and pioneers of the nationalist movement placed before us the objective of national independence not as an end in itself, but as the means to a greater end.

The end for which India struggled for years, and at last has attained political independence, is what is known in history as a social revolution. One need not be frightened by the term revolution. It does not mean anything more drastic than a radical readjustment of social relations which have become antiquated ; in other words, a thorough overhaul of the established social order. A social organisation, with its economic relations and political institutions, is not static. It continually grows and evolves. In course of time, the limits

under which a system has progressed and developed become too restricted for further growth. Within those limits, the unbounded potentialities of human creativeness can be longer unfolded. Therefore, it becomes necessary to reorganise the established social order with the purpose of widening the horizons of freedom, giving greater latitude to the creativeness of man.

From these few words of explanation, it is quite clear that, when we say India must experience a social revolution, we are simply saying that certain things must be done, if the Indian people are to come out of the long period of intellectual stagnation, social and economic backwardness and cultural coma. But we shall not be able to tackle this problem of social reconstruction with the proper spirit and the confidence of attaining success, unless we can learn from history a lesson which is often forgotten, or simply ignored by the more impetuous romantic prophets of revolution. History teaches us that no great change in political institutions, in legal systems and economic organisations is possible before the community requiring such a social revolution undergoes what can be called a philosophical revolution. An impending revolution is heralded by the more forward-looking spirits, who realise the necessity of a change and also have the courage to challenge the moral sanction of the established social order. In other words, a change in the mental outlook of a sufficiently large number of members of a community is the precondition for a successful and constructive change in the material conditions of life.

The ideal of freedom, for instance, is as old as mankind. But through the ages, it was conceived differently, according to the intellectual atmosphere and cultural pattern of a given period. Its sanction was derived, now from religion, then from metaphysical speculations ; in certain times, it was a transcendental concept, in others a moral principle. As human knowledge grows, mental horizons broaden, new visions of freedom rise before our mind. A new vision of freedom transcends the limitations of the established social order ; the new concept cannot be fitted into its cultural pattern. Then it becomes necessary to challenge the sanctions of the established social order, be they religious,

transcendental, metaphysical or moral, according to the preconceived notions of religion, metaphysics and morality of the period.

The spread of such a critical attitude towards traditional values— established forms of thought, venerable beliefs and blind faiths is called a philosophical revolution ; it heralds a change in the mentality of mankind. It is learned from history that in the successive stages of human evolution, changes in the social, economic and political conditions of mankind were heralded by such philosophical revolutions ; whenever the standard of philosophical revolution raised by the pioneers of a new era attracted a sufficiently large number of members of a community, it also experienced a social revolution ; social relations, economic systems and political institutions were overhauled so as to expand the frontiers of freedom, to give greater scope to human creativeness.

Now, if we could, for the time being, set aside the prejudices and preconceived notions which have been occupying our minds for a generation and more, it should be very easy for us to see that India is in such a period of her history. An all-round progress of the Indian people, such as will bring them abreast with other peoples of the modern civilised world, requires a social revolution, and the social revolution, in its turn, requires a philosophical revolution ; in other words, a change in the traditional mentality of India. That change is known in history as a Renaissance. The object of the Renaissance movement in India is to bring about that change and to carry that message of the revolt of man far and wide, so that a sufficiently large number of men and women see that established notions, old beliefs, traditional authorities, venerable dogmas, are setting limits to the possibility of development of the Indian people. It is no longer a question of changing one political government for another ; the mentality of the Indian people must change before it can go forward in its march towards real freedom and progress and thus come abreast with the rest of modern mankind.

The term Renaissance is foreign ; it is not even English ; originally French, it was taken over in English literature. Being so very foreign, the term naturally lends itself

to misunderstanding and wrong interpretations. Etymologically, it means rebirth. That seems to fit in with our own hoary ideas. Indians also believe in rebirth : Man dies, and is reborn, again and again. But India has not died ; so, how can she be reborn ? The misunderstanding may not go to such a ridiculous extent. It does, however, confuse Renaissance with revivalism. The Renaissance movement must guard itself against this confusion. Renaissance is not revival, for the simple reason that the past can never be revived. The past is dead, and the dead must be buried. But there is something which survives physical death. My grandfather is dead and I cannot revive him ; yet, if he was for instance a great artist or a philosopher, his spiritual creations must survive his death. I shall do him honour, I shall be a worthy descendant, I shall make good use of the heritage, if I can appreciate those values and see that a larger and larger number of people can be benefitted by them. Only in this sense can the past be revived.

There are instances of intellectual and aesthetic values created in the past being forgotten. Attempts should be made to revive them. If we want to cherish the memory of our past, if we want to draw inspiration from our past so that we can travel on the right road into the unknown future, we shall have to distinguish between what is dead and what is immortal in the past. Renaissance may be equated with revivalism to the extent that it distinguishes the immortal human values created in the past from the concrete material past which is dead, and endeavours to rescue those values, if forgotten, out of the ruins of the past which is dead. Because, certain things in the past have been forgotten, we shall have to revive them, if we discover them to be still valid. But the sense in which revivalism is preached generally in our country is not only not Renaissance, but counter-formation. There are people in our country who talk about Renaissance, and yet purpose revival of Ramraj, return to the Vedic culture and idealise the Vikram era, so on and so forth. Assuming that there ever was a Golden Age in India, and that in that legendary past India attained a level of culture and civilisation, not yet reached by other nations of the world, it is simply not possible to go back to that age.

But if there was really a Golden Age, and at that time Indian genius created values such as do not die with the bodies of their creators, then they have been simply forgotten. Traces of them may be still lying buried under the debris of traditional junk heaped up through the ages. Having discovered those traces of old glory, we may be able to reconstruct it in imagination. In case of intellectual values, such as philosophical systems or scientific thought, the process of reconstruction will be logical. But to rescue the forgotten or neglected heritage, we must dig deep into the debris of the dead past, clear away the thick cob-webs of legends, myths and mythology, which are cherished as India's cultural tradition.

That exactly happened in Europe during the period which is known as the Renaissance. At the close of the Middle Ages, over a period of nearly two hundred years, there was a mighty revolt of man, which challenged the authority of the Church and the clergy, a revolt which laid down the spiritual foundation of modern civilisation. We in India require such a movement, such a revolt of man, with the spirit of Renaissance, the spirit of enquiry and criticism and the urge to throw light into the dark corners of the past with the object of discovering there buried gems and treasures. Fortunately for us today it is easier to do that than it was for the pioneers of European civilisation. Because, they had themselves to be also the heralds of modern science, whereas we are the inheritors of the vast store of modern scientific knowledge accumulated since the days of European Renaissance. But if we cannot appreciate this advantage, if we disdain that experience as something foreign to India, which cannot be reconciled with the spiritual genius of India, we shall not be able to create a Renaissance movement ; on the contrary, we shall actually relapse into revivalism, which only provides the spiritual sanction to stark reaction ; when India is in need of a revolution, we should be creating an ideological counter-revolution.

Apart from the critical enquiry into the past, there is another factor which goes into the success of a Renaissance movement. That factor existed at the time of the European Renaissance also ; in our time it is there to a much greater

14 Humanism, Revivalism and The Indian Heritage

degree. The forerunners of European civilisation not only drank deep at the fountains of the classical learning of Greece and Rome, but they were greatly helped by the scientific knowledge, rationalist enquiry and philosophical thought of a long succession of Arab scholars who had treasured and cultivated the positive outcome of Greek thought and culture while Europe was lingering in the twilight of mediaevalism. The pioneers of modern civilisation not only carried on an enquiry into the original sources of classical learning and antique culture; with open arms, they also welcomed the lessons that they could learn from the infidel Arabs. Today we shall have to have that spirit of toleration and boldness. Not only shall we have to find out what was great in our own past, but we must also have the boldness, and I should say, humility, to learn from foreigners, and not disdain what they can teach us as Western Materialism.

Unless we learn from the West the very method of studying and writing history, we shall never know what was really great in India's past. As it is taught today, Indian history is all legend. A real history of India is still to be written. Every country of the world has had the same experience. To write history is perhaps the most difficult task. History can be correctly written only when records are kept day to day. There was a time when very few people could read and write. In those days, history was written mostly by courtiers; therefore, old history is all stories of kings and dynasties and tales of their imaginary or magnified exploits of greatness and glory. Only when a critical spirit and scientific method were applied to the study of history, did history become a science. The writing of history requires a penetrating philosophical outlook. Because, the history of the past, when no reliable records were kept, has to be reconstructed only from the tradition of the thought of that period. Therefore, in order to know our own history, in order to recognise our heritage and be benefitted by that legacy, we shall have to sit at the feet of the great men of knowledge and science, the philosophers of the West, and acquire from them the searchlight of the spirit of enquiry and scientific mode of thinking, with which to penetrate the dark chambers of our own past.

About this aspect of Renaissance, I shall not say much in detail at the present occasion. Only a retrospective glance at what we call our cultural heritage will do for the moment. Somehow or other, it has become an article of faith that Indian culture and philosophy have always been distinct from the Western ways of thought: that it was spiritual, whereas the Western thinking was materialist. History does not corroborate this specious assumption. Indian thought was no more religious, transcendental, metaphysical and spiritual than in mediaeval Europe. But just as before Europe plunged into the darkness of religiousity, and even during the period of theological exuberance, all thinking germinated, similarly in India also, side by side with metaphysical thinking, there developed other currents of thought which have been practically forgotten today.

The students of ancient history and thought, Indian as well as European, know that, barring the period of ancient Greek learning, India developed a greater volume of materialist, rationalist, scientific thought than was done by the pioneers of European civilisation. When we come out of the Vedic era and read the Upanishads, which contain the foundation of Indian philosophy, we find not only rationalism, naturalism and agnosticism, but also out and out atheism and materialism. One of the eighteen main Upanishads, is entirely devoted to a very brilliant exposition of rationalist and naturalist thinking and most outspoken heretical views. It denies the existence of God and soul; it holds that nothing but matter exists, and that there is no other world beyond this world. Its thesis can be summarised as follows:

There is no reincarnation, no God, no Heaven, no Hell; all traditional religious literature is the work of conceited fools; nature, the Originator, and time, the Destroyer, are the rulers of things, and take no account of virtue or vice, in awarding happiness or misery to men; people deluded by flowery speeches, cling to God's temples and priests when, in reality, there is no difference between Vishnu and a dog.

(*Swasanvedyopanishad*, Eliot II, p. 322.)

In the same Upanishad, one reads the story of Virochana, who for years studied at the feet of Prajapati himself, and learned Brahnavidya. Thereafter, on returning to earth, he preached :

One's self is to be made happy here on earth. One's self is to be waited upon. He who makes himself happy here on earth, obtains both worlds, this and the next.

In Chhandogya Upanishad, orthodox Brahmans are compared with "a procession of dogs, each holding the tail of his predecessor and chanting piously 'Om, let us eat ; Om, let us drink.' " (I, p. 12)

The origin of the naturalist and sceptic thought developed in some of the major Upanishads, indeed, can be traced even in the Rig Veda, for instance, in the Creation Hymn which concludes the dialogue between the parents of mankind—the twin brother and sister, Yama and Yami.

The Ramayana records the story of Jabali—the sceptic and sophist who questioned faith and scriptural laws. The Mahabharata also denounces "doubters and atheists who deny the reality of souls." They "wander over the whole earth" ; they were "rationalists, critics of the Vedas, revilers of Brahmans." The Gita also refers to heretics who "deny the existence of God."

Finally, of the six systems of Indian philosophy, at least three are out and out rationalist, and those three have the greater significance. While the Sankyas expounded atheistic naturalism, the Vaisheshik and Naya system tended clearly towards materialism. That very significant evolution of thought, out of the background of the Vedic religion and Upanishadic metaphysical speculation, in the fullness of time, ushered in the Golden Age of India, if there ever was one, that is, the Buddhist period. The later Upanishads and earlier Buddhist literature are full of references to "heretics, atheists and materialists."

It is recorded that, when Buddha was a young man, the great halls and vast forests of Northern India were echoing the powerful voice denying the divine origin of the Vedas and the authority of the Brahmans, and preaching agnosticism, atheism and materialism. And it was during the several centuries of the Buddhist era that

India really attained a very high level of material and moral culture.

But the long process of the development of naturalist, rationalist, sceptic, agnostic and materialist thought in ancient India found culmination in the Charvak system of philosophy, which can be compared with Greek Epicureanism, and as such, is to be appreciated as the positive outcome of the intellectual culture of ancient India. That precious heritage, unfortunately, has come down to us only in small fragments, which, pieced together painstakingly, give a general idea of the system. But there is a hope of rescuing the whole of it thanks to the recorded vehemence and thoroughness of its orthodox opponents, who almost succeeded in destroying all traces of it. On the basis of logical inferences from the arguments, used to combat the Charvaks, the entire system can be reconstructed. That is perhaps the basic task of Indian Renaissance.

The greatest of the "Paribrajaks" mentioned in the earliest Buddhist literature, those Sophists and Stoics of ancient India, was one Brihaspati. He was the founder of Indian Epicureanism—The Charvak System. The Brihaspati Sutras are referred to frequently in contemporary Buddhist and Brahmanical texts. But only some remnants of the Sutras themselves survived the downfall of Buddhism. From them we learn that Brihaspati condemned Brahmans as "men devoid of intellect and manliness, who uphold the authority of the Vedas because they yield them the means of a comfortable livelihood."

The Charvaks laughed at the notion that the Vedas were divinely revealed truth ; they held that truth can never be known except through the senses. Therefore, the idea of soul is a delusion. The Charvaks thus anticipated the modern philosophical thought of ultra-empiricism. They held that even reason was not to be trusted, because every inference depended for its validity not only upon accurate observation and correct reasoning, but also upon the assumption that the future would behave like the past, and of this there was no certainty.

That was anticipating modern agnosticism more than two thousand years before Hume. But the Charvaks were not

mere nihilists, agnostics and sceptics. They developed an elaborate system of positive philosophical thought :

All phenomena are natural. Neither in experience nor in history do we find any interposition of supernatural forces. Matter is the only reality ; the mind is matter thinking. The hypothesis of a Creator is useless for explaining or understanding the world. Men think religion necessary only because, being accustomed to it, they feel a sense of loss and an uncomfortable void when the growth of knowledge destroys faith. Morality is natural ; it is a social convention and convenience, not a divine command. There is no need to control instincts and emotions ; they are commands of nature. The purpose of life is to live ; and the only wisdom is happiness.

This retrospective glance should make the unprejudiced enquirer share the opinion of a modern writer very sympathetically inclined to Indian philosophy. "Perhaps the good Brahmans, who have preserved the history of their country, have deceived us a little about the unanimity of Hindu mysticism and piety."

(Will Durant, *The Story of Civilisation*)

The moral sanction of the established social order in India is provided by the Brahmanical system established after the fall of Buddhism. So, if we want a social revolution, which is necessary to lead India out of the much too long lingering mediaevalism, we shall have to challenge that sanction of Brahmanical reaction, which has kept India in backwardness for so many hundred years, and which has been the cause of all her misery and humiliation, including the conquest by the British, and before the British, by the Mohammedans, and before them, by others.

Unless you lay your finger on that sore spot of India's history, you cannot explain it. Unless you can explain how a handful of merchant-adventurers landing on the shores of India, thousands of miles away from their homeland, as freebooters, could within a few decades conquer it and rule this vast sub-continent for two hundred years, you cannot explain Indian history at all, nor find the causes of India's backwardness, nor be able to lead her

forward. The contention that all this was due to someone's forgery or another's chicanery, does not convince the critical enquirer.

India was conquered again and again because Indians did not value freedom, and did not therefore fight for freedom. They have always been taught not to bother about what is happening today ; that the things of this life do not matter ; that they must think of the future life ; because this world is Maya. To be concerned with material well-being is bad for one's soul ; disregard for material welfare secures liberation of the soul. This doctrine was taught at a certain period of history to all human communities. It is not India's spiritual genius. Past Indian culture was peculiar in that it never successfully taught men to call the bluff of the priesthood who claimed to hold the key to the other world in their hands. And what is glorified as India's spiritual genius, was the monument to triumphant Brahmanical reaction, which all but throttled the voice of the heralds of the revolt of man against spiritual slavery. India's spiritual message can be very rightly parodied in the words of the famous song of the Industrial Workers of the World :

Work and pray,
Live on hay ;
You will get pie
In the sky
When you die ;
But that is a goddam lie.

How can we talk about improving conditions of the people unless the people themselves feel the urge for a better life in this world? So long as the people will find consolation in the faith that everything is the result of their Karma ; whatever happens to them is due to what they did in a previous life, and they are themselves responsible for all their misery ; so long as a people, a culture, a religion, teaches us to make a virtue of misery, so long as that remains our philosophy, the concepts of freedom and progress will be foreign to Indians. They will simply not understand what those concepts mean. We have been taught to hate the foreigners, but we have never been taught to love ourselves. We have to get over this illusory love of God. Man must love himself. Therefore, the philosophy of the Renaissance is called

Humanism. We have had enough of God ; now the time has come when we have also had enough of the nation. The revolt of the nation should be followed by the revolt of man. Otherwise, national independence may bring us more evil than good, indeed something worse than we have ever experienced.

So long as it was a foreign rule under which we suffered, it was easy to incite the people against it ; but now it is rule by our own people ; it is our own government, and it has the sanction of our own old cultural and religious tradition. Even to doubt the motives of this government will be a sin, will be going against our tradition and culture, will be "harming the nation". Therefore, we shall be taught to suffer willingly and sacrifice more, so that the nation can be great. Have you ever stopped to think of this absurdity, which proposes to make men and women of flesh and blood suffer and sacrifice so that the fictitious entity of the nation can prosper? The freedom or greatness of a nation which has to be reared upon the slavery and weakness of the men composing that nation, is an illusion, indeed, a fraud. Unless we can get our people out of this illusion, the social revolution which our country needs, and for which the way has been opened by the advent of political independence, will be impossible.

But the philosophical revolution which will prepare the ground for the social revolution cannot be brought about by people engrossed in the present politics. It is the task of men who refuse to participate in the vulgar scramble for power, and would try to raise political practice on a moral level. Their efforts will create the Renaissance movement, a humanist movement, which will think in terms of the rise, progress and welfare of man. The main function of the movement will be to awaken in man, in as many men as possible, the urge for freedom. That is a work of education of enlightenment. At present, we are still in the stage of educating the educators. to create a sufficiently large number of them, we shall have the help of modern science. Our old culture and scriptures won't help us in that task. It is only in the light of modern science that we can show that man has unlimited potentialities of development. It is in that light that God is revealed as a creation of man. It

is in the power of the creator to destroy his creation or recreate it. Only this belief, this confidence, can awaken in man the urge for freedom and the zeal to work for his freedom. And this confidence is created by modern scientific knowledge.

To develop a sufficiently large number of men to conduct such a movement, we must spread the philosophy of Humanism and tell the people that, whatever is known, has been done and thought throughout the ages by human beings anywhere on earth, is the heritage of all men everywhere. We shall have to take it and make use of it for the benefit of our country and our people. Should we forego our own heritage because some foreigners took up the threads of ancient Indian thought and learning, and developed them when Indians could not do that? It is after all our heritage. We have only to study it critically. We have really to come to know our own past, and that will give us the knowledge and the power and the courage to awaken in Indian mankind the urge of freedom. Then only can a new social order be established in India. Therefore, the Indian Renaissance movement, even though the Clubs may be still few and far between and not have very many members in the beginning, is not a negligible movement. I may tell you, the few free souls of this place who have taken the initiative for spreading this movement here, that you are doing a very great and important work. And in co-operation with similar free spirits conducting similar efforts in other parts of the country, you will contribute to the shaking off of the burden of helplessness and hopelessness which is crushing the Indian people, and kindle in them the love of freedom and the belief in the creativeness of man, which is dormant in them also and only waits to be roused and encouraged.

For many years I have been waiting for the day when the energies of Indian men and women would be freed, upon the attainment of national independence, from the pursuits of hatred and struggles for petty things, when they could devote themselves to the creation of new thoughts, which will develop into a mighty current to sweep away all backwardness and meanness, and lay the foundation of a really new world of free men, not only in India, but

throughout the world. A similar movement of thought, an urge for the rebirth of Humanism, is sweeping the post-war world almost everywhere. India can be in the forefront of that movement, because some of the pioneers of it started their efforts in this country. Your Renaissance Club here may be only a small beginning, but it has a great role to play and a bright future ; if you will only persist in your efforts, you will succeed in drawing all serious-minded and thinking people within the orbit of these efforts. And with similar efforts going on in many other places of the country, they will together create a movement which will grow and spread and ultimately change the mental climate of India, and that is the precondition for any change for the better in the economic conditions and social status of the masses of Indian humanity.

From *Independent India*

Volume : XII

Nos. : 22 and 23

Date : June 6, 1948

June 13, 1948

THE STUDY OF INDIAN HISTORY

One of the objects of the Renaissance Institute is to carry on research in Indian history. For one reason or another, a true history of India has not yet been written. Recently, several attempts are being made to rewrite the history of our country. Since the advent of the National Government, some of these attempts are receiving official support. It is to be hoped that these new attempts, with the encouragement given to them by the Government, will at last produce a true history of India, and we shall learn from the experience of the past, so as to understand more realistically the problems of the present. It is on the solution of these problems that the future of our country depends.

When one speaks of carrying on research in Indian history, the impression is made that this has no bearing on the practical life of the country, and consequently the general public need not have any concern with these pursuits. In a way, historical research is a work of the academicians. But they perform this function not only for their own satisfaction, but to lay before the general public a body of knowledge gained empirically and also with the help of rational thinking, which will enlighten public mind and also enable public activities to be carried on with a purpose and intelligent understanding. Therefore, the public also should be interested in the study of history, and this interest should not end with a man's college career.

But a fruitful research in history will not be possible, a truthful history of India will not be written, unless the scientific approach to historical research is adopted by our scholars. The method was developed by European scholars engaged in historical research. Historical research should be conducted scientifically, without any preconceived notions, with the sole purpose of discovering the truth.

Addressing the annual meeting of the Royal Asiatic Society, henceforth to be known as the Asiatic Society, the

Governor of the province spoke at length of Indian history. He said, although general history is a tale of kings and their battles, yet in India, the kings did not interfere with the private life of the people, so that the law of the country grew as conventions founded on the experience of the people. If it was so, the conditions of our country today might have been different. Unfortunately, it was not so. Let alone the history of antiquity or prehistory, even the history of the Indian Middle Ages and earlier part of modern times speaks very little about the people. From what passes as history, one gets no idea about the conditions of the people, how they lived, what was their attitude towards their governments, how the country was governed. That was not the case only with India. Until the 18th century, the history of Europe also was annals of ruling dynasties, accounts of wars and biographies of great men. It was believed that history was made by great men, conquerors, kings or saints, and history was a record of their doings.

The practice of writing history scientifically is comparatively new. Even after the practice of writing history came into vogue, it was done *post factum*. Events were not recorded while they were taking place. For instance, nobody would say that Valmiki was travelling with Ramchandra and wrote the Ramayana as a record of actual events. Nor can that be said about the Mahabharata. Not only Epics, but other works of ancient literature, which are traditionally called history, were all written *post factum*. They cannot be a true description of events as they actually happened.

Traditional history is unreliable for yet another reason. It was written by men who usually lived in the courts of kings. Dazzled by the splendours of the court in which they lived, ancient chroniclers wrote accounts of the court life. They could not be truthful records. Patronised by kings, historians were naturally inclined to glorify them. Therefore, traditional works of history are very largely fictitious.

This critical point of departure of modern historical research, however, does not reject all the ancient records as worthless. They are the only written records we possess. There are others, more faithful records also, which will have to be discovered and unearthed, which is being done recently by archæologists and anthropologists. But pending the discovery

of hidden truths in consequence of those attempts, historical scholarship must undertake a critical examination of the early literature such as the Epics, scriptures and mythology. They all contain elements of history. Criticism informed by the modern knowledge— of philology, anthropology and psychology— can differentiate the core of historical truth from the mass of legend, fiction and fantasy, and enable scientific historical scholarship to piece together theoretically a picture of life as it was actually lived in ancient times.

It is quite obvious that this kind of work requires a good deal of scholarship and a good deal of independent thinking. These virtues are not always cultivated by the professional teachers of history. Until recently, the history of India was written from two points of view : the imperialist and the nationalist. Neither wanted to find out what really happened and why things happened as they did. In the one case, the object was to prove that the advent of the British in India was necessary— to carry on the civilising mission of the white man ; if that was very largely a falsification of history, nationalist historians bent the stick in the other direction. They tried to prove that ideal conditions obtained in India before the British came. Not only was India politically democratic, economically prosperous and culturally highly developed ; but nationalist historians asserted that great scientific discoveries had been made in ancient times, which even now have not been made elsewhere. Perhaps that kind of history gave some Indians a certain amount of self-confidence, and the belief that they were not really inferior to the white man enabled them to launch the nationalist movement. But at the same time, the idealisation of the past has done incalculable harm. It has discouraged the spirit of enquiry into history undertaken with the purpose of discovering the truth. It has completely destroyed the critical faculty and encouraged an attitude of complacency. Once a people is obsessed with the idea that in ancient times their country had attained glory as yet unsurpassed by any other, the incentive for further progress is killed ; complacency breeds stagnation ; social development is retarded. The pride in an imaginary past superiority serves the purpose of consolation for the present of shame and degradation. It is what psychology calls an inferiority complex. Only dissatisfaction with present

conditions leads to progress; the desire to go beyond what has been achieved until now alone enables mankind to improve its conditions and create a world in which there will be progressively greater prosperity and higher freedom. Researches in Indian history will destroy complacency and remove the obstacle to further progress.

History must be studied scientifically, and historical research should also be guided by philosophy. There is a philosophy of history. Indeed, true historians are philosophers. One of the leading philosophers of our time, I mean Croce, has gone a step further and said that historians are poets. I do not know if that is true. Personally, I am afraid of these distinctions. I am interested in history as well as in philosophy. But I am certainly not a poet. I am even inclined to think that we must discard the poetic element in our approach to history, because it may lead us to depicting things of the past more beautifully than they really were.

The scientific method of studying history, as well as the philosophy to guide historical research, shall have to be learned from Europe. That is another bitter pill which we shall have to swallow. Why should we not learn from others? The habit of running down anything European is a part of patriotism. That is a result of the nationalist approach to history. The argument runs as follows : India achieved a much higher level of civilisation and culture while Europe was still in a state of savagery. What can Europe teach us?

This inferiority complex, meant to hide a backwardness by posing as superior human beings, must be discarded. In Europe also, until the 18th century, history was written as a part of literature. Towards the end of the 18th century and early in the 19th century, there developed in the Universities of Europe a very lively controversy about the nature and role of history. Is it a part of literature, or is the function of history to deal with facts and, therefore, is it to be regarded as an empirical science? The issue was not settled until the end of the 19th century. Throughout the 18th century, when some of the great historians of all times lived and worked, the notion prevailed that history was literature, and should be written as such. In Carlyle's *History of the French Revolution*, there is more of literature than of history. But Buckle's *History of Civilisation*, for instance,

was a new type of history. He treated history as a science, a record of facts, and held that no work could be called history unless it was either a relation of facts or an attempt to reconstruct facts of the past.

Until this view gained ground, history mainly was a collection of fictions and stories, all of which have a substratum of facts. They were an exaggerated and somewhat distorted description of facts. All ancient records must be subjected to a critical analysis conducted on the principle that history is a record of events of the individual and collective life of man. In other words, history must be studied as an empirical science.

This view of history was formulated for the first time by the Italian scholar Giambattista Vico. He lived early in the seventeenth century. He called history a science and maintained that it could be studied only in the light of philology, anthropology, archaeology and social psychology. Nobody denies that these are branches of science. A body of knowledge deduced from investigations into these branches of science is scientific knowledge. Although Vico was the first to formulate this fundamental principle of history, others, like Bacon, preceded him. Subsequently, Vico's ideas were developed and freed from various fallacies which resulted from the fact that, although a brilliant scholar, Vico was after all a bigotted Catholic. He described history as humanity creating itself. But at the same time, he maintained that it is Divine Providence which enables mankind to make history. Herder, Hegel, Michelet, Buckle, to mention only a few of the most outstanding ones, developed the "New Science" of Vico, and formulated a philosophy of history.

The fundamental principle of the philosophy of history is humanist. History is the record of man's evolution. Man's evolution out of his biological background is not a part of history proper. History is very largely social history. It records the events of man's life as a social being. There is a very large gap between the appearance of *homo sapiens*, the appearance of the human species, and the origin of society. That is a very long period, which has to be counted in terms of geological time. Events taking place during that period generated the driving forces of social evolution. The investigation into the earliest stages of social evolution

belongs to anthropology, the science of man. How did man as an anthropological phenomenon develop before he became a social being? Then follows the development of particular groups of men; how a herd of *homo sapiens*, a herd of biological beings who were removed from other animals, but not yet quite human, develop into an organised unit called society? Instincts, intuition and such other mystic human properties grew in the context of the process of biological evolution during that period of the early history of mankind, which may be called the prehistoric period. It is quite evident that, unless we understand the mechanism of the mysterious forces called instincts and intuition, it will not be possible for us to understand how events took place in history as they did and not otherwise.

In order to dig out the roots of human society, we need not only to study anthropology; we shall have to go beyond: to study biology and geology. In the opposite direction, anthropology throws light in the dark corners of psychology, and the latter merges into physiology. That leads us to an understanding of the entire structure of the human body and the various branches of science which have developed from the understanding of the human organism, including the brain, the seat of thinking and all the properties which distinguish man from the lower animals.

These few remarks are only meant to point out that the accumulated knowledge of different branches of science—all the sciences dealing with biological evolution to the extent that without them biology cannot be understood—will have to be brought to bear on our study of history, if it is to lead to a truthful history.

The crucial point in the philosophy of history is: What are the forces which primarily motivate the social actions of mankind? Social action being the spring, the motive force of history. In the middle of the 19th century, there was a divergence of opinion on this point. A comprehensive philosophy of history was for the first time elaborated by Hegel. He declared that the history of civilisation ultimately was the history of philosophy. As an idealist philosopher, he held that the ability to think being the most distinctive human feature, ideas were the prime motive of history. As against the Hegelian idealistic interpretation of history, there

were other views which all referred to Vico's theory that history is created by man. If history was created by man, but there is no underlying motive common in all human action, history would be a chaos, and it would not be possible to explain why history has taken the course it did.

Various scholars carried on researches to find out the prime motive of human action. One of them was Karl Marx; he offered a philosophy of history as against Hegel's idealist conception. He came to the conclusion that man's activities, his behaviour and actions, were determined by the tools with which he earned his livelihood. His reasoning was as follows: Like all other animals, man also is primarily engaged in a struggle for existence. He separates himself from the lower biological forms by the ability to create tools, which supplement the efforts of his limbs in his quest for food and the struggle against nature. The ability to manufacture tools being the distinctive feature of man, human history is determined by the kind of tools made by man at any given time. The evolution of the means of production explains human history.

In the 19th century, scientific thought was based on the generally accepted principle that nothing was to be taken for granted. Scepticism was the prevailing spirit. Hegel's view was largely rejected; and the Marxist interpretation of history developed and prevailed in various shades. Ultimately, it came to be more or less generally accepted in the later 19th and early 20th centuries.

To criticise the Marxian economic interpretation of history does not come within the purview of this talk. With all its fallacies, it is pragmatically more promising than the idealistic view. As such it may be tentatively adopted in studying Indian history also. Even our modern historians do not do more than describe events which took place in ancient or mediaeval times. None so far has tried to explain why events took place as they did. The general belief is that Indian history was determined by India's special genius. Events in India took place differently from those in other countries because India has a special genius, which determines the process of evolution and of history in this country. This is only a variation of the idealistic conception of history. If we want to understand history, this preconceived notion has to be abandoned.

Perhaps India has a special genius; I do not know what it may be. If she has one, we must know what it is.

It is maintained that India's special genius is spiritual as against the Materialism of the West. This assumption that there are two types of human beings simply because they inhabit different parts of the world, and for this reason have entirely different views about the problems of life, cannot be taken for granted. It is neither theoretically plausible nor empirically conclusive. The precondition for research and study in Indian history, which will make us acquainted with truth about the past, is to challenge the validity of the dogmatic assumption that India has a special genius, and that it is spiritual. In support of this sweeping assertion, it is pointed out that even today religion occupies a higher place in Indian life than in the West. A general acquaintance with the history of Europe teaches that, until the 18th century, the West was equally dominated by religious and mystical preoccupations, and by and large even today European mentality is not yet quite free from these preoccupations. When a scientist, in a moment of extravagance, declares that somehow or other matter has been reduced to spirit and the phenomenal world is a creation of man's mind, Indian intellectuals jump to the conclusion that the West is repenting its sinful materialist tradition, and the spiritual message of India is finding response from the tormented and misguided western humanity.

The contention that preoccupation with spiritual things, with other-worldly affairs, disdain for life in this world, was the characteristic feature of India, is backed up by the fact that ancient literature, epics and scriptures, deal mostly with saints and religious topics. They have little to say about the secular conditions of the people, about the life of ordinary men and women. But the country was not populated with saints. The majority of the people was composed of mortal human beings. The overriding concern for the other world could not free them from the requirements of this world. If the ancient literature is silent about the life of the common people in this world, that only proves that in those days the common people were hardly counted as human beings. Yet they lived, and laboured to sustain the social structure with all the pomp and glory described in ancient literature. The

history of the past will remain incomplete and misleading until and unless it includes a true picture of the conditions of life as actually lived by the majority of the people. To reconstruct that picture is the purpose of historical research.

Let us take the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. There is a science of language, investigation how language developed, leading up to literary criticism, the criticism of early poetry, the understanding of the structure of symbols, how words were coined. This whole branch of science of the human language and literature can enable us to discover the social conditions of the time when they were written, and under which people would think and behave in the manner as described, for instance, in the Mahabharata. We shall also find that in certain social conditions man's imagination moves in a certain direction so that only a certain kind of stories are written. Such a critical study of the epics will enable us to reconstruct the historical background of the period covered by them. Then we shall find out whether our country was populated by saints who obviously did not care for this world, or whether there were ordinary people also, and many more of the latter who neither practised Yoga nor preached renunciation, nor were honoured at the courts of kings. They had to earn their livelihood by the honest sweat of their brow, and therefore could not but be concerned with the conditions of life on this drab earth.

While I am prepared to concede that a scientific research in history must not reject any possible hypothesis, it cannot ignore commonsense considerations. Human beings in other parts of the world are known to have been concerned with affairs of this life. Indians must also have been so concerned unless it is maintained that Indians could defy the laws of nature. Obsession with the idea that Indians are an other-worldly race kills the incentive for a scientific historical research. Unless the prejudice is discarded, a true history of India will never be written.

It is true that even today superstitions, sanctified as religion, dominate the mentality of the Indian masses. From this fact it can be inferred that the latter were still more religious in the past. But it is also true that this fact has destroyed self-confidence of the people and precludes the spirit of enquiry and revolt against tradition and authority

which is the incentive to social progress. It makes the economic problems of contemporary India baffling. As far as the masses are concerned, the spiritual genius of India expresses itself in fatalism. They implicitly obey the law of *karma*, which is another name for the Providential Will. Everything in one's life being predetermined, either by the law of *karma* or by the Will of God, the idea of changing the conditions of life by human endeavour is logically precluded by the religious mentality. Therefore, all the frantic appeals of leaders to produce more so that the country can be prosperous find no response from the masses.

The spiritual genius of India has not been an unmixed blessing. The obsession must be overcome. But the fact cannot be changed unless it is known why the religious mode of thought dominated Indian mind longer than in other countries, and why superstitions and religious prejudices still have such a grip on the life of the people. Science explains observed phenomena. A scientific research in Indian history must explain the fact which has fostered the illusion of a spiritual genius. For explaining it, historical research must discover its cause, the destruction of which will contribute to the solution of the problems confronting the present and open up a promising perspective of the future.

Coming to the more recent past, the objective student of history is confronted with another puzzling fact which must be explained, and the explanation will throw a flood of light on earlier history. It is the conquest of India by the English, and previous to that, by the Mohammedans. A large country, populated by heroes, about whom so many sagas have been written, a land of high civilisation which is supposed to have developed a superior culture in the earliest time, was conquered time and again by a handful of foreigners. The British conquest has been explained in a familiar manner which must be rejected on the face of it : It was due to Clive's forgery. Clive might have forged not only one but ten documents, but the fact is that it was possible for the foreigners to conquer India with the help of Indians. One Mirzaffar might have been a traitor, and another might have taken bribe. But what about the Indian soldiers who conquered India for the English ? One must then come to the conclusion that Indians can be easily bribed. The

predisposition to accept bribe is a token of appalling moral degradation. A man with any self-respect does not take bribe. If we conclude that there were so many people willing to be bribed, it will be very discrediting for our country. And if we are looking for truth, we should not be afraid of calling a spade a spade.

In the case of Mohammedan conquest, no such facile explanation as forgery has been given. But again, the fact is that seven hundred horsemen conquered the country. When Clive came, the Bengalis were perhaps enervated ; but at the time of Ibn Kassim, Indian men and women were supposed to have been heroes and heroines. How could a land of heroes be conquered by seven hundred freebooters from Arabia ? The purpose of history is to explain how things could happen as they did. Again, historical research must come to the conclusion that there were certain features in Indian mentality which prevented the normal reaction to events. It was the spiritual genius, in plain language, fatalism. There were subsidiary, more immediate causes— social degradation of the masses, in the case of the Moslem conquest, and economic ruin and political chaos, when the British came. Helpless victims of the intolerance and caste tyranny of the Hindu society were lured by the message of Islam which offered brotherhood and equality to all who embraced the new faith. That is the only explanation of the rapid spread of Islam in India. Millions could not be converted by force.

The decline and fall of the Moghul power plunged the country in a chaos ; civil war devastated the country. The destitute masses supplied recruits for the armies of Dupleix and Clive. All except the political adventurers wanted peace. It returned wherever the foreigners acquired control. Their interest thus became identical with the interest of the majority of Indians. British rule was established with active aid and passive acquiescence, if not express consent, of the Indians.

The shameful fact of India being conquered repeatedly has been glorified by an English poet, often quoted by Indian writers *ad nauseum* to prove the spiritual superiority of Indian culture : Conquerors came and conquerors went, empires rose and empires fell, but the Indian peasant bowed down his head under the storm and continued ploughing his field.

That is a fact : Indians, who are not saints and kings, who are mortal men of flesh and blood, who must eat because

they are hungry, have to go on ploughing the land, completely indifferent to whatever happened in the country since time immemorial. And it is still so today. If you want to improve things in this country, if you only want the peasants to use better ploughs and produce more, you must strike at the root of the much-vaunted religious mentality; the spirit of resignation is admission of defeat in the struggle of life.

India has attained political independence, and now you must think of reconstructing Indian society. Scientific historical research will help the solution of practical problems of social reconstruction. For that purpose, the student of history must remember the controversy between the two conflicting schools of the philosophy of history, the idealistic conception and the so-called economic interpretation. To reconcile those two points of view is one of the challenging questions confronting the modern world. Here history merges into philosophy, and the study of Indian history will show you that perhaps Hegel was nearer the truth than Marx. My personal view is that both of them were partially right, and the two views are not exclusive. They can be reconciled, and a more comprehensive and realistic philosophy of history can be built up by harmonising the two.

The history of India will have to be reconstructed very largely by the logical process of deducing facts from the history of thought. While we have practically no history which records the process of economic, political and social developments, we have a history of philosophy; not the kind of history that our professors have written, most of which is unreliable. We have records of the development of ideas, and the process can be traced back perhaps 1500 to 2000 years before Christ. The first task will be to trace a coherent connection between these various stages of thought recorded in innumerable books. As regards a history of Indian philosophy, we are not so helpless as in the case of a history of social development. The task of historical research is to reconstruct the social background of the process of mental evolution. The science of history shows the way.

These considerations have led me to the conclusion that the precondition for the writing of a truthful history of India, a history of the social and political development, is to write a logically consistent history of Indian philosophy. Thus,

the study of Indian history is something bigger and more difficult than cramming textbooks. Historical research must be guided by the totality of scientific knowledge, which throws light on the dark corners of the process of mental evolution, thus explaining the social and individual behaviour of man from the dawn of history. We must have a coherent view of the development of Indian thought before we can undertake a fruitful study of Indian history.

The behaviour of mankind and its social condition in prehistoric times will have to be deduced logically from what is known about its thought. Hegel was not right when he said that a World Spirit was operating through man. But it is true that after all ideas, man's thought, are the incentive of human action. Any physical action is preceded by a movement in man's brain. What appear to be automatic actions are not exceptions. Even when you will step out of this hall, go down the stairs and walk on the streets, the movements of your limbs will be preceded by the will to do so. You may not be conscious of the mental act; it will take place. In this sense, Hegel is sounder. But on the other hand, Marxian economic determinism is an important pointer.

You cannot simply take man for granted. You have to explain man also: Why man established society? Why society established a political organisation? Why this took the forms we know? These questions can be answered to a certain extent by the materialist interpretation of history, that the material conditions of life, to a large extent, influence man's thought and thereby his action.

But Karl Marx committed the same mistake for which he criticised Hegel. His premises was dogmatic. Therefore, the conclusions deduced from it were fallacious. It is true that the ability to make tools and use them separates man from the pre-human animals. But what enables man to make tools? Man's mind differentiates him from that of the ape before he can invent the first tool. Karl Marx forgot that the brain also is a tool, and man differentiated himself from his animal ancestors and invented the device of mechanical ways of solving the problems of his life, only when man's brain was differentiated from the brain of the pre-human species. In other words, the idealistic interpretation of history goes a little further than the economic interpretation. Therefore,

historical research should not be restricted by any dogmatic premises.

In so far as Indian history will have to be logically reconstructed from the history of Indian thought, we shall have to be guided by the so-called idealistic conception of history. At the same time, economic interpretation will be very fruitful when we shall reach the period of recorded history and more modern times. Consequently, Indian historical research may contribute to the development of a new philosophy of history by reconciling the sound elements in both the conceptions. Apart from the search for truth, which is the primary purpose of historical research, and the reconstruction of our history as such, we shall thus do something of great significance. This perspective should encourage us to face all difficulties. We may not find official support; and the truth which we shall discover may not be liked by all; but the research is bound to reveal truth and that by itself will be the greatest reward. Only with that spirit can science be promoted.

But there will be practical consequences also. The knowledge of history will enable us to clear away the cobwebs which are paralysing brains, to discard various preconceived ideas which inhibit human incentive, and open up before mankind new vistas and hopes. India might have been great in the past, but because Indians are human beings, they must develop into something still greater. Once this attitude is shared by many, the past will cease to be a nostalgia and become an incentive for present action and inspire future hope.

Research in Indian history is a very vast field for scholars and laymen who want to discover truth and contribute to the reconstruction of Indian society; for people who want to lay the foundation for such a reconstruction, and also for people who think in terms of mankind as a whole, who have outgrown the limitations of nationalist mentality. They too will achieve something in the pursuit of the ideal of solving the problems which confront modern mankind as a whole, the solution of which is the crying need of our time.

From *The Radical Humanist*

Volume : XV

Nos. : 36 and 37

Date : Sept. 16, 1951

Sept. 23, 1951

INDIAN CULTURE

Indian culture is a favourite subject of discussion in our country. A good deal is being written and talked in our country. A good deal is being written and talked about it. But though there is so much talk about culture, there is no agreement about what culture is. Only recently, the famous poet T. S. Eliot has written a whole book in an attempt to define what is culture. I do not know if there are many people who agree with his definition. I certainly do not.

Eliot's definition of culture is not new. It is the so-called German definition. It was Kant who first suggested the understanding of culture in that light. Hegel developed it further. But Fichte was the man who really made it fashionable in the nineteenth century. That German definition of culture was rather a reaction to the traditional definition, which prevailed in Europe since the Renaissance, and which was taken over by the men of the Renaissance from the early Greek understanding of culture.

The Renaissance regarded culture as an individual production, whereas the German definition, which was incidentally, never quite accepted in England, is somewhat mystic. Even if Eliot advocates it, I wonder if it will now be acceptable to the English, with their liberal tradition, any more than in the past. According to this definition, certain ethnic groups, or races, are inherently endowed with particular tendencies to develop specific forms of culture. It appears that those who in our country speak authoritatively about culture are inclined to accept this view, because the conception of a national culture is deduced from this definition, according to which culture is a collective production.

I believe that culture is an individual human production. Therefore, in my opinion, any assessment of the Indian cultural heritage, or that of any other people, to be historically correct, should begin from the principle that the totality of

human culture is the heritage of all people and every nation. That does not ignore specific forms of cultural development by different ethnic groups. Certain forms of culture are developed by individuals in the process of self-development of the personality. In course of time, people living in a group develop certain forms or modes or traditions or canons of culture which are accepted by all the members of that group. In that sense, you can speak of a group or collective culture. But unless we analyse the given forms of collective culture into the constituent parts contributed by individual members of that community, we logically come to a negation of the doctrine of individual creativeness, of individual freedom.

The Indian cultural heritage also must, in my opinion, be regarded from this point of view. Firstly, we must examine the specific forms of culture that were developed in India; and secondly, if we want to build on the foundation of India's particular cultural heritage, and in building on that foundation want to contribute something new and additional to that heritage, then we shall also have to own the totality of all human culture as our own cultural heritage. Then only can we enrich our particular cultural heritage and develop a border and greater and richer culture.

Another point of cultural history which must be studied and understood, is the relation between culture and civilisation. The relation between the two is very often overlooked, and there has developed a certain attitude of regarding them as antithetical or contradictory. To discover the historical relation between these two forms of human activity— culture and civilisation— is a rather difficult problem. Which precedes which? Which comes first? There is one school which considers civilisation as the basis of culture. It defines culture as the process of the development of what is called the finer human attributes. From that it is deduced that, unless the physical existence of the human being, meaning the social circumstances and material civilisation under which men live, have attained a certain level of comfort and amenities, it is not possible for them to develop the finer sides of human existence.

This theory of culture logically follows from the doctrine of economic determinism in history. There is a good deal to be said in favour of that view, although a quite powerful

criticism can also be levelled against it. The obvious objection is that people who are considered not to be civilised may have very distinctive forms of culture. There are primitive cultures. If we distinguish the two, saying that culture is the measure of the individual development of man, and civilisation the measure of his social development, the two may be harmonised. But in that sense, we cannot draw a relation of historical sequence. Certain types of culture developed before mankind entered the stage of civilisation. On the other hand, a highly civilised people has opportunities of developing higher forms of culture. In discussing our cultural heritage, this point is not always borne in mind.

We have a tendency of indulging in exaggerations, which is a characteristic feature of modern language about national cultures. We talk about our nationalism as a cultural nationalism. I am afraid we cannot appraise our indigenous cultural heritage objectively so long as we do not discard the points of view that the Indian people is endowed with certain natural attributes or qualities to develop a peculiar form of culture, not developed by other countries, and that this form of culture would be adulterated or corrupted by the influence of cultures developed by other peoples endowed with different natural qualities. That is the meaning of the distinction between the spiritual culture of India and the materialist culture of the West. If we go outside India in search of the common human heritage, we shall have to appreciate a good deal of cultural values which were developed by the European people. The tendency to reject those cultural values or deprecate them, will do more harm to the cultural development of India than good.

One may even go a step further and say that, if the political and economic development of India is to take place according to our aspirations and plans, it will not be possible for us to maintain our peculiar tradition and cultural heritage in their pristine purity.

The fact is that, from time immemorial, Indian culture was intricately mixed up with religion. Indeed, the specific forms of Indian culture developed as religious rituals and ceremonials. If from that historical fact we deduce that even the future Indian culture will be so closely associated with religion, I am afraid we shall condemn Indian cultural

development to an interminable period of stultification and stunted growth.

It is not necessary to develop this point theoretically. It can be deduced empirically also. Because, if we look at Europe, the so-called materialistic West, we shall see that until perhaps three hundred years ago, European culture was also very closely associated with religion. Ever since antiquity, European culture developed as part of church. The conclusion that we can deduce from this fact is that, at some stage of development, every group of people, no matter where they live, necessarily thinks in terms of religion. That is to say, the entire intellectual and emotional history of any people during a certain period of its development is influenced by the religious mode of thought. Later on, the religious mode of thought becomes inadequate. Within the framework of that mode of thought, human intelligence, will and emotions find no further scope. Consequently, human genius, which had previously created the religious mode of thought, created a new mode of thought. That new mode of thought was the scientific mode of thought, which has dominated European intellectual history even since the time of the Renaissance.

Now if we want to experience the political and, particularly, the economic development which was denied us during the last 200 years or more, the result will be a very powerful impact on the Indian mind, and under that impact the venerable religious mode of thought will necessarily give way, to be replaced by the scientific mode of thought. What is the difference between the two? The one specific feature of the former is faith. Man takes certain things for granted as immutable, something given, which has to be believed, and everything else is built on that supposition. And since that is the given foundation, everything follows logically deduced from it. Whatever cannot be logically deduced from it, is considered as going against the particular culture, against the genius of that particular community, and hence must be rejected. We know this attitude from the heretical movement in Europe. We have had similar movements in our history, which were also similarly treated.

The scientific mode of thought, on the contrary, is based on doubt. Nothing is to be taken for granted. There are certain observed phenomena and certain experienced facts.

We try to understand their causes and how they come about, and then we go a step further to coordinate these experiences into a system of thought that can guide our lives. The necessity of the religious mode of thought giving way to the scientific mode of thought can be clearly discovered in the process of human evolution. It may be a very strange statement to make, but I make it : What is called the religious mode of thought is also, in the last analysis, scientific and rational. Religion also starts from enquiry. Primitive man, surrounded by hostile nature against which he had to struggle for his survival, feels the need to understand the natural phenomena which threaten him.

For instance, take rain. Rain is necessary. But if man does not know whither it comes and when it comes, he does not know when to sow. So, he started to think when rain will come, and that led him to think of how it comes about. The same is true about the wind and thunder and lightning. For the sheer need of physical survival, primitive man found it necessary to understand why things happen as they do. But in the state of primitive intellectual development, he cannot give an adequate rational explanation for the natural phenomena, and he is guided by the animistic spirit. He knows from experience that, when he wants to do certain things, he does them ; or sometimes he does not want to do them. He has his volition. So, he thinks that rain and wind also happen, or do not happen, according to a certain super-human volition.

That is the beginning of the conception of the gods. Man thinks that as he can do and create certain things, make corn grow, for instance, or produce a spark of fire, so also the bigger phenomena of nature must be created by a much bigger being like himself, and depend on the will of that being, which can be changed and influenced. That is how man created gods in his own image. In a way, this conception is also based on scientific method of hypothesis, if it is based on a sufficiently adequate store of knowledge, it becomes verified, and you call it a theory. Man learns to pray for rain only when rain is due to come. That was a discovery about nature. Later he learns that rain comes whether he prays or not. When a hypothesis is not borne out by experience, it is discarded.

In the religious mode of thought, which is a primitive form of human rationality, certain hypothesis were made, which might have been totally false, but on their basis certain ideas were created which transcend time and space. Just as certain modern scientific notions closely resemble certain ancient hypotheses, as for instance that of ether, based on apparently quite arbitrary ideas, so many cultural values created within the framework of the religious mode of thought can survive long beyond it and retain their validity, even if now based on entirely different grounds. There is a fear that, if religion disappears, these forms of culture would also go. But there is no reason for this fear. We have seen in Europe that the aesthetic and cultural values developed within the surveillance of the Catholic Church have survived religious faith in the West. Many Europeans who have lost their faith in God treasure the values developed as part of Christianity.

I believe that we shall have to experience the same process in India. To be afraid of that process is to condemn ourselves to cultural reaction. For instance, you see our historical monuments, paintings and sculptures. They were all developed as part of religion. But the unknown painters or sculptors created those things not because they were religious, but because they were creative human beings who had to express their personality by painting and carving. Those values were created not by religion, but by human beings who were born with the urge to be painters and sculptors. If we want to admire our ancient monuments, we go and see temples and pillars which were built as part of a religious culture, but we admire them just as we admire also beautiful buildings built and things made today, not for their religious association, but as manifestations of human culture and creativeness. The predominant form of modern Indian culture remains an imitation of the ancient art, which was part of religion. But even if our modern painters may be religious men, who believe in God, they create their art not as an act of worship, but out of their human urge of creativeness.

If at any time in history the painter ever painted as a religious act, it was so because at that time religion was a living reality for him and gave a certain inspiration to his

creative artistic genius; but it also restricted the scope of artistic genius and imagination. Later on, when the same cultural patterns of painting or architecture or sculpture were created by people no longer circumscribed by the religious mode of thought, their art developed much further. Modern artists have created entirely new forms. They may be starting from the ancient tradition, but adding something new to it, developing it, enriching and broadening it.

On the other hand, there are people who are talking much about ancient culture, but contributing nothing new to it, and they may create a cultural reaction. This is how culture depends on the individual human being. You can find that many people who are talking most about Indian culture do not often know themselves our greatest cultural heritage. Many do not know, for instance, of Kalidasa, but only of the Gita or Vendanta. We do not regard with pride some of our best cultural treasures and traditions, even if we nominally know of their existence. Only what is clearly religious is considered the specific Indian form of culture. Form and contents are being mixed up. Religion was the form. In that form, certain cultural contents were placed. And today we consider as culture only the form, and do not care to look separately at the contents.

One cannot speak about the history of culture without speaking of the history of religion. But the clinging to this association may stifle the development of our culture. For instance, you see in our science laboratories men who still carry all the outward symbols of orthodox religious belief. I do not know whether they are hypocritical or submitting to social compulsion, in which latter case it is only lack of courage. But in either case it is certainly not compatible with the scientific spirit. Thus, we see how the tendency to conform can lead to hypocrisy or cowardice or both. This intellectual lethargy is most deplorable and may stunt our whole cultural development.

There are those who would discard the old forms of religion, but think that in any case there must be some form of religion, because otherwise men become immoral. That conception is like giving the baby a toy to keep it quite or promise the school boy a reward for behaving himself. It is a very superficial conception of religion. If we have to

regard religion as a form of culture, we cannot base our belief on such arguments. I do not say that religion is necessary for cultural development today. But religion was a form of culture and has created great values. Even if such values are created as the forms of a certain belief, because of their artistic value they can survive religion itself and be taken over by us—the cultural contents without religious associations.

If we want to progress, we have to apply the modern scientific mode of thought to our religious beliefs, just as we apply it to all other problems. Throughout the history of civilisation, religious beliefs have changed. We know of animism, natural religions, polytheistic religions and then monotheistic religions. This only shows that the human mind, even when it cannot do without believing some thing, yet submits even the object of its belief to changes. Thus, in our life the forms of religion may still survive, but they are today mere ballast. You may say that our peasants still need religion that, unless a man believe that a God protects him from snakes, he might die of fear, if not of the snakes. But for the average educated Indian, such assumptions are not needed. Both are Indians by "national culture". They are living, however, in different ages. Thus, you see that one cannot speak of an Indian culture as such. There is only human culture. There are many Indians culturally more akin to a modern Frenchman or Englishman than to millions of their Indian brethren.

When we speak of Indian culture, we commit ourselves on two points. You may speak of the culture of Tagore or of Nehru, but how can you call that the culture of India? The majority of Indians have nothing to do with that culture. If you want a typically Indian culture, you have to take that of the overwhelming majority of Indians, which means, you have to go down to a very low level of culture.

We have to admit a plurality of forms of culture in an almost infinite number of variations. If you do that, you will find it difficult to speak of national cultures. What is in common between the culture of a Tamil Brahmin and a Punjabi College Professor; a Pathan and a Bengali? Until recent history, there was not even a common Indian nationality to all of them. Their environments were vastly

different. All of them had their own specific cultures, even then, within the geographical boundaries of the Indian subcontinent. But inspite of that you may find more in common between Bengali and Italian art than between Bengali and Punjabi art.

Therefore I say, there is only human culture, based on the common denominator of human creativeness. You may say, creativity is emotional or intellectual. But I say, the common denominator of human creativity is rational, which does not underate either emotion or intelligence.

The very idea of national culture runs counter to all cultural history. If we want a national culture, we shall have to destroy whatever culture we actually have. Within the framework of one country, various forms of culture have developed. The one thing we can do is to see that all these various cultures are preserved and allowed to develop their specific forms. If we insist on having one national culture, or for that matter one national language, we shall in the process destroy the real cultures that we have. Therefore I said that too much talk about the cultural heritage of India may have reactionary consequences.

If we finally take the specific form of Indian culture—specific according to our authorities, and that means religious culture: what form of religious culture should we maintain? There is no such things as one Hinduism. There are many sects and forms of this religion. It is not correct to say that the Gita is Hinduism. Even in the Gita there are half a dozen religions. There are some new and very highly sophisticated forms of religion like that of Croce, an ethereal kind of religion divested of all qualities and worship traditionally associated with religion; but I do not see what kind of satisfaction that can give to the modern human mind. We should be satisfied that zero with nothing before and nothing behind remains nothing. However, unless we think of religion in that ethereal way, we cannot speak of an Indian religion as such.

If we want to find out what is the specific form of Hindu culture we shall have to go through the complicated process of studying the history of Indian religion. But in that respect also, people tell many things which are historically not quite correct. It is said that there are six schools of Indian religion.

The Upanishads are a record of a particular period of Indian religious development. From that development, the six systems of Indian religion and philosophy emerged. Vedanta was the latest of them. And there are some who maintain that Vedanta is a particular Buddhist system. Then there are the Vaisheshika and Nyaya systems. They cannot all be lumped together and called Hinduism. Some are based on Shankaracharya's Pantheism. Buddhism itself was the logical outcome of early Hinduism. If we want to say that religion is India's specific form of culture, we shall have to go further and shall find that Sankhya or Vaisheshika system can be logically deduced from the Upanishads. But that is difficult with Vedanta. In order to prove that the world is Maya, Shankara set up another principle which is consistent and co-eternal with God. Thus, in order to establish Monism, he set up an absolute dualism.

This early part of Indian religious history is really the source from which we can rescue the most valuable contributions India has made to human culture. But we cannot rescue them so long as we regard them as contributions of a national culture. That was our contribution to a human world culture, and it has entered into human culture through the Greeks and Arabs. The Sankhya system contains in it the premises of a full-fledged materialistic philosophy, similar to what we find with the Greeks. This tradition was maintained in Europe throughout the Middle-Ages, even when it was forgotten in India. In this sense India's contributions are contained in modern human culture.

If we appreciate our cultural heritage in that sense, there will be no difficulty in claiming the other part of our heritage also, namely, the cultural values developed in other parts of the world based on a tradition to which Indian humanity had contributed, taking them over and harmonising them with our specific forms of culture prevalent in India now, and point out the ways towards new forms of this culture which will again be a contribution to the universal human cultural heritage.

But if we insist on a national Indian culture all our own, it will mean cultural chauvinism, and all chauvinism is barbarism. Our cultural heritage is great enough for us to

be cosmopolitan and receptive of whatever comes our way, confident that we can develop and enrich it, just as we have contributed to whatever it is today. Thus, alone real human culture can grow, and it is human culture which we want. National cultures divide. But human culture is what all developed human beings throughout the world have in common, what binds and unites them, and what holds out the hope that there will come a time when all people can live in peace, happiness and harmony together on this earth.

From *The Radical Humanist*

Volume : XIX

Nos. : 9 and 10

Date : Feb. 27, 1955

March. 6, 1955

HINDUISM AND MODERN THOUGHT

A fruitful discussion of the subject must start with a proper understanding of religion, in other words, a clear definition of the concept. That is extremely difficult in the case of Hinduism. As a religion, Hinduism is different from other religions, in the sense that it is not based on divine truth believed to have been revealed to one particular individual; therefore, it has not got one generally accepted body of doctrines and dogmas. Because of its rather comprehensive foundation, various currents of thought and various types of faith, often mutually contradictory, came to be known as Hinduism. It is extremely difficult for a student of history to judge what exactly is Hinduism as a religion. The ambiguity is so great that there are competent authorities on the subject who maintain that Hinduism is not a religion at all. Certain aspects of Hinduism may be proved to lack the characteristic features of religion. But when we take the entire body of beliefs, which has been current in India since time immemorial, and which, in a sort of omnibus way, is called Hinduism, it cannot be maintained that it is not a religion. What is true is that Hinduism is not a religion in the sense that Islam, Christianity and Judaism are religions.

Owing to the eclectic nature of Hinduism as a religion, it is all the more difficult to compare or contrast it with modern thought. The vast body of ill-assorted Hindu religious literature, which abounds in myths, legends and fantasies, has encouraged attempts, evidently very far-fetched from the point of view of historical research. Many writers on Hinduism have tried to prove that what is known as modern thought was known in India already in the earliest times. The corollary to this contention is that, unlike other religions, it is not necessary for Hinduism to measure itself up with the principles, standards and values of modern thought. But the contention itself is not beyond challenge. If it failed to stand the test of reason, Hinduism must be relegated to

the lumber-room of history, and those who have professed it even now should search for a different source of faith or adopt a different mode of thinking.

If the contention was that certain aspects of modern thought in embryonic form can be traced in ancient Hindu literature there would be nothing to object. It would be quite a factual statement. That is the case with all other religions also, because human thought has a continuity. Essentially, what is called modern thought can be traced in embryonic form in the earliest intellectual efforts of mankind. And that is the point of departure of religious criticism. Its purpose is to find out in what respect and to what extent earlier modes of thought carried in themselves the germs of knowledge acquired subsequently, so that those embryonic truths could be treasured as the immortal heritage of mankind which transcends time and space.

A generally accepted body of dogmas deduced from the teachings of a particular prophet is the characteristic feature of the so-called revealed religions, such as Christianity, Islam and to some extent, Judaism. Revelation is not unknown in the history of Hinduism. The peculiarity of Hinduism is not the absence of revelation. Only, it was not claimed by one person, but experienced by any number of persons. The interesting fact for the critic is that, although many prophets or seers claimed to have divine truth revealed to each of them, yet, in the doctrines, preached by them, the conception of divine truth is not always the same.

All religions, whether revealed or natural or theistic have one common feature, and that is the most essential feature: it is the belief in something super-natural and super-human. That is the distinctive feature of the religious view of life as against the modern scientific mode of thought. Faith in something super-sensual, super-natural, super-human is the point of departure of every school of Hinduism. That is the case even with the earlier systems of Hindu philosophy which broke away from the poetic Vedic natural religion, and also moved away from the speculations of the Upanishads, although all the six systems of Hindu philosophy grow out of the speculations of the Upanishadic age. While belief in something beyond human understanding is the foundation of Hinduism, the basic principle of modern

thought is not to take anything for granted. It maintains that truth is accessible to human understanding, and anything which is not within the reach of human apprehension cannot be the content of knowledge, and therefore can be dismissed as mystic illusion.

Bearing in mind this distinction, we can immediately reject all the various attempts made to reconcile Hinduism with modern thought, or to maintain that modern thought has not discovered anything new, that whatever it has discovered was known to the ancient seers and prophets of Hinduism.

It must be pointed out that this critical attitude does not imply any disrespect for religious faith; nor does it deny, that, in the earlier stages of intellectual development, man is necessarily given to the religious mode of thought. That necessity has not yet completely disappeared, and so long as it is felt by some people, they will think in religious terms. It would be unfair to say that a religious man is incapable of grasping modern thought.

A critical attitude to religion is indispensable for the study of history. Religion was an important factor, in some periods, indeed the most important factor, in the history of mankind. Therefore, the history of the development of religion is a necessary part of the general history of any period. What has come down as recorded history does not present a true picture of the realities of the past. Simply because history of the remote past was written mostly on the basis of legends. Therefore, to reconstruct a true picture of the conditions of life in the past, written history as well as legends must be subjected to criticism in the light of philology, anthropology and psychology. The history of the development of religion as part of the general history must be subjected to a similar criticism. Conversely, a critical examination of the religious beliefs, institutions and traditions throws a flood of light into that dark corners of the social and cultural history of the country concerned.

A critical history of the development of religion reveals the fact that religion originated in the ignorance of man. The primitive man's inability to explain natural phenomena in terms of nature, without going beyond the limits of nature, compelled him to assume super-human beings as the prime movers of various natural phenomena. Those assumed

natural forces eventually came to be the gods of natural religion. The polytheism of natural religion was subsequently replaced by monotheistic religions.

One specific feature of the history of Hinduism is that Vedic polytheism was never rejected in favour of a monotheistic religion. The idea of a Supreme Being as a Super-God was conceived. But the conception lacked uniformity. The religious thought in ancient India developed from polytheism to pantheism. The concept of a personal God, as in Islam or Christianity or Judaism, is absent in Hinduism. The Avatars are not personal Gods. They are incarnations of some divine force which is impersonal. The Hindu conception of the Supreme Being was never personified. It logically led to pantheism, which identified the entire existence with God.

The seeds of modern thought could be traced in this Hindu conception of the Supreme Being. In the last analysis, pantheism is inverted Materialism. God is identical with the world, and the world of experience is a material being. The seeds of modern thought in Hinduism began to sprout already in the Advaitavad of Shankar; because, his monotheism, as a matter of fact, destroyed religion. Shankaracharya himself resorted to absolute dualism to save religion from the ruinous consequences of his metaphysics. But dualism cannot get around the problem of priority, which confronts it with the fallacy of infinite regression.

In order to maintain the purity of the spiritual Final Cause, one must concede, as Shankar did, external existence to the material world. Then the question of creation becomes irrelevant. Apart from the obvious counter-question— who created the creator?— it can be argued that, if the spiritual Final Cause was never created, the material world could also have existed by itself. By following this line of thought inherent in Hinduism, one must come to the conclusion that man must be satisfied with truths accessible to intelligence and experience. The transcendental is a matter of speculation, imagination or faith. The life on this earth must be guided by truths accessible to man's comprehension. That is the foundation of modern thought.

Thus, historically, it can be said that there is no contradiction between Hinduism in its philosophical aspect

and modern thought. The germs of the latter were there in Hindu philosophy in an embryonic form. But from this one cannot jump to the conclusion that the quintessence of modern scientific thought was contained in Vedantic pantheism. It is not necessary for a country to have attained the level of modern thought already in the remote past in order to prove that it is good as any other country. Every country went through a period dominated by the religious mode of thought; therefore, the mentality of every people had to liberate itself from that tradition before it could enter the stage of evolution characterised by the scientific mode of thought: the guiding principle that human knowledge was not dependent on revelation or mystic and metaphysical assumptions, but is the result of man's experience.

Modern thought again is a very general and comprehensive term. The basic feature of modern thought is the scientific approach; it is often called rationalism, but rationalism is not always and necessarily scientific. It can also be metaphysical. The more accurate term is the scientific mode of thought, inspired by the spirit of enquiry, which does not take anything for granted, which opposes faith with reason. Unless it is subjected to criticism, to that its abiding contents are discovered, the whole of Hinduism the entire body of scriptures, legends, stories and mythologies, which have come down as Hinduism, and which are cherished as our national heritage, cannot be reconciled with the scientific mode of thought.

As I remark previously, the inclination to choose tradition and orthodoxy to maintain that ancient Indian literature contained the highest of wisdom, and therefore we have nothing more to learn— would mean to forego the path of further progress; it would be to hold that India could do without the vast body of human knowledge accumulated during the last 4-500 years. Because, modern knowledge, just as ancient wisdom, is a common human heritage. To disown our own heritage would be a wrong choice, which should not be made. Unless it is realised that modern thought compels the rejection of a large bulk of our traditional beliefs, faiths and superstitions, we shall be forced to make the wrong choice.

Modern thought is a challenge to Hinduism, as it has

been a challenge to all other religions. I know of no scholar and historian who could prove that Hinduism was able to take up the challenge without discarding the traditional beliefs considered to be its integral parts. For instance, take one of the very popular dogmas of Hinduism, the belief in the transmigration of the soul and *Karma*. It is evidently not consistent with the modern idea of human freedom— not the freedom which will be attained in imagination by one's realising the identity with some Supreme Being or World Soul— but freedom to be enjoyed by man in this world. According to the law of *Karma*, in this life man has no choice. He is predestined to enjoy or suffer for his acts in a previous life, and that life again was equally predestined. It is a vicious circle. How it began, none knows. And the doctrine of transmigration of the soul says that not only one human life, but the entire history of mankind is predetermined. With these venerable beliefs, one cannot simply conceive of the modern idea of man's creativeness, man working out his own destiny. If you conceive freedom in the religious sense, as escape from this world, which is a vale of sorrow, then there will be no inconsistency. But in that case, the convinced religious man should not bother about what happens in this world, about the social or political problems. Evidently, traditional orthodox Hinduism, with its dogmas and beliefs, is not compatible with modern thought.

By holding that Hinduism is Sanatan Dharma, eternal and immutable, India would convert herself not into a modern nation, but into a mediaeval monastery. If there are people who prefer that, I cannot convince them. But if you study history, you will find that this mentality of running away from the world grew in the atmosphere of social dissolution created by man's inability to solve the problems of life. In ancient times, man was baffled by the problems of life because he lacked the power of knowledge. Modern science has made man conscious of his unlimited power. Even now, he cannot solve all the problems of life. But the urge for flight, the feeling of fatality, of defeat, is no longer so compelling. That being the case, there does not seem to be any legitimate ground for holding on to the belief that man is a helpless victim of a Providential Will; that the

material world is of no importance for the higher life of man ; that the object of man's life is to free himself from the material world and seek bliss in some other world of his imagination.

Modern thought is not completely antagonistic to Hinduism. Nor is it so in the case of any religion. Modern thought is only the logical consequence of the endless process of intellectual development, which started with the appearance of *homo sapiens*. Under certain circumstances, man's mind was excessively burdened with some notions and prejudices and ideas which fall off as soon as it rises on a higher level of development. But even after rising to a higher level, man's mind retains some of the old ideas as a matter of habit. Therefore, the fact that the tradition of Hindu faith and customs has resisted the impact of modern thought does not prove that it is still necessary, or that they are indispensable for our social and national life. They are only relics of a dead past persisting as a matter of habit. They are doing so, because scientific knowledge, the modern mode of thought, has not penetrated sufficiently deep to blast their foundation of ignorance.

To put it differently, the difference between Hinduism as a religion and modern thought is the difference between faith and reason. It is the difference between ignorance and knowledge. It has been maintained that Hinduism can stand the test of reason. Well, we shall have to agree about what we mean by reason. But for our present purpose, it is enough to point out that, in so far as Hinduism is a religion, it does not discard the common point of departure of all religions, *viz.*, the faith in something super-sensual, super-natural, super-human ; it is neither rational nor scientific. Hinduism, and for that matter, any religion, can be reconciled with reason in the sense that religion is a primitive form of rationalism. The basic principle of religion is that nothing happens without a cause, and that also is the foundation of science. Unable to discover the causes of natural phenomena, the primitive man attributed them to super-natural beings. Gods were creations of primitive man's anthropomorphic imagination. But why should the search for the causes of natural phenomena stop at the gods ? Who created the gods ? Confronted with this rational question, the rationalism of

religion breaks down, and makes room for faith. Therefore, neither Hinduism nor any other religion can stand the test of reason. The Hindu conception of the Final Cause is a contradiction in terms. The belief in Final Cause is a negation of rationalism. It implies that something can come out of nothing. And the Hindu philosophical conception of the Final Cause is analogous to the Hegelian Absolute Being, which is Absolute Nothing. It cannot cause anything. So, religious rationalism leads to a palpable absurdity.

Those who want to reconstruct the spiritual history of India, will have to find out what aspects of Hinduism cannot be reconciled with modern thought, and write them off as pertaining to the dead past, things which were necessary in the past but are no longer necessary, which have no social and no human value for the present. This kind of religious criticism is necessary for the study of Indian history, for an understanding of our past, which will enable us to grasp the implications of the problems of our present and face those of our future.

One prejudice has to be dispelled before the Hindu religious mind can take a dispassionate attitude to what is known as modern thought. It is the preconceived notion that the East is spiritual ; that modern thought is materialist and therefore cannot be reconciled with the spiritual genius of the East. This is an idea which has absolutely no foundation in history. It is nothing but a prejudice, and a slight knowledge of history will enable us to discard it. It is true that for a long period of time Indian thinking was dominated by religious beliefs. But that is not a peculiar feature of Indian history. That was the case also with the materialist West until three-hundred years ago. And European mentality, by the large, is not yet quite free from religious prejudices, although it is largely influenced by the scientific outlook. There is no historical foundation nor empirical justification for the belief that people inhabiting a certain part of the globe naturally think in terms of super-human and super-natural values, whereas those inhabiting other parts are concerned with only the gross appetites of the flesh.

As a matter of fact, the concern for the physical aspects of life is fundamental, common to all human beings. Religion

originated in it. The urge to explain the various natural phenomena induced man to assume the existence of super-natural forces. In course of time, scientific knowledge enabled him to dispense with *ad hoc* assumptions which constituted the basis of religion. Consequently, the psychological necessity of religion disappeared; the foundation of the religious mode of thought was blasted. This happened in Europe several hundred years ago. The concern of European mankind reverted to the original human nature, that is, concern with the world in which he lived, concern with his power as a human being to acquire greater and greater knowledge and derive greater and greater power from this knowledge, power for still greater conquests of nature. That is the way of modern thought. It is clear to see that it is not a peculiarity of a particular race or people, but results from the ability of man to explain natural phenomena no longer by assuming super-natural forces, but in the light of ever expanding knowledge of nature.

The fact that for one reason or another India could not attain that stage of intellectual development at the same time as the western peoples, should not be glorified as the token of a special genius of the Indian people. This prejudice of a special genius precludes us from appreciating the liberating significance of modern thought, and leads to the absurd assertion that modern thought is materialistic concerned only with the gross things of life. It is nothing of the kind. The basic principle of modern philosophy is that the world of nature, the physical world, is the only reality given. Mankind is a part of this reality. Man can only understand and know this reality, and the contents of his knowledge, which can increase indefinitely, is the only truth accessible to him. It is idle to speculate about anything beyond the world of experience.

Materialism does not preclude the appreciation of what is called the higher aspects of human life. It only maintains that all the so-called spiritual aspects of man's life do not transcend this world, but are inherent in man as a biological being. In proportion as man develops intellectually, his knowledge broadens, the higher values inherent in man, the capacity of taking interest in other things than the physical existence, the cultivation of finer sentiments, arts, science,

etc., become more and more possible. But the uninformed criticism of Materialism is that, believing himself only slightly differentiated from lower animals, man is concerned only with eating and drinking, and consequently degrades himself morally and spiritually. The corollary to this unfair and unfounded criticism is that modern thought being materialist. India must eschew it if she wants to preserve her spiritual integrity.

But it is known that modern thought is the logical outcome of the development of human spirit and therefore can be traced to ideas which developed in India also, within the framework of Hinduism itself, and thus it can no longer be maintained that it cannot be reconciled with the spiritual genius of India. This genealogical relation with modern thought proves that India must accept it if she is to make further progress, if freedom is not to be simply an illusion. Modern thought is a human heritage and its germs can be traced in Hinduism. That is the best appreciation of Hinduism. It should be preserved as the living legacy of a dead past; there were strong currents in ancient Indian thought which were not anti-thetical to modern knowledge; indeed, they anticipated it. In so far as Hinduism disowns the intellectual heritage of India herself, it cannot be reconciled with modern thought.

It is only with the help of modern knowledge that we shall be able to distinguish truth from falsehood in our religious history, that we shall be able to find out what was abiding in our past. Then we shall be able to appreciate the historical value of Hinduism. Any religion today belongs to the past. Religion belongs to a period when man's mind had attained a certain level of evolution. To say that religion is eternal is to maintain that man's mind should not rise above that level. When man's mind does rise above that level and gives birth to modern scientific thought, religious belief ceases to be a necessity. Today, one can study the Vedas and all other scriptural literature as records of history; study the Upanishads and other schools of Hindu philosophy and discover in them the germs of later thought. But it would not be correct to say that life today has to be guided by the codes of Manu; or, to be a good man today one must perform the rites prescribed in the Samhitas. We can appreciate how

those rites in those days were necessary and good. People in those days made, when performing those rites, an experience which was probably very ennobling; but in the environments of today, it is difficult to see how that is still so. Indeed, it can be shown that they often have a degrading and demoralising influence.

So, on the one hand, a critical understanding and a correct appreciation of the history of Hindu religion should enable us to see that modern thought is nothing harmful or antagonistic to Indian culture; on the other hand, in the light of modern thought, we shall be able to understand the history and significance of Hinduism more clearly and shall be able to allot the proper place to religion in history. We shall realise that the religious mode of thought is a necessity in a certain period of intellectual development, but no longer necessary when man's mind and intellectual equipment attain a higher level.

This critical attitude to religion and appreciation of modern thought as common human heritage are two prerequisites for the study of Indian history. I have not gone into the examination of Hinduism as a religion exhaustively, nor have I tried to outline modern thought. I have only tried to find out the correlation between Hinduism and modern thought as a pre-requisite for the study of Indian history.

In spite of prevailing religious pre-occupations, in spite of various kind of faiths which still persist, modern thought has penetrated our country. But it has done so mainly as practical application of science. The scientific mentality, the scientific outlook is still to be cultivated. A man can be an engineer or a technologist and still be a very bigotted religious man. But if one cultivates the scientific spirit, that is, the spirit of enquiry, if one realises the tremendously liberating significance of science, then it becomes difficult for him to reconcile his knowledge with some faith or prejudices inherited from his forefathers. We all know of electricity and the good it does. We do not discard it on the ground that it is materialistic. But the prejudices which have been dispelled by the discovery of electricity, still largely persist. The philosophical implication of the development of physical sciences are not known. What has really happened is that educated India is acquainted only with the vulgar

materialist aspect of modern thought, but is as yet little touched by the spiritually liberating influence of scientific thought. The age-long ideal of the liberation of the human spirit can be pursued with greater success with the help of modern scientific thought than with superannuated, superstitious beliefs and prejudices.

Scientific knowledge shows that man's mind is capable of overcoming all his various limitations; and it is only in the light of scientific knowledge that the concept of spiritual liberation ceases to be a fantasy and becomes a real experience. It is not necessary to wait indefinitely for spiritual liberation by the grace of God or in consequence of some mystic experience. Spiritual liberation can be attained by discarding the various notions and prejudices which have weighed down the human spirit since time immemorial. It is within the reach of man; he can attain it by his own efforts. That is the essence of modern thought. If Hinduism does not make room for that, we must say that it has ceased to be something useful and elevating for human life. It has become a bondage, and the sooner we get rid of it the better.

But this is not a negative attitude to religion in general or Hinduism in particular. It does not deny the great historical significance of religion, and does not even deny that it may to some extent be a necessity even today. In certain stages of human development, man must have this faith. But when greater knowledge eliminates the limitations of his circumstances, man no longer requires those assumptions on which faith is based; then religion ceases to be a necessity.

That is a process which takes place over a period of time. And the development is uneven. Certain groups of mankind go ahead earlier and others follow. In that sense past the makers of our future, the leaders of Indian mankind, must free themselves spiritually from these prejudices of an antiquated religious mode of thought. They will then be able to show the way to the rest and in course of time entire Indian mankind will rise to higher and higher levels of intellectual development. Modern thought provides us with that inspiration, and unless we are prepared to drink deep from that source of inspiration, we cannot take our country out of the social and cultural stagnation.

Both these talks I delivered were concerned with the study of Indian history, with which our educated people are so very much concerned. But unless we have the right method to conduct that study, we may be chasing chimeras instead of deriving valuable lessons from our past. In other words, we shall have to go through the experience of European mankind, the experience of a religious criticism, the experience of being able to turn on our past the searchlight of modern knowledge in order to find out what was abiding in it and can still enter into the intellectual and spiritual equipment of our generation, which must advance farther ahead. The past contained great historical values. But the past is dead and cannot be revived. It can give certain indications to seekers of truth in the light of which they can blaze a new trail into the future. That is the purpose of the study of history. And with that purpose, we must subject Hinduism also to a searching criticism. Only then can we find in our past history inspiration to march forward into a better and brighter future.

From *The Radical Humanist*

Volume : XV

Nos. : 41 and 42

Date : Oct. 21, 1951

Oct. 28, 1951

RELIGIOUS REVIVALISM AND THE DANGER OF FASCISM

After the military defeat of Fascism in Europe, the world seems to have forgotten the danger of Fascism, as if that danger was over. But I remember writing even during the war that the military defeat of Fascism would not necessarily mean the elimination of Fascism as a social and cultural danger. I further said that, defeated in Europe, even if the military defeat there was followed up also by a social and cultural extermination, Fascism might yet find a new home in Asia.

If we cast a critical look around ourselves, I am afraid there will be plenty of ground for this apprehension. Therefore, when I see literary men and generally progressive people, who are disgusted with the idea of dictatorship and regimentation in any sphere of life, I consider it necessary to draw their attention to the other danger also. This danger is disguised in the habit of equating Communism with Democracy. Everybody who calls himself a Communist also claims to be a Democrat. That is a very dangerous idea, and we shall have to be on our guard against it. Totalitarianism is a danger, whether of the Left or of the Right.

Religious revivalism may be one of the manifestations of the fascist danger. This need not necessarily be so. It depends on the social background on which the religious revivalism manifests itself. For instance, in Europe, not only today, but as a twentieth century phenomenon, we have some kind of religious revivalism, a neo-mysticism. While one may philosophically disagree with, or even condemn, this tendency, it would not be fair to say that this movement towards a neo-mysticism is in any way sympathetic towards Fascism. On the contrary, it is generally associated with Liberalism.

But when we turn to Asia, religious revivalism is found to be associated with fascist tendencies. Here, religious

revivalism is to be regarded as a cultural trend. In Europe, those who are representing this new tendency do not really want to revive institutionalised religion, but a certain revaluation of religion. Take for instance a philosopher like Jacques Maritain, perhaps the best known advocate of a restoration of Christian values in the life of modern civilisation. But at the same time, he is certainly one of the most eminent liberal thinkers of our time. In fact, this tendency goes to the extent of saying that the world needs a religion without God, Christianity without Revelation. That might be called a religion, but it is hardly to be identified with religion as it is historically known, and which in the modern world is necessarily a reactionary factor.

Religious revivalism in India and similar countries becomes an ally of Fascism because here the religion which is to be revived is of a positively reactionary character, a system of thinking, a system of beliefs, a system of values which once upon a time might have been of social usefulness, may even have been necessary for human existence, but today has ceased to be so. As a matter of fact, today it cannot be fitted into the pattern of human existence at all.

Therefore, Fascism in India need not— and I believe it will not take the shape and form it took in Western Europe. Perhaps this will become clear if we begin with a definition of Fascism. It has been defined in various ways. The definition which is fashionable among the most vociferous anti-fascists is that Fascism is the politics of monopoly capitalism, or of the bourgeoisie in the period of decay. Fascism in Europe might be described like this, to a certain extent. But even there it will not be the whole of its content, because Fascism particularly German Fascism, had very deep cultural and philosophical roots. It could not be simply regarded as merely political fanaticism or an economic theory.

Fascism in Europe could be described as the negation of Democracy, a negation of all the values of modern civilisation. From that it would be deduced that Fascism is really a revival of mediaevalism, a revival of mediaevalism on the background of all the results of the technological development of modern science. In our country, Fascism is exclusively a revival of mediaevalism, and as religion is the central point of mediaeval life and culture, Fascism in India, and the

fascist danger in India, is associated with religious revivalism.

We have to keep in mind another point while examining the possibility of the rise of Fascism. Dictatorship presupposes a predisposition on the part of people to accept a totalitarian rule. The experience in Europe corroborates this conclusion. Fascism succeeded in Italy and in Germany, and some other of the more culturally backward countries of Europe ; but it did not make any headway in Britain or the other leading democratic countries. Even when France and other West-European countries were overwhelmed by the armed forces of International Fascism, Fascism could not take root there. As soon as the foreign factor was eliminated, Fascism ceased to be a force in those countries.

The fall of de Gaulle is a case in point. So long as General de Gaulle was leading a popular movement against the foreign fascist invaders, he was the hero of France. But as soon as he showed his dictatorial tendencies in internal politics, he no longer remained the hero of the French people. If even today he still commands a considerable support, it comes from the more reactionary Catholic section of the people.

This examination of the European situation leads us to the conclusion that, when the people of a country have a liberating cultural tradition, a tradition of cherishing certain human and humanist values of life, Fascism finds a very widespread popular resistance. In that atmosphere, therefore, it cannot succeed. But in the absence of the tradition, Fascism becomes easily a popular movement, and Fascism always succeeds as a popular movement. Dictatorships imposed on a country by sheer armed might cannot last very long. Fascist dictatorship in Germany was a "popular dictatorship". The absence of attachment of those values cherished by modern mankind indicates an authoritarian mentality of the people, that means, a lingering of the mediaeval view of life.

It is quite evident that that view of life is still the most predominant feature of the cultural atmosphere in our country. Therefore, the Indian atmosphere is very congenial to the rise of Fascism. But Fascism will not necessarily and everywhere find expression in brute force or terror, nor assume all the violent forms that it adopted in Europe.

There can be a non-violent Fascism. It can be a popular Fascism in the sense that there will be no popular resistance to it, and yet society can be regimented in all walks of life. In fact, the intellectual and cultural life of our country is already to a large extent regimented. It is a voluntary regimentation, and it results from the traditional mentality of accepting authority without questioning.

A people predisposed to accept some divine or supernatural authority as Mentor of life on this earth will also be very prone to be submissive to any authority of this earth. This kind of mentality can be galvanised by a movement of religious revivalism, which in our country is sailing under the colours of a cultural movement. For instance, the R.S.S. will not admit that it is a religious revivalist movement. They call it a cultural revivalism. But in mediaeval times, culture and religion were so closely associated that a revival of mediaeval culture necessarily means revival of religion. Therefore, the anti-fascist movement, or any movement for resisting the growth of Fascism, will also have to take a different form, to meet the danger.

In other words, Fascism in India is primarily cultural reaction. Fascism in India has to be fought mainly on the cultural front. Therefore, groups of literary men like yours, people who want to maintain independence in the literary and all intellectual fields, are destined to play a very important role in the resistance to Fascism in our country.

What is the relation of literature of politics, and similar questions, is beyond my competence. I am only pointing out that, in so far as literature is a part of the culture of a people, those who are engaged in that branch of human activity will have to play a part in resisting the cultural reaction which would be associated with the danger of Fascism. Religious revivalism in our country takes two forms. One is the orthodox revivalism of the Sanatanists. They may be more reactionary to all appearances. But there is another tendency, which consists in the attempt to rationalise religion and such attempts are made by many philosophers also in Europe, who are trying to reevaluate the values of religion. These attempts, which are very popular among our intellectuals, are a more insidious danger. Because this

tendency is likely to influence the attitude of that section of our society which otherwise could be expected to put up a resistance to cultural reaction.

You must be aware that there is a very popular movement on the basis of the teachings of a number of "modern saints". This movement is composed of educated people. They are not advocating a religion without God and without Revelation, as their European counter-parts are doing. As a matter of fact, mysticism which is the rationalised form of religion, and which is very popular among our intellectuals, in the last analysis relies precisely on a kind of revelation. This revelation may not be the revelation of a Prophet or a Seer, but a revelation believed to be within the reach of every single individual. It means that reason, spirit of enquiry, quest for knowledge, are subordinated to a faith; that knowledge, science and all the conquests of man during the last four or five hundred years, are inferior as human values to what one can find in himself in an imaginary moment of beatitude, a state believed to be sublime, though impossible to understand, explain and know.

As far as I know, it seems that this kind of neo-mysticism or pseudo-scientific religion is gaining ground among the literary people of our country. It is almost of the same order as the popularity of dogmatic Marxism among another group of intellectuals in our country. Thus, the literary life of India seems to be getting polarised between dogmatic Marxism and cultural reaction.

Consequently, there must be room for a "Third Force" in the literary and cultural life of our country. The rise of this third force alone will be able to resist the danger of cultural reaction and Fascism, on the one side, and of dogmatic Marxism, on the other. The attention of those who are getting alarmed by the possibility of a rise of dictatorship in our country is generally directed towards the Left, against the anticipated danger of a dictatorship coming from the Left. But if you analyse the relation of political forces in our country, you will see that, if India is going to have a dictatorship, it is not so likely to be a communist dictatorship as a fascist dictatorship.

That need not mean that we shall have Storm-Troops or mass massacres, because all these things are not necessary

in our country. The vast bulk of the people are so deeply predisposed to accept any authority, so eager to be regimented, so afraid of the hardships of thinking for themselves, that, if and when, for whatever reasons— political or economic— any party or group of politicians will find it necessary to establish a dictatorial regime, they will be able to do so with as much popular support as they care to whip up. Since Fascism can be established in our country with popular support, since we can practice one of the fantastic ideas of Lenin, namely, a democratic dictatorship, Fascism is clearly a very insidious danger.

We talk so much about freedom of the press. I have seen the press in European countries and in fascist countries, and I do not think that our press, on the whole, makes less regimented reading than in any fascist country. And the worst of it is that it is a voluntary regimentation. When a sick man does not believe that he is sick, you cannot cure him. We are regimented, but we are so naturally predisposed to be regimented, because we find security in regimentation, that we don't mind it at all.

The tradition of individual liberty is foreign to our culture. We talk about the Communists merging men into the masses. Well, our own cultural tradition has done that since long. Only the masses of our cultural tradition were not a glorified monstrosity, but a pathetic, subhuman, amorphous mass, which did not feel any impulse for revolt. Their only impulse was to be subordinated, to accept authority. As literary men, you may admire the old story that conquerors came and conquerors went, the storm comes and blows over, but the Indian peasant bows his head and goes on as before. That sums up our cultural tradition. And in that atmosphere, Fascism can easily thrive. Communism might also thrive in that atmosphere, but unfortunately for them, the Communists may not get the opportunity. Reassured by the prospect that Communism may not get a chance in our country, we are inclined to ignore the other, and more real danger.

If you analyse the situation, you will see that the established political regime must necessarily drift towards some kind of dictatorship. If the economic chaos which prevails today is to be checked, some strong hand, that is,

a high degree of centralisation and regimentation, is bound to come. Of course, the perfect regimentation, which is possible in a society dominated by modern technology, will not be possible in our country, where industrialisation is so very backward. But the role played elsewhere by technology will in our country be replaced by a mediaeval authoritarian mentality, the willingness to be dictated.

In view of this situation, we shall have to think out ways and means for resisting this danger of Fascism. I believe that any attempt to resist in directly in the economic and political field will not be successful, because, if we have to compete with the party in power for popular support, I do not see that any party in the near future can succeed with different methods. Therefore, the struggle against the danger of Fascism in our country has to be a struggle with the object of blasting the foundation on which Fascism can rise. The means, we need a movement of Enlightenment, similar to the European Renaissance. When we remember that in Europe the movement which laid down the foundation of modern culture and civilisation was mostly aesthetical, literary and cultural, we can see what an important role small groups of intellectuals like yours can play. The future of our country can be guaranteed against the danger of Fascism, and may yet appear hopeful, in so far as such people will carry on the battle on the cultural front, quietly and in an inspectacular manner. To the extent that they will play their part with courage and determination, there is hope of avoiding the danger of Fascism.

I do not presume to advise you what form this literary and cultural movement should take. There may be some among you who believe in literature and other arts for art's sake. But I believe that, after all, the creators of aesthetic and cultural values are also human beings. They live in society, and they must share the sorrows and joys, the freedom or unfreedom of all other individuals in society. Whatever may be the conception of art, nobody can deny that artists, like other individuals in society, have a social responsibility. And to discharge this responsibility cannot possibly be inconsistent with their role as creative artists, as creators of artistic values.

I am sure that you are fully conscious of these responsibilities, particularly when a man like my friend Ayyub is with you. I am sure that whatever I have said can be no more than a repetition of what all of you must be saying and discussing and thinking yourselves. Therefore, I should not say anything more today, and be satisfied with having expressed some of my ideas before you, for you to consider and develop. From groups like yours, the third force which I have mentioned will arise. One day, when it will be known that you have played your role creditably, it will be an all the greater privilege for me to have spoken to you today.

From *The Radical Humanist*

Volume : XVIII

No. : 43

Date : Oct. 24, 1954

GANDHISM AND HUMANISM

A very interesting report of "Gandhiji's Last Discussion With Fellow Workers" has just been published by Sri Pyarelal. The discussion took place "during the first half of December, 1948", that is to say, hardly two months before the great tragedy. I don't know if the Mahatma had any premonition of what was coming. A psychic person who firmly believed that God was working through him could conceivably have such clairvoyance. It is all a matter of predisposition. In any case, what he said on that occasion seems to have come out of the depth of his heart, and therefore should be regarded as a part, if not the whole, of his testament.

For the moment, I do not propose to appraise the testament. That will have to be done some day for the sake of history and truth. Meanwhile, Sri Pyarelal's report makes it easy for me to answer a question which has of late been put to me repeatedly: What is the difference between Gandhiji's teachings and the so-called New Humanism? Am I not behaving like the biblical man who came to scoff and stayed to pray?

Until now, my public reply to the question has been begging it. I have simply suggested that the interrogator should judge, and if he believed that there was no difference between Gandhism and Humanism, I would not demur. I have all along been a critic of Gandhism, frankly doubtful about the claim that it offers the only hope for mankind. If my doubt was proved to be unfounded, I would readily stay to pray. But I never came to scoff; my criticism and doubt have never been prejudiced or malicious. Even now, I do not feel that I was wrong, although I do feel a strong sympathy for those who are desperately trying to differentiate Gandhism from the practices of triumphant nationalism, which still professes to worship the Mahatma as its patron saint. That however does not mean that I have suddenly discovered

Humanism in Gandhism. The sympathy is for an endeavour to stand by one's conviction.

The Mahatma did have some humanist tendency and he was a moralist. As such he has claimed my homage. But he was rather a humanitarian than a humanist. The distinction is not generally made. The desire to do good to all men without discrimination is very laudable. But it does not necessarily mean to place the highest values in man. The Mahatma did not regard man as the end in himself, but as the means for the operation of the purpose of God. This may be a sublime view of life ; but it deprives man of freedom and sovereign creativeness. Therefore it is not Humanism. Moreover, in this attitude of surrender to a superhuman will, one may find justification for having done what he would not do as a free agent.

In the last days of his life, the Mahatma was painfully conscious of having deviated from the path of truth and non-violence. But the sublime attitude of surrender to a higher power enabled him to disown the responsibility for his own action. Humanism leaves no such convenient loopholes ; it holds man responsible for his action, and consequently offers greater guarantee against possible deviation from the chosen path of rectitude. It claims freedom, and deserves it by assuming responsibility. The Gandhist view of life offers the comfrontable freedom from responsibility in return for the surrender of the freedom of human judgment.

Sri Pyarelal reports the Mahatma exclaiming penitentially : "My eyes have now been opened. I now see that what we practised during the fight with the British under the name of non-violence was not real non-violence. God had purposely sealed my eyes as He wanted to accomplish His great purpose through me. That purpose being accomplished, He has restored to me my sight." With this attitude, any human delinquency could be justified. It brings God down in the world of pragmatism, to be guided by the questionable maxim that the end justifies the means. Faith in God is the sheet-anchor of Gandhism. For that distinction, it may be regarded as superior to Humanism by the faithful. But others may differ. Here I do not raise that issue. Now the point is that, if God himself endorses

the maxim that the end justifies the means, how can it be rejected by Gandhism ? What God does is good ; man cannot be better than God. Yet, to have rejected the maxim, not only in theory but also in practice, is said to be one of the most distinctive merits of Gandhism. I have always been doubtful in this respect ; now my doubt is borne out by the authority of the Mahatma himself.

The first principle of Gandhism— that man can only serve the purpose of God— caused the failure of the Mahatma's attempt to introduce morality in politics to "purify politics"— a failure admitted by himself and a number of his closest associates. For the same reason, religious moralists of all ages and all countries preached divine doctrines only to be set aside in practice by their professed followers. Humanism agrees with Gandhism as regards the importance of the purity of means ; but its demand for morality in politics is more uncompromising ; and it holds that, so long as power remains the basic incentive of political practice, it cannot conform strictly with professed moral principles.

Gandhism also is supposed to reject power-politics. On this point, Sri Pyarelal's report throws a flood of light. In course of the discussion, the Mahatma is reported to have said : "The conception of non-violence as the weapon of the strong must remain a chimera and a dream, and non-violence has no future as a world power and harbinger of universal peace, unless it could be shown to be capable of retaining and defending the power which it had helped to win ; in other words, unless it could successfully act upon and guide power-politics." That is clear enough ; Gandhism is not against power-politics ; it would not participate in the practice directly, but only guide it. It is further admitted that it has been instrumental in the attainment of power (by a political party) and wants to prove its capacity to retain and defend power. Since admittedly Gandhism approved of political practice in pursuit of power, it could not insist upon the purity of means.

During the discussion, some of his followers advocated that true Gandhists (other than political Congressmen) should enter the Government to "use it for the purpose of building up a non-violent social order." The Mahatma

disagreed, insisting upon the spread of *Nai Talim* (new education) to create an atmosphere in which non-violence would triumph. New Humanism proposed to do the same. Is it not following in the footsteps of the Mahatma? He added that those who have come to power, thanks to the misuse of the instrument of non-violence and to the will of God that he should condone their questionable practice, they would hand over the power to him any time he wanted. But he would not. That does look like an act of supreme self-abnegation— not to be tempted by power when it is within reach. But there is another way of looking at it. He was the all-powerful. Why should he want more, which might indeed be less?

The Gandhist attitude towards political power becomes still clearer when the Mahatma proceeded to visualise the result of the *Nai Talim* : "By abjuring power and devoting ourselves to pure selfless service of the voters, we can guide and influence them. It would give us far more real power than we can have by going into the government. A stage may come when the people themselves may feel and say that they want us and no one else to wield power. The question could then be considered. I shall most probably be not alive then. But when that time comes, the Sanghs will produce from amongst them some one who will take over the reins of administration. By that time, India shall have become an ideal State."

Later on, he added : "We can send men of our choice without going into the government ourselves". And "Today we have our own Government. Under adult suffrage, if we are worth our salt, we should have that hold upon the people that whomsoever we may choose, should be returned". Then again, "Suppose you don't take power but gain hold on the public, you will be able to return at the polls whomsoever you may wish. Forget membership (presumably of the ruling party of the government) so long as the voters are in your hand." Finally, the peroration : "Banish the very idea of capture of power and you will be able to guide power and keep it on the right path."

Why should king-makers bother for kingship, which involves responsibility. Almightiness is irresponsible. To aspire for that status is hardly the same as to abjure

power. The use of terms like "hold on the people", "choose our men", "guide power" is not accidental. Language is determined by the logic of the thought it expresses. And Sri Pyarelal testifies that "the words of wisdom that dropped from his lips on that occasion have an exceptional significance. They afford a glimpse into the working of his mind on the future role of constructive work in independent India as he envisaged it, and its relation to power-politics."

We also get a glimpse into the Ideal State of Gandhism. Someone (note the singular number) of the Gandhists will gather in his hand all the reigns of power as the result of a complete hold on the people, who would then do whatever they are told to do. That might be a non-violent social order, although it will be based on emotional coercion (otherwise the total regimentation of opinion will not be possible). But it hardly will be a democratic or humanist social order. The Gandhist social order is the terrestrial reflection of the teleological world order. In the latter, man is the vehicle for the operation of a super-human Divine purpose. In the former, the citizens will blindly follow their non-violent rulers or a Benevolent Despot. It will indeed be a return to the legendary Ram Raj.

As against the teleological first principle of Gandhism, the fallacy of its ethics deduced therefrom and its consequent failure in practice, Humanism rests its ethics on the rationality of man. The purpose of its practice, therefore, is to make man progressively conscious of his innate rationality and be guided by it in all his behaviour. Gandhism would teach man to surrender his freedom of judgment to the unscrutable Divine Will, believing that goodness results from that attitude. It regards man only as an instrument, a means, not the end. Humanism does not recognise any metaphysical power to which man must be subordinated. Its ethics is based upon rationality, which is the essence of human nature. It declares that man as man can be moral, and therefore political practice being a form of human activity, can be guided by moral principles.

Humanism reaches the same conclusion also from its attitude to power. Uncompromising criticism of power-politics leads it to the rejection of party-politics. In that position,

political practice can do without the incentive of power. In the absence of that corrupting agency, morality in political practice becomes possible. Power, inasmuch as it means ability to do things, is not necessarily corrupting. Centralisation of power is an evil. In the Gandhist ideal State, power will be concentrated in the hand of "someone". That is the extremist form of centralisation. In view of the fact that each human being is possessed of unlimited potentialities, Humanism can visualise a social order in which power will be progressively decentralised, until it is equally distributed. That in short is the difference between Gandhism and Humanism.

From *Independent India*

Volume : XIII

No. : 12

Date : March 27, 1949

SHANKARACHARYA AND MODERN RELIGIOUS REVIVALISM

By her own effort, India never emerged from the intellectual twilight of her Middle Ages which followed the downfall of Buddhism. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, individual religious reformers preached devotionism which would dispense with the priestly intermediary between God and his devotees. But their influence was local and transitory. India experienced neither a Renaissance nor a Reformation. The intellectual stagnation lasted until the middle of the nineteenth century, when a faint echo of the modern rationalist and liberal thought reached India to disturb it partially. During the latter half of the century, the intellectual life of the country was influenced by a number of men who preached revolt against religious orthodoxy, intellectual parochialism and social injustice. There was no great philosopher amongst them. They were social reformers. None of them thought of going behind the twilight of the Middle Ages in search of India's philosophical heritage. The attitude of the more advanced amongst those forerunners of an Indian Renaissance towards her past was negative. They drew inspiration from the West and held that India as a whole must do the same in order to emerge from mediaevalism.

Unfortunately, the impact of modern western thought came in the wake of the British conquest. It made some headway until discontent and then hatred against the foreign political rule became the predominating passion of the educated classes. Then all western influence was decried as denationalising materialism to be opposed and rejected in favour of the spiritual genius of Indian culture. Speculative thought of any kind had been for centuries eclipsed by priestly bigotry, superstitious ritualism and practice of social injustice, such as the caste system, untouchability, etc., which passed as religion. In that atmosphere, the democratic

simplicity of Christianity had a strong appeal not only for the victims of social injustice, but also for many liberal intellectuals.

A movement of religious reform and of revival of the spiritualist philosophy of India were the reaction to the process of the disintegration of an intellectually stagnant society. Return to the pristine purity of Vedic ritualism was the religious reform advocated. The orthodoxy of the reformers was more bigotted than the current variety. Such a reactionary movement being incapable of meeting the situation, it was reinforced by the modern prophets of India's spiritual mission, who sought to provide a philosophical sanction for a religious revivalism. It was discovered in the post-Buddhist scholastic theology, which had expounded Vedanta as the quintessence of the philosophical thought of ancient India.

Sankaracharya's interpretation of the Vedanta Sutras is an admirable work of scholastic argumentativeness and speculative extravagance, full of self-contradictions. For instance, Sankaracharya admits : "If (there) is a second entity, co-existing with Brahman from eternity, it follows that Brahman has a second." He saw the fallacy of this inextricable dualism which invalidated the basic theorem : "When Brahman is known, everything is known" ; therefore, he tried to explain it by declaring the parallel existence identical with Brahman. But that hardly improves the situation. Sankar is generally believed to have expounded a system of monotheism almost as perfect as Hegel's Absolute Idealism. A study of the Sankar Bhashya, however, shows that the belief is baseless. The work begins with the following passage : "It is a matter not requiring any proof that the object and the subject, whose respective spheres are the notions of "Thou" (non-ego) and "Ego", and which are opposed to each other as much as darkness and the light are, cannot be identical."

No less than two major fallacies are involved in this point of departure : firstly, the basic principle of the system is simply taken for granted, it is not proved ; and secondly, an absolutely dualist conception is made the premiss of a monist philosophy. Consequently, Sankar had to invent the absurdity of the Mayavad (which cannot be traced in the

Sutras themselves) to establish the purely spiritual unity of being.

The doctrine of Maya is expounded as follows : "Brahman is associated with a certain power called Maya or Avidya, to which the appearance of this entire world is due. This power cannot be called 'being', for being is only Brahman. Nor can it be called 'non-being' in the strict sense, for it at any rate produces the appearance of this world. It is in fact a principle of illusion : the undeniable cause, owing to which there seems to exist a material world. Maya thus constitutes the Upadhana, the material cause of the world. Maya belongs to Brahman as a Sakti. We may say that the material cause of the world is Brahman in so far as it is associated with Maya." This doctrine obviously contradicts the conception of Brahman as the unitary and absolute existence. Brahman is devoid of all qualities. Yet, Maya is assumed to be its Sakti. Moreover, Maya is conceived as an existence parallel to Brahman. The idea of "association" presupposes two entities : similarly does the idea of "belonging".

The most remarkable part of the Vedantic monism is the logic with which the unity and simplicity of Brahman is established. The object of the Vedanta Sutras was to systematise the Aupanishadic speculations into a homogeneous whole, and to prove that the heretical doctrines of Kanada, Kapila, Gautama and others were not borne out by those speculations. The Upanishads contain speculations which cannot be reconciled in one system. For example, in the Tchandogya, Brihadaranyaka and Taittiriya, ether or space (Akasa), fire and air are visualised as existence without origin. This view cuts across the basic dogma also set forth in all the Upanishads, that in the beginning there existed the Brahman, "only one without a second", and this dogma constitutes the premiss of the cardinal doctrine of Hindu religious philosophy, namely, "when the Brahman is known, everything is known", also propounded in the Upanishads.

In the face of this flagrant contradiction, the entire body of the Aupanishadic speculation could not logically be the basis of a single system of philosophy. Unorthodox thinkers daring to challenge the authority of the scriptures pointed out this contradiction. They argued : If none but Brahman

exists in the beginning, then ether, air, fire, etc. have an origin ; that is to say, they are created, and the hypothesis of creation renders the absolute conception of Brahman untenable. On the other hand, if the elements are without origin, then, the Brahman ceases to be what it is assumed to be— "only one without a second". If one of the views is correct, then the other is not. Thus, the infallibility of the scriptures is shaken. Their claim to absolute authority can no longer be maintained.

The monism of Vedanta, as interpreted by Sankaracharya, is reared just on this contradiction. In order to obviate any disturbance of the absoluteness of Brahman, the elements must be without an origin. The difficulty (of dualism or pluralism) is overcome by declaring them to be identical with Brahman.

Sankar's commentary on this Sutra is highly interesting. It gives a graphic picture of Hindu speculative thought, and outlines a curious logic. "These premissory statements (regarding the unity and exclusiveness of Brahman) are not abandoned, that is, not stultified, only if the entire aggregate of things is non-different from Brahman, the object of knowledge for, if there were any difference, the affirmation that by the knowledge of one thing everything is known, would be contradicted thereby. Non-difference again of the two is possible only if the whole aggregate of things originates from the one Brahman. And we understand from the words of the Veda that that affirmation can be established only through the theory of the non-difference of the material cause and its effect ... If the ether etc. were not effects of the Brahman, it could not be known by Brahman being known, and that would involve an abandonment of a (previous) affirmation ; an alternative which, as invalidation of the authoritativeness of the Vedas, is of course altogether unacceptable."

The logic is remarkable. If the Vedas contradict themselves, that should not be allowed ; since that would affect their authoritativeness ! The incontestable authority of the scriptures is the absolute standard. Should the evidence against the infallibility of the scriptures be found in the scriptures themselves that should not be admitted, because that would shake the authority of the scriptures. The basic

principle of this remarkable logic is to submit everything to the test of an unverifiable hypothesis, and to reject all evidence against the hypothesis, simply because they expose its absurdity and render it untenable.

To have found the unity in diversity, is claimed as the greatest merit of orthodox Hindu philosophy. But, as a matter of fact, the unity was not found. It was simply assumed or imagined. It is an ideal conception which brushes aside the problems to be solved. Since the rise of the material world out of the assumed immaterial root-cause is not logically possible, dualism persists, defying all metaphysical verbal jugglery. From the Aupanishadic Rishis down to Sankaracharya, no orthodox Hindu speculative thinker was able to prove how the diversities of nature could arise from a common cause.

The sheer impossibility of the task ultimately drove Indian speculation to the monumental absurdity of the Mayavad. Vitiated by the baffling, but obstinate problem of dualism, the speculation about the origin of the world must necessarily come back again and again to the good old conception of an anthropomorphic god, whose venerable appearance casts a sinister shadow on the sublime light of philosophy. Sankaracharya's laboriously constructed Advaitavad solved the problem of the world by the simple contrivance of declaring it to be a dream. Nevertheless, it could not get rid of a personal god. And a personal god is utterly incompatible with the philosophical conception of unity in diversity.

It is only by degenerating into a dogmatic system of theology, which tries to reconcile even the gods of the Vedic Natural Religion with the metaphysical conception of Brahman, that Sankaracharya's system apparently escapes the glorious fate common to all systems of consistent pantheism. The fate is to corroborate the materialist view from the opposite direction.

From *The Radical Humanist*

Volume : XIX

No. : 49

Date : Dec. 11, 1955

PLANETS AND HUMAN DESTINY

I presume that the reader would not mind a few remarks generally about astrology. In view of the fact that this ancient superstition is still granted the dignity of science even by the educated in this country, a few words on this subject will not be out of place. Superstition is my *bete noire*. I cannot resist the temptation of running it down whenever I find it. Until the mental horizon of India is cleared of this sinister cloud, the health-giving ray of the sun of knowledge will not shine. The breath of criticism must blow hard till it becomes a veritable tempest dissipating the cloud of venerable superstitions from every part of the mental horizon of India.

Astrology is a creation of human egoism, which places man in the centre of the entire cosmic scheme. This egoism received its death-blow when Copernicus founded heliocentric astronomy. The deposition of the earth from the centre of the Universe logically gave a rude shock to human vanity. It could no longer be maintained "scientifically" that heavenly bodies were created by God to act as the guardian angels of mankind. Since the earth is not the centre of the Universe, the race of biped animals inhabiting its surface could not be regarded as playing the leading role in the cosmic drama.

Hindu astrology, believed in this country even today, is yet more antiquated, and never could lay claim to any scientific validity. It is a pure superstition. It is a relic of animism—the religion of the savage. The pseudo-scientific Western astrology pretends to be free of any belief in the supernatural. It maintains that the stars exert physico-chemical influence upon the human beings inhabiting the earth. This notion is silly enough; but the doctrine of Hindu astrology is simply amusing.

According to it, the heavenly bodies (only nine—*Nawagraha*) are not physical bodies; they are gods or

demigods, two of them (*Rahu*, and *Ketu*) being queer mixtures of god and devil. It is impossible to rationalise Hindu astrology. It cannot be interpreted in terms of modern astronomy. It cannot be argued that the godliness of the *Nawagraha* is a symbolic conception; that they are really physical bodies which exert physico-chemical (or electric, if you wish to be ultra-modern) influence. All such efforts to rationalise Hindu astrology cannot be of any avail, simply because the first step towards a reconciliation with the most rudimentary knowledge of astronomy will necessitate rejection of the doctrine of *Nawagraha*. And the disappearance of the traditional *Nawagraha* will necessarily mean the end of Hindu astrology.

For, all astrological calculations are made on the basic assumption that the movement and constellations of the nine heavenly bodies influence the life of men. The *Nawagraha* are said to be stars; they are, however, a fantastic medley which includes one star (sun), six planets and two purely imaginary bodies (*Rahu* and *Ketu*)—products of pure superstition. The six planets themselves cannot be identified with the members of the solar system. The moon, for example, is counted as a planet. In reality, it is a satellite of the earth which is a planet. There is no way of ascertaining whether the remaining five coincided with the real planets or were also imaginary bodies. At the very best only five out of the nine planets enter into the calculations of Hindu astrology.

Granted that the planets do exert some mysterious influence, that cannot be correctly calculated by Hindu astrology, because it leaves out four out of the nine factors involved. If you wish to point out in reply that predictions of Hindu astrology have always turned out to be correct, and that they are so even today, you will only prove the power of superstition. The prediction turned out to be correct because none ever suspected that they could be otherwise. This is a case of faith moving the mountain. Those who claim mathematical correctness for astrological calculations, must be constrained to admit that these were all wrong, having been based upon only about half the factors concerned. Do a bit of clear thinking, free of mystic preoccupation, and the superstitious nature of astrological belief will be palpable.

Astrological calculations are said to be mathematical ; on the other hand, in the light of the knowledge of modern astronomy, these calculations could not possibly be mathematically correct. Nevertheless, predictions based upon them turned out to be true ! This is a miracle. It cannot be explained otherwise. Remove the element of superstitious faith, and the correctness of the calculations would be revealed to be a myth— a product of wishful thinking. You may be indignant at my revealing the clay-feet of your gods, and casting doubts upon astrology, as the Indian spiritualist is wont to do in respect of scientific knowledge. Should you take such an incredible position, I could do no better than leave you at that, only reminding you of what the devil told Faust :

Do but despise reason and science,—
The highest of man's powers,
And Thou art mine for sure.

Modern astronomy and astral physics do not leave astrology a leg to stand upon, even if it were free of animistic superstition. In the light of the vast knowledge of physical science, man appears to be an insignificant, practically negligible, factor in the grand scheme of the Universe. The contemplation of the most rudimentary facts of modern astronomy should put humanity to shame. Man's home is one of the smaller of the nine planets constituting the solar system. The centre of this system itself, namely, the sun, is a moderate size star in a galaxy of 100,000 million stars, some of which are millions of times greater than the sun. The observed and hypothetically observable Universe is again composed of 100,000 million such star galaxies.

Look at the staggering picture in another way. According to the famous English astronomer, Sir J. H. Jeans, the number of stars in the entire Universe is approximately equal to the number of the grains of sand in all the sea-shores on earth. The sun is a small one of this vast number of stars, but it is more than a million times larger than the earth. Astronomical distances are so immense that they are calculated in what are called "light-years". One light-year is equal to $186,000 \times 60 \times 60 \times 24 \times 365$ miles. It represents the distance that a ray of light, covering 186,000 miles per second, travels in one year. The nearest star, other than the

sun, is 4.3 light-years away from the earth. That is to say, a ray of light from that star takes so long to reach the earth ; the light from the sun takes only eight minutes.

Only shameless vanity can entertain the idea that this gigantic astral organisation was created to watch over the fate of beings crawling on a tiny speck of dirt whose magnitude, in comparison to the Universe, is no larger than one millionth part of a grain of sand ! But it is not necessary to measure the absurdity in imagination. It can be more accurately done.

Over the vast cosmic distances, light serves as the only means of contact among the heavenly bodies. Supposing that stars exercise some mysterious influence on the events of human life, that can be done only through the intermediary of light. But there are only three stars, besides the sun, the light from which can reach the earth within one hundred years, that is within the largest average span of human life. It is thus obvious that practically for all the stars it is physically impossible to exert any influence upon individual lives on the earth. The idea that a person is born under the influence of this or that star appears to be meaningless when it is known that any such influence is a physical impossibility. The light emitted from the nearest star, to influence a particular person at birth, can reach the earth 4.3 light-years after the person is born. In case of practically all the astral bodies, a ray of light, beginning its journey through the interstellar space at the moment of the birth of terrestrial human being, reaches the earth long after the death of the said individual !

If it is maintained that the influence is exercised not by the stars, but by the planets of the sun, then, astrology is a misnomer. Besides, such an argument would not improve the situation. It may overcome the difficulty of distance, but raises another difficulty of a different sort which is equally insuperable. Even among the planets, the means of communication is light ; but they are not luminous bodies, that is to say, they do not emit light. So, they have no means of exerting any influence at a distance.

Now, let us measure man's insignificance in the cosmic scheme from still another angle of vision. Copernicus dethroned the earth from the centre of the Universe. Later

on, Darwin deprived man of the claim to special creation. Even in relation to the tiny speck of cosmic dust, which is its own abode, mankind cannot claim much distinction. A ball of flaming gas, cast out by, or torn out of, the sun, coolen down and condensed into our earth. The process took place over a period of astronomical time which is calculated in billions of years. Then began geological evolution which is estimated to have taken from four hundred to five hundred million years. The first signs of life—tiny specks of primordial slime floating on water—appeared on the surface of the earth about one hundred million years ago : that is to say, the earth itself was lifeless for about four hundred million years. In biological history, which itself covers a small fraction of geological time, the appearance of mankind is an event of yesterday. Only about a million years ago, the ancestors of man left their arboreal home, and began to cultivate the habit of walking on the two hindlegs. Before the birth of the earth and formation of the solar system, the physical Universe, consisting of innumerable stars and vast nebulous masses condensing into heavenly bodies, had existed for trillions and trillions of years—over a stretch of time practically incalculable.

Human vanity, piously clothed in the spiritualist cosmological conception, would perhaps go to the extent of believing that the long processes of astronomical, geological and biological evolution represented the setting of the stage for the appearance of man. It is remarkable how religious people insult their God in the attempt to rationalise faith ! To argue that it took God all these ages to create the world, so that his images on earth could be properly protected, is to deny the godliness of God, namely, his omnipotence. Honest religion, straight-forward faith, requires a real God, the biblical God, for example, or the Pauranic gods. Such a god commands faith by his own merit. He does not require a tribe of pseudo-philosophers to apologise for his existence, to rationalise his essence of irrationalism. Reason and faith are strange bed-fellows. If they are coerced to cohabit, the offspring is a curious hybrid which is neither religion nor philosophy. Science and superstition are equally incompatible ; astrology is the bastard born of their illicit love—more correctly speaking, of the violation of science by superstition.

The notion that the long processes of physical and biological evolution took place to set the stage for the appearance of God's special creation, man, is incredible by itself. Nevertheless, it could persist as a prejudice, if the knowledge of the evolution of the physical Universe did not disclose the utter absence of intelligence in the process. Ultimately, modern astronomy and astral physics have come to the conclusion that physical evolution does not as a rule culminate in the appearance of the phenomenon of life. If there is a purpose behind the grand scheme of cosmic evolution, it is not to produce life. Man is not the highest creation of God. Life is an excrescence which soils the majestic harmony of the physical Universe. All the primary bodies composing this grand system are free from the blemish ; their fiery purity can never be soiled by it.

Theoretically, life may occur only on the minute specks of ash, blown out of the flaming heavenly bodies, called planets ; and even out of these insignificant components of the Cosmos, only a very small one has fallen into disgrace. It is the earth. It is theoretically excluded that the physico-chemical conditions in which life can originate and evolve into higher and higher forms, will ever be created on six out of the eight remaining members of the solar system. The two exceptions are Mars and Venus. The former seems to have water, though not in an adequate quantity ; its atmosphere contains gases necessary for organisms ; the temperature also is approximately suitable. But the speculation about the inhabitants of the Mars has not been borne out by recent researches of astral-physics. If the God of War really commands an army of living beings, these are most probably of a very low order, hardly above the botanic level. The present conditions have obtained in the Mars for a long time, most probably as long as in the case of the earth. So, if there was a purpose in biological evolution, and it was the creation of man after the image of God, Mars would be today inhabited by a race of human beings. Since it is not, the doctrine of purpose falls to the ground with all the philosophical efforts of Bergson or Lloyd Morgan.

The knowledge regarding the habitability of Venus is still misty as the planet itself. The Grecian goddess of beauty keeps her charm hidden behind a tantalising veil of mystery.

Astronomers have been lured to pull aside the veil only to be baffled. However, their curiosity has so far been rewarded with some informations which indicate that the mysterious member of the solar family is only approaching the physico-chemical stage in which the appearance of life may be a possibility. But here again it remains to be ascertained whether the possible organic evolution of Venus will go to the extent of producing man. Anyhow, from whatever is known, it can be deduced that the appearance of mankind is not a necessary outcome of organic evolution, even those few bits of burned-out ashes which tend to be soiled by the excrescence of matter called life.

On the top of this knowledge of modern astronomy, so very disconcerting for human vanity, now it is further known that planets themselves are rarities in the cosmic scheme. They do not result as a rule from the process of physical evolution. The solar system most probably is the only system of planets. But it is not a normal outcome of astronomical evolution. It has come into being as an accident, and man is the result of that accident. If the Universe is the creation of any God, the creator did not intend to place man in the picture. Mankind has stolen into the providential scheme. The appearance of man, therefore, is not in accord with the Divine Will; it represents a violation of the law of Providence.

This being the case, is it not absurd that man should claim the credit of being the bearer of some divine mission, for the realisation of which the entire scheme of cosmic evolution was conceived? The physical Universe is obviously not the stage set for the appearance of man as the agent or image or the son of God on earth. Therefore, there cannot be any possible connection between the movement of the heavenly bodies and the events in the life of the two-legged lumps of protoplasm which crawl on the surface of the earth by sheer accident. I mean the spiritual connection, which is supposed to be the subject of astrological calculations. Material connection, of course, there is, life being the result of a certain physico-chemical organisation of matter.

Life alone is not a fortuitous phenomenon. The solar system, on a minor member of which life has appeared and

attained the high level of manhood, itself originated by an accident. In the authoritative opinion of Sir James H. Jeans, the solar system is a "freak", that is, an exception to the laws of astronomical evolution. Jeans is the founder of the latest and generally accepted theory about the origin of the solar system. The theory is that trillions of years ago, a much larger star passed close by the sun, and pulled out of it a long trail of incandescent gas which eventually broke up into pieces, which in consequence of their rotatory motion, inherited, so to say, from the sun, assumed spherical shapes. The gaseous balls gradually cooled down and condensed to become the planets of our solar system. The evolution of the physical Universe, being governed by strictly deterministic laws, nothing purely accidental can happen. So, it is not altogether excluded that similar happenings that caused the birth of our solar system might take place somewhere and sometime. But the probability against the repetition of such a happening is so great that, for practical purposes, it can be regarded as an impossibility. On the basis of precise mathematical calculations, Jeans has come to the conclusion that, in a period of seven million years, only about one star in a hundred thousand will approach near enough to another for the birth of a solar system to be possible, and even then, there are odds perhaps of ten to one against a solar system actually being formed. The same authority has estimated that the growth of life is theoretically possible on a thousand million millionth part of the entire physical Universe. It actually exists only on an infinitesimal fraction of the possible portion.

The superstitious nature of the belief in astrology is exposed in the light of these observed facts and experimentally verified theories of modern astronomy and astral-physics. Gods in heaven do not watch over the fate of man. Man is not a marionette dancing on strings pulled by the gods in heaven or planets in their course. No self-respecting human being should picture himself or herself in such a predicament. If you believe in gods in heaven, you must also know that they are too egoistic to bother about the fate of man. They are too busy with their drinking bouts, and *Apsaras*. In between they have extra-legal erotic adventures— even with the *guru's* wives. They have their

petty intrigues, jealousies and quarrels. Then, they are always being licked by the demons, and chased out of paradise. Obviously, such a tribe of heavenly beings, if it really existed, would be too preoccupied with their own affairs to bother about others. Besides; man would simply debase himself by entrusting his fate to the care of such a gang of drunkards, profligates, idlers, imbeciles and cowards, as are supposed to populate the den of inequity called the paradise.

If you hitch astrology to the movement of the planets, you must be disappointed to know that most of them that enter your calculation do not really exist, and that the planets existing outside the imagination of the astrologer go in their course utterly indifferent to the fate of the biped animals who soil the surface of one of them.

Now I shall leave this subject with a question : Did you ever put astrology to an empirical test ? If it has any scientific validity, it must be able to stand the test, at least approximately. Here is a test you may try.

Taking the earth as a whole, there is one human being born every half a minute, on the average. If a particular "constellation lasts even for a few minutes (it lasts much longer according to astrology), there must be innumerable groups of several people experiencing identical events throughout life ; because those belonging to any particular group are born under the same constellation. It will not be very difficult to ascertain if that is the case. The discovery of a few groups of individuals living identical lives would make a very strong case in support of astrology. The test can be made in a different way, historically. Constellations repeat themselves, according to astrology. So, granted the correctness of astrological predictions, history should be repeating itself to a considerable extent, not once, but many times. There must be a multiplicity of buddhas, Christs, Mohammeds, Alexanders, Hannibals, Napoleons, so on and so forth. Indeed, history should be a regular repetition of a cliché or certain sets of events, because according to astrology, there is a limited number of possible constellations. The number of the patterns of human life, therefore, must necessarily be limited by the possible number of constellations. To put astrology to this test, one need only cast a critical glance over the history of the world. It will be

found that history does not repeat itself as it should, if the events of human life were determined by the imaginary constellations of astrology.

Superstition is the greatest obstacle to spiritual progress. Astrology is a superstition. India will not be able to extricate herself from her present position of misery, shame degradation and demoralisation, unless it ceases to raise superstition on to the high pedestal of spiritual superiority. The conditions for the renaissance of India are revolt against tradition, reason against authority, knowledge against faith. Let the past bury its dead, however illustrious they may have been, and learn a motto of life from the poet Tagore—a poem he wrote before he became a prophet and began to preach mysticism as all prophets always do. But the poet survives the prophet. Let us laugh at the prophet, but learn from the poet. Here is what you can also learn :

Let us go forward, forward, brothers !

To lag behind, is to live for nothing.

What is the use of living a life which is death ?

From The Radical Humanist

Volume : XXVI

Nos. : 7 and 8

Date : Feb. 18, 1962

Feb. 25, 1962

INDIAN HERITAGE AND THE TASK OF RENAISSANCE

The place in which we meet suggests the subject, on which I am to speak. This library is a monument to the father of Indian Renaissance, and I have accepted the invitation in the spirit of paying my homage to Rammohun Roy.

Since the time of Rammohun Roy and his associates and friends, many things have happened in this country. For the last fifty years, Indian public life was so engrossed with political problems, that the important cultural movement started by our great Reformers of the nineteenth century appears to be all but forgotten.

Now, the movement for national freedom having ended in success, the time has come for us to take up the threads of the work that these pioneers of an enlightened future for our country have left unfinished. Of late, the name of Rammohun Roy is being heard again. Attempts are being made to revive and revitalise the cultural and intellectual life of our country. These are very encouraging signs. The effort will bear fruit, if it is made in the spirit of Rammohun Roy.

At the same time, the critical observer, who desires a Renaissance of our country in the true sense, cannot help noticing that there is an element of revivalism in this movement. The term Renaissance can be misleading. It means a rebirth. The misleading connotation of the term may suggest that the rebirth of a nation means resurrection of its past. That is an obvious impossibility. The past may have been very great. Great cultural achievements have been made in the past. But it must also be realised that what was done in past cannot be done over again in a different time, and the future of a country cannot be cast in the mould of its past, however great that past may have been.

The correct evaluation of the past of a country would be to find out if its achievements can inspire us to build a feature of still greater achievements. In other words, the true historical significance of the term Renaissance is to reevaluate the past of a country and reassess its values from the point of view of their usefulness for the creation of even greater and nobler values in the future.

They talk about a Golden Age of India. Every country claims to have had a Golden Age in some remote past. No objective and critical historian would dare to say exactly what that Golden Age was. It is very largely a matter of legend and imagination. But I believe that, if there ever was a Golden Age in the history of India, it was the later half of the nineteenth century, a historical past about which we can make no mistake. Rather than probe into the remote past, which is shrouded in so much legend, it will be advisable for us to seek inspiration from that Golden Age which is a historical reality, and for some of us a matter of living memory.

The political movement in our country has produced many outstanding men, some of whom may go down in history as Great Men. The Twentieth Century has also had its important scientists and literatures. But the foundation of a really brighter and greater future of our country was laid by the work of the great reformers and thinkers of the late nineteenth century. And Bengal has a claim to be proud of the fact that many of them were her sons.

Because of the peculiar tradition of the mental life of our country, for a long time, reason was not given a sufficiently important place in the scheme of things. That was the case also in other parts of the world in certain periods of history. For more than a thousand years, the Christian Church practically destroyed rational thinking in Europe. So, in our country also, after the downfall of Buddhism, reason was at a discount. When reason is placed under discount, intellectual progress and cultural achievements, which presuppose free intellectual development, naturally become static. In order to come into the heritage of our cultural legacy and make proper use of it, the first thing to be done

is to apply reason and criticism to the study of our own old history.

Historian will tell you that what we know of the history of past ages is to a large extent undependable. Firstly, the practice of keeping written records of events is not very old. We have still to find out when that practice first started in India. If we make an investigation into that problem of history, we shall have reason to doubt the historical value of the great Epics and many other monumental achievements of literature, which will continue to exist as great literary productions, but in course of time shall have to be deprived of their place on the shelves of works on Indian history.

Even when the practice of writing history began, it did not happen simultaneously with the occurrence of the events recorded. As a rule, it took *post factum*. Inaccuracies were inevitable. The absence of firsthand knowledge of facts was very often compensated by giving imagination free play. Secondly, as learning in ancient times was restricted to a small circle of people, and the learned usually congregated in royal courts, history was written as a rule so as to flatter the kings and countries. These are human failings, and it would be bold for Indians to claim to be free of common human weakness.

Take the Mahabharata, for example. You may say that the Indian epics, like all other great epics, contain a large element of historical truth. But their significance is large by poetical and literary. If we undertake a critical study of the Mahabharata, the first thing that strikes the student of history is that this book cannot possibly have been written in one and the same period of time, and certainly not by the same man. Yet Vyas has gone down in history as the author of the Mahabharata.

We shall further discover that social conditions which, according to our knowledge of anthropology and social history, have proved to exist in periods of history separated by long intervals, have been described as obtaining at one and the same time. These and similar observations lead us to the conclusion that there might have been an essence, a central part of these epics written at a particular time, but

in course of time other parts were added to it and ultimately the germs of history in it were buried under a very imposing monument of literature with very little direct value as a historical document.

We can find in the Mahabharata abstracts of a certain culture. But a culture does not hang in the air. It is connected with other aspects of life. When we know that a certain type of culture is associated with certain social conditions, then we must conclude that there are in the Mahabharata different interpolations. That is the positive result from a critical study of Mahabharata. There are in it certain abstract cultural patterns which may appeal to our social idealism and our sense of values. But then we must examine whether these patterns of culture can be reintroduced under the present conditions of our country. If we try to impose, in social conditions which are bound to produce their own patterns of culture, another pattern of culture, the result cannot be satisfactory.

On the other hand, the study of the Ramayana creates a different impression. It is a more homogeneous piece of work, written over a shorter period of time, which was certainly earlier than the time of the Mahabharata. If the Renaissance is to have a similar historical significance as the Renaissance in Europe had, it must begin not with a glorification of the past, not only with the declaration that India had a great past and all that we have to do is to remember that great past and be inspired by it. That is not enough. We shall have to apply our critical mind to that past in the light of knowledge acquired since then, and study the past with a view to finding out what was really abiding and logically consistent in the chain of traditional Indian thinking, and finally we must examine those intellectual and cultural achievements of ancient India to find out if they are still valid for modern life and can inspire us to create new and greater forms of culture.

As I said in the beginning, the values of an ancient culture must be judged by its ability to inspire us to greater cultural achievements. We cannot just go back to those days, for the simple reason that we cannot recreate the social conditions which produced those patterns of culture. As at the time of

the European Renaissance the pioneers of that movement approached their problems from different points of view, so also it is bound to happen in India. But the fact of great significance is that all the thinkers and reformers of the nineteenth century had one thing in common; they all had the courage to realise that the established social conditions, the prevailing intellectual life of our country, was so very permeated with prejudices, superstitions, blind faith and other factors inhibiting free thinking, that a brighter future for India would not be possible unless those evils were eradicated.

Now, that movement, which might have yielded great results, was eclipsed by another movement which a student of history, particularly of cultural history, must characterise as superficial, that is, a purely political movement. This movement not only impeded the earlier intellectual movement of free thinking and cultural resurgence, but it tended to reinforce and galvanise popular ignorance and superstitions and all those very evils of our public life which were the targets of attack of the pioneers of Indian Renaissance. This superficial political movement has thus created a consideration in our national life, which has to be resolved if we want to solve even our practical political and economic problems.

The movement for political freedom started from the assumption that everything that is bad in our country is the result of foreign rule. Undoubtedly, foreign rule was an evil. No doubt, it had to be removed before the creative energies of the Indian people could be freed. But a student of history cannot run away from the problem of having to explain the very fact of foreign rule. History is no longer just a chronicle of events. It has become a science. And whenever we come up against any striking historical fact, the task of historical science is to explain it.

Foreign rule is now removed. But have those evils been removed which, it was believed, were caused by the foreign rule? They have not. That means that the foreign rule may have been a contributing cause, but it cannot have been the root cause of the evils in our national life. The pioneers of Indian Renaissance realised this and tried to attack the roots of the evils.

Later on, for good or for bad, the public mind, and even the most powerful intellects of our country, were concentrating exclusively on the subsidiary problem which resulted from our inability to solve the greater problems. The subsidiary political problem being solved, we are now confronted with the fundamental problem.

The British were not the first of conquer India. Others had come before and conquered India. This outstanding fact of Indian history has not yet been explained. Why is it that a large country, a civilized country, could be conquered time and again by any handful of free-booters who took it into their head to do so? It has been said in poetry that the Indian peasant has weathered all storms and misfortunes. But are we to take it that we must continue to suffer in patience and bow our heads to any new misfortunes for all time to come?

The fact is that, because the majority of Indians had precisely that attitude of life, all these misfortunes happened to our country: It does not matter what happens; we have no control over what happens to us; we can only bow our heads and accept our predestined fate. But what has produced that national mentality? That is the challenging problem, before our historians, most of whom unfortunately are avoiding the challenge.

When we pose this problem and approach it boldly, we can come only to one conclusion, namely, that this type of Indian mentality was the practical result of the sum total of our ancient culture, which is one of other-worldliness, holding this world to be a sort of third-class waiting room on some junction railway station. We have to travel as on a pilgrimage; life is a journey to be suffered, not an end in itself; the end is beyond. This is believed to be a highly spiritual attitude; but can that really be the ideal of the four hundred million human beings living in this country? They must have certainly some less noble ideals, assuming that this ideal is noble. By it they cannot be moved. Their ideal must be deduced from their conditions of life. If we live in this world and are to make something out of our life in this world, our first ideal must be to make the conditions of life on this earth more tolerable.

It is a lesson of history that a minimum amount of leisure, that is, freedom from the drudgery of earning a livelihood, is a condition for any cultural development. As long as a man has to toil from dawn to dusk to earn his food alone, he cannot develop any other finer aspects of life. Therefore, for the vast mass of Indians, this spiritual ideal is completely unrealistic. And if I were one of those peasants who are expected to go on forever bowing their heads, I would certainly think that this is a fraudulent ideal, and that those who place it before me can have no good motive in doing so; they simply want me to think of something else and forget my urgent needs. In the name of this ideal, a Renaissance—a rebirth of India, cannot take place. It is asked, unless this special Indian genius was really better than other ideals, how could our ancient culture survive so long? But if you look at India how much of our ancient culture is still a reality for those who represent Indian culture today, not to mention the Indian people?

Take for instance Rabindranath Tagore. Does he in his greatness represent the mass of the Indian people? We cannot identify the spirit of a whole huge country with the spirit of a few of its most fortunate sons. If we want our people to enjoy the cultural values of Tagore, we must first ask ourselves how many Indians can read, not only the writings of Tagore, but read at all. What is the sense of telling other countries to follow the genius of Tagore, when 99 p.c. of our own people cannot read his writings, not to mention understand him?

This critical attitude towards our own history was discouraged by the argument that, for the time being, nothing could be done, because the foreign rule had first to be removed. Such a critical attitude would weaken the movement for national liberation, and therefore it should be suppressed. It was suppressed to such an extent that from the closing decade of the nineteenth century, there was a positive intellectual reaction in the cultural history of India. The high spirit of rationalism and reform, the iconoclastic ideas of great dreamers and thinkers, were replaced by a religious revivalist movement. Therefore, today our position is not only just to carry on the work of Rammohun Roy and

others like him, but we have to begin all over again from the beginning, to create the spirit of Indian Renaissance.

I do not know how many of our great men today will have the courage to declare themselves as rebels, as Rammohun Roy did. But while in his time his voice inspired only a few to emulate him, today a similar voice can have a much larger response. Therefore, we should not only glorify the fathers of Indian Renaissance, but we must emulate their courage, their power of reason and conviction. We must inherit their burning desire for social justice and their hatred against time-honoured but enslaving social customs and prejudices, which have all but killed the spirit of our people.

It was the spirit of revolt against the Christian Church which dragged European humanity out of a long period of slumber in the Dark Middle-Age and placed it on the road to progress and greater freedom. We don not have to follow Europe slavishly. Our way may be different. I believe that India will indeed have to strike out a new way, because many things that appeared to be very promising in Europe in the nineteenth century have turned out deceptive in experience. But you cannot strike out a new path out of mere desire and imagination. If we want the overdue Indian Renaissance really to happen, we have to study European history and see how the European Renaissance freed European mankind from the bondage of tradition. Then we must also have the courage to say that the political institutions and economic systems and social thought which developed in Europe after the Renaissance were tested in experience and failed to produce the promised results; therefore it is no use for us to imitate slavishly the modern institutions of the West. But we shall be entitled to reject them only if we can produce something more progressive and liberating. An Indian Renaissance is the precondition for this. On the other hand, if we want to go back to Vedanta and from that point of view reject the achievements and creations of Western civilisation, we shall be crying in the wilderness. The world will not listen to us, and we shall not achieve anything positive at home; India's future would remain dark and dismal.

We need two things. Firstly, a critical appreciation of our past. The future cannot be created in the air. The present is founded on the past, and the future on the present. The wisdom of the Vedanta Rishis and other Indian philosophers and learned men can help us to lay a sensible foundation for a new Indian culture. But if we want to take them as they are, we shall be building castles in the air. They had a different social foundation, and our social foundation demands different ideas and a culture of its own.

Secondly, we must remember that for hundreds of years humanity in other parts of the world has forged ahead, while Indian history was stagnant, and its cultural superstructure could therefore not develop. But the human mind is universal. All human culture is a common human heritage. Therefore, in recovering our own due heritage, we should not omit to look to other parts of the world as well. Nobody can say that we should develop Indian culture on the model of the past and at the same time reject science ; because that would be very inconsistent with the contention of those very people that the Theory of Relativity was already enounced in the Vedas, and that the world should learn its science from ancient India.

Whatever the scientific achievements of ancient Indian civilisation, the world has gone ahead. Other peoples had the chance in later ages, and we must take advantage of human achievements wherever they may have been made. Knowledge is not parochial, and truth is universal. Therefore, the spirit of the Renaissance should be to welcome knowledge wherever we find it, and to welcome truth even if it reveals as untrue what we may have maintained for so long.

I hope that institutions like the Rammohun Roy Library, where the memory of the great fathers of Indian Renaissance is treasured, will be points of radiation of this spirit of Renaissance, which will have to combat very powerful and even popular tendencies of conservatism and vested interests. The latter are not only of a political or economic nature. There are cultural, spiritual, intellectual vested interests also. There are classes and sections of people whose privileged position in society is connected with certain institutions, rituals and beliefs, and who will naturally

combat the ideas of Renaissance, of rationalism and scientific enquiry, as subversive. But these ideas are necessary. No progress can take place except on the basis of those ideas. And they are the ideas of men like Rammohun Roy and the pioneers of Indian Renaissance. To follow in their footsteps means to be intellectually alive and alert. Only when our intellectual life will become thus dynamic, can it be effective, and unless it is effective, the national freedom we have achieved will remain meaningless for the majority of the Indian people.

From *The Radical Humanist*

Volume : XVIII

No. : 49

Date : Dec. 5, 1954

RENAISSANCE MOVEMENT

When we analyse the Indian situation, we come to the conclusion that thorough reconstruction of Indian society is the precondition for opening up before Indian mankind all the avenues of progress and prosperity. Except for very few people who are still blinded by tradition and die-hard conservatism, practically everybody, particularly the younger generation, feels the need for a social revolution.

The term social revolution has been associated with some very frightening notions. But in reality, social revolution is nothing very frightening or in any way objectionable. Because, society is not a static thing. It is the association of human beings who have been continuously evolving and progressing. Consequently, society also progresses and evolves from stage to stage ; whenever this process comes to stagnation, the need for breaking the stagnation by extraordinary means becomes felt.

Our Indian society has been in such a stagnation for quite a long time. The present problems of our political and social life are very largely born out of that background of social stagnation. Social stagnation not only impedes the material progress of the particular group of mankind concerned, but also its cultural and intellectual progress. Therefore we see in our country today not only economic backwardness, but also mass illiteracy, ignorance and intellectual apathy.

Intellectual backwardness is to be measured not only by the small number of people who can read and write, but by the mental state and outlook on life of those who can be called the educated classes. This is not a peculiar experience of our country only. The history of the world teaches that every group of mankind, no matter where it resides, in Europe or in Asia, experienced such a crisis in their collective life at one time or other. History also teaches us how those crises were overcome by other peoples in their history.

Learning from history, all critical and thoughtful students of history have come to the conclusion that a philosophical revolution is the precondition for any far-reaching social revolution. In other words, the members of a society in stagnation, in crisis, must realise the necessity of breaking that stagnation. They must feel in themselves the will and the power to bring about that necessary change.

That will and that power are not felt by people so long as their minds remains obsessed with old ideas which provide moral sanction to the established society. In order to reconstruct a society, to replace as ossified decayed social organisation by a more liberating and progressive one, the moral sanction of the established order has to be challenged, because only when the moral sanction of a system is challenged, can the people be shaken out of their authoritarian mentality, and feel the urge, the will, to subvert the various social institutions which are obstructing their material and moral progress.

An examination of the history of India— a scientific examination, not that view of Indian history which is obsessed with preconceived notions— an objective and scientific study of Indian history must lead to the conclusion that India perhaps more than any other country today stands in need of that mental reorientation if she is to progress in the social and political field.

The difficulties of establishing really free democratic institutions and a corresponding economy in our country cannot be resolved unless the large majority of people wake up from their blind faith in time-honoured ideas and traditions, which are the sanction of authoritarianism. That is the most urgent task : to bring about a philosophical revolution in the country, a task which has been undertaken by the Indian Renaissance movement.

The term Renaissance is historically known to all students of world history. It came into use after the experience of Europe in the 14th to 16th century, when Europe also had to reorientate herself spiritually and intellectually from the Christian religious mode of thought towards what has since come to be known as the scientific mode of thought.

That reorientation has not yet taken place in our country. On the contrary ; we have many students of science, indeed

we have great scientists, but science in our country is identified very largely with technology. The value of science is judged by its practicability. You may have read the speeches delivered at the Science Congress in Bombay and Poona. Whoever is interested in science as science must have been struck by the peculiar view taken by our scientists themselves. According to them, science is all technical problems of economic production and industrialisation. All that is of course necessary, but it is not science.

Science is much more than that. Science is the result of and the instrument for acquiring more and more knowledge, which enables man to outgrow progressively the limitations set to the development of his mind and spirit by old ideas, ideals and notions which resulted from the primitive ignorance of humanity in its infancy. The shedding of these old ideas through the growth of scientific knowledge is a mental revolution, and that is the greatest significance of science.

In order to feel the need for this profound revolutionary change, which must precede any other revolution, we shall have to learn a lesson from the history of other countries, particularly those which have been leading human progress for the last 400 to 500 years. We have to emphasise this all the more because of the deplorable habit of decrying western civilisation as against the genius of the East. This special genius of India is said to be a spiritual genius.

The peculiarity of Indian culture is believed to be that it has been associated with religion. Therefore Indian culture is supposed to be spiritual and different from western culture. We compare what is called spiritual Indian culture with the culture of modern Europe, which is not so intimately associated with religion. But we forget that, until the sixteenth century, the culture of Europe was as intensely spiritual and religious as that of India. The difference is that in the 15th and 16th centuries the European mind outgrew the limitations of the religious mode of thought and accepted the scientific mode of thought, under which is made such astonishing progress, and that did not happen in India.

Now, the political institutions and economic system that free India wishes to establish resulted in Europe precisely from this progress made in the last 4—500 years. If the

results of that progress of 4—500 years are considered to be bad, then the political and economic results of that progress cannot be the ideal of India, if she is to remain true to her "spiritual genius". If we find difficulties in establishing democratic institutions in our political and economic life, it is because of the fact that the preconditions for a democratic way of life, that is, the change in the mentality of the people, the philosophical revolution, did not take place in India.

Consequently, when we talk the language of modern politics and economics, very few people may understand it: it is not a language which could be understood by the vast bulk of the people. The cardinal principle of western culture and the democratic way of life is the dignity of the human being, the notion that man is a value in himself; man is the ultimate value; man is the measure of everything. Prior to the Renaissance, in Europe also, the religious mentality had subordinated man to an inscrutable, all-powerful or divine Providential Will. The Renaissance was a rebirth of man after those dark ages. It was a Renaissance because originally man was not a believing animal, but a rational animal, an enquiring animal. These essential attributes of man came to be rehabilitated in the Renaissance.

If you will go into the history of primitive mankind, not only of those primitive communities which no longer exist today, but even of those still living in our time, you will find a complete absence of the conception of God or Soul, and similar peculiar religious notions. Life expresses itself in the struggle for existence. When the human species appears on the background of the long process of biological evolution, its main concern is to preserve its existence. In order to carry on the struggle for existence, it is necessary for the human species to understand its environment, so that it will be able either to overcome them or to know how to escape from the dangers of the various natural phenomena.

Therefore, everywhere, in the East as in the West, the human mind began by enquiring for causes, which laid down the foundation of science and philosophy. But the knowledge of mankind being very limited in the early days of its evolution, the urge of explain the natural phenomena surrounding and threatening the existence of primitive human beings, and the desire of find ways and means for

continuing the struggle to survive the onslaught of those surroundings, compelled man to adopt a method which we know today as the setting up of hypotheses. In any scientific enquiry, when we are confronted with a new phenomenon, we make a hypothesis ; that is to say, on the basis of our previous knowledge, we assume a most plausible explanation, and on the basis of that hypothesis we carry on further investigation, observation and experiments to test the hypothesis. If it is verified by observation and experiment, it becomes an explanation and enriches our knowledge and becomes a new scientific theory. If it is not verified, it is rejected, and we have to set up another hypothesis.

Religion was established by mankind exactly in this manner. The various gods of natural religions are nothing more than hypotheses. Man saw lightning in the sky and wondered how it took place. Man had the experience of producing sparks by striking a flint on a stone, and from this he deduced that lightning must be a gigantic spark produced by a gigantic man striking a huge flint on an enormous stone. The gods of natural religion were conceived as giant men, who had human will, desires and powers, only on a vastly larger scale. As man was engaged in a struggle against the forces of nature, to acquire such power of gods was the highest ambition of man. It is easy to see that religion was thus the expression of man's primitive rational belief that nothing comes out of nothing. Everything has a cause, and the human mind can explain everything.

Out of the primitive bliss of his ignorance, man populated nature with a galaxy of gods. Even when he did not need them any more for the purpose for which he had created them, they remained fixed in his mind and he became a victim of his own creation, just as it is said today about that newer creation of man, the machine. Man created in religion an instrument for his liberation and that initial liberation inspired him to create something newer and bigger. That is how mankind progressed. Today the need of mankind to surpass its creations of the past is greater than ever.

Once the religious mode of thought was established, it got a hold on man's mind for a long time. Great religions developed in various parts of the world. But one predominating principle was common to most of them

namely, that life on this world is only transitory. The origin of life was unknown, man's ability to shape his destiny and improve his condition was inadequate ; he could not have this confidence yet. In his anxiety and helplessness, he clung to the belief that a higher power guided his fate and had a better life in store for him after death. Man has come from somewhere else and must go back to somewhere else. Life on this earth is only a passing nightmare, and the sooner it is over, the better.

If we go a little deeper into ancient history, we shall see that with his innate rationality, man had evolved, on a primitive level, some fairly developed philosophical and scientific thoughts, which were only overwhelmed for a time by the religious mode of thought, but which, being a partial understanding of reality, could not be altogether extinguished. Later on, when man was waking up from his long slumber in blind religious beliefs, he found inspiration in the ancient wisdom, which had been acquired at the dawn of man's history. That was the inspiration of the European Renaissance.

If we study Indian history, we shall find that similar primitive wisdom was also developed in ancient India, and the knowledge of that wisdom can serve the purpose of an Indian Renaissance. That is the function of the study of history, which until now has only set itself the task of glorifying the past and to prove that everything in the past was good. But the study of history is to reconstruct the past as it was. The writing of history is not an easy thing. Even in modern times, history is not written truthfully and faithfully. In ancient times, when history came down the ages through hearsay and legends, to be recorded perhaps many centuries afterwards, it was unavoidable that history was more myth and fairytales than a record of actual facts. Even when history was written later on by scholars living at the courts of kings, it became merely a glorification of those kings, not a record of the facts of that time.

If you read the Ramayana or the Mahabharata, you will come to know all about the heroes, and we are told that everything was grand in Ram-Raj, and that we should strive to revive it. But what was the condition of the people under Ramchandra, that we do not know. From the Ramayana, we

know only the exploits of Ram and even of the monkeys, but nothing of the ordinary human beings of that time. Reading the Mahabharata, you can see that it is the record of a very highly civilised period with advanced political institutions. But even there you find only the story of the heroes, kings and warriors, nothing of the ordinary men and women, the peasants and craftsmen of the time. Relying on the record, you would think that there were only warriors and kings, and no other occupation for people than war—no agriculture, no arts and crafts, not even trade.

If we really want to understand what was the condition of our country in the past, we shall have to undertake a scientific study of history, and that is not possible unless we again learn from the experience of the West. History was like that—a record of kings and wars—also in the western world. The earliest history was never written. The systematic writing of history began only in the 13th century. Therefore, if we want to discover the ancient wisdom of India, which may still provide us with inspiration—a wisdom which will enable us to doubt the validity of the religious mode of thought, to doubt the moral sanction of religious tradition and authority—we shall have to subject the vast bulk of our Sanskrit scriptural texts to a philological investigation, to a critical study of comparative religion, and then only shall we be able to separate the chaff from the grain, discover that in India also thoughts developed very similar to those of ancient Greece, which provided the inspiration for the European Renaissance, and which may provide also to us the inspiration for that Renaissance which India must experience if our dreams of a brighter future are ever to come true.

When we say that India must make a similar experience, like Europe in the Renaissance, we do not suggest aping the West. We simply suggest that, confronted with a similar social crisis, with similar problems, Indian mankind must also revolt, must also challenge the moral sanction of the established order, and for that purpose we can profitably adopt the procedure which was adopted by European mankind when it was placed in a similar situation.

The Renaissance was a rebirth of man. Man must remember that everything that exists in society was created by men

who preceded him, and it was created for the progress and happiness of mankind. Confronted with social institutions or political organisations which are antagonistic to the progress and happiness of mankind, which bind men instead of liberating them, man must feel the necessity of breaking those bonds, so that he can make further progress. But in order to have the confidence that he can do that, man must remember himself. That is the rebirth of man as man. Men have been either the slaves of gods or the servants of kings or at best the devotees of some religion. But man must be man for himself, if he wants to work his own salvation.

I have referred before to the authoritarian mentality of the masses, which creates an atmosphere favourable for the rise of dictatorship. Why is this atmosphere so deep-rooted in our country? Because the roots are struck deep in what is called India's spiritual culture, the teleological view of life, which dominates Indian mentality. Whatever may be our different conceptions of god or gods, this mentality is common to all Indians: Everything that happens in the world, happens according to our destiny, and that destiny is providential. It is beyond the comprehension of human intelligence and cannot be changed in any way by human action. Given that mentality, how can you expect Indian mankind to take its destiny in its own hand and shape it? The popular result of this spiritual culture is fatalism, which is the only spiritual outfit of more than 99 p.c. of Indian mankind, expressed in their belief in Karma. If man suffers, he believes it is because of his Karma, because he has committed some sin in a past life. In other words, whatever happens is predestined; man has to accept it and pass through it. Therefore we have cultivated the belief that this world is a vale of sorrow—life is a nightmare. There is some spiritual being in man which is enslaved by his physical existence. The sooner he gets out of it, the better, and existence itself being an evil why should we bother what form that evil existence takes? The result is an utter indifference to whatever happens. Because my grandfather did a certain thing, I have to do the same; that is providential destiny or the will of God. Man has no say in it.

As long as this mentality will prevail, the will, the very desire to change the world cannot be felt by the bulk of

Indian mankind. Consequently, one has to come to the conclusion that, if we want a social revolution, if we want to reconstruct Indian society, if we want to create political and economic institutions which will place man in his proper place and open before him all roads to progress and prosperity, then we must apply ourselves to the fundamental task of bringing about a change in the minds of the people, help them outgrow that paralysing fatalism in them and develop a mentality inspired by the belief in man's own creativeness. We must awaken in Indian mankind the will to change their fate and the belief that they have the power to change it.

That task was accomplished in Europe by the Renaissance of the 15th century and that task has to be fulfilled in India also, if India is to take her place among the free nations of the modern world. It is conceivable that we may get that place through the action of a few people at the top of our country, while the masses of the people remain ignorant and indifferent to what is going on. It can conceivably be done through regimentation and authoritarianism. In that way India may become great. But that will be a castle reared on the weakness and poverty of the Indian people. That was how nations in the past became great and glorious. Therefore past history is a history of kings and dynasties, not of peoples. If in our old literature you can read much even about animals and birds, but not a word about the common man, it shows that man was considered on a sub-animal level. In the modern world, similar things may happen. We know the story of Japan. Japan was a great and apparently prosperous country. Some people think that India should follow that example. But do you know how Japan built up that greatness? It was built on the low wages and exploitation of the Japanese workers and peasants; on their misery the prosperity of Japan was built.

Similarly the complete absence of freedom of a people may be the basis of the military might of a country. That story we know from Hitler's Germany. And for that too, unfortunately, we have much admiration in our country. But under such conditions, men become like animals or machines. To put on the uniform of a soldier or a government servant, was the highest ideal of an average German. We

should beware of similar ideals in our country. As long as men think that to put on a uniform and shout commands at fellow human beings is the greatest achievement on earth, we shall not have freedom, but at best we may deprive others of whatever freedom they may have had.

Those who want a really *free* India rather than a Great India built on the foundation of a submerged mass of men, they will feel the need for a philosophical revolution. They will have to change the mentality of the people so that the slumbering giant will feel the stir of life and power in him and stand up and break the rusty chains of age-long tradition. That is the message of the Renaissance Movement.

Once that happens, we shall be confronted with many questions, which can be answered, not by arguments, but by imparting scientific knowledge. Therefore, the Renaissance of our time can achieve greater success in a shorter time than it happened in the past. When the European Renaissance asserted the sovereignty of man and placed man in the centre of the world, man himself was still unknown. They drew inspiration from the early philosophers who had said that man is the measure of things. But man himself remained a mystery. Until then the prevailing belief in Europe was that man is superior to other animals because the divine spark operates through man. Man is some representative or fraction or expression of God. Therefore man is superior to other animals. If that is the conception of man, if human dignity and sovereignty is deduced from that belief, then certainly the height of man's ambition must be to get out of his human existence, because it is subsidiary to a divine existence, to merge in which is the ideal of mankind. With that kind of mentality and society will come to stagnation and ultimately break down.

History shows us that the same experience was made by other peoples who attained a high degree of civilisation, but because of the total absence of initiative to improve their worldly conditions, because of this fatalistic mentality, those civilisations broke down. To believe that life is something bad and we must run away from it, is not a philosophy which can improve human existence. People who are fascinated by such a philosophy are welcome to do so, but those who preach it do not usually believe in it themselves;

they only preach it to others, to the common people. The belief that life is a predestined evil keeps the common people plodding and suffering until they die. A philosophy which may give us a few saints, but can produce for the vast bulk of mankind only such debased results, cannot be really called divine.

Our business is not to go and argue with the preachers of that philosophy. Our task is to inspire the common people to revolt against it, to make them feel that, if they are miserable, it is not because it is predestined, but for certain causes which can be changed. We can do this even in terms of their own religious beliefs. If God is good, how can he make such a bad creation, a world in which there is no sympathy, no kindness, no goodness? If God has made such a mess of our life, let us take our life in our own hands and try to make something better of it.

The need for a philosophical revolution compels us to oppose the established traditional, authoritarian philosophy with a new philosophy. We shall have to oppose the philosophy of spiritualism, or whatever you may call it, by one of Humanism. Our spiritualists will combat Materialism. Therefore, I do not use this term. I oppose their spiritualism with Humanism, which is a philosophy with the object of enabling man to attain freedom. What is freedom? Freedom is not a distant utopian ideal. It is the progressive liberation of man from the various limitations on the development of his potentialities. The modern science of biology teaches us that every human being, barring the mentally defective, are endowed with the properties of developing intelligently, morally and mentally. It is merely a question of opportunity to make these potentialities actual. Freedom is nothing more than that opportunity : the opportunity for all human individuals to develop their potentialities. That is freedom, and nothing more, nothing metaphysical, nothing mystical or abstract.

The second question will take us a little further. One may ask whether we can make men conscious of these potentialities. Our answer will be in the affirmative, and it is so on the strength of scientific knowledge. When an individual or a group of men are habituated to a certain way of thinking, it naturally takes some time to jolt them out

of that mental rut and persuade them to travel a different way. But as that habit was created over a long period of persistent preaching, it can be changed again by appealing to those instincts of mankind which are antagonistic to those other-worldly proclivities. We have in man the tendency to believe as well as that to doubt. The first has been fostered and glorified in our country for ages. Therefore our people are very largely believers. But the tendency to enquire, to doubt and ask questions is also inherent in every human being, as the history of mankind, teaches. So, if we continue to insist that man must enquire about the Why and How of everything, that tendency in men will be strengthened and will ultimately prevail. And in proportion as this scepticism, this spirit of enquiry will develop, the habit of belief, created by the religious mode of thought, will be undermined, and the beginning of a mental change, of a philosophical revolution will be made.

Therefore, the fundamental principles of the philosophy of Humanism, with which the spiritualist philosophy has to be confronted, can be very simply stated. These principles are that man is inherently a rational being, and, being rational, it can be shown that he is also inherently a moral being. Given rationality and the sense of decency on the part of its members, you will have a well organised harmonious and moral social order. If these properties were not inherent in human beings, you could never have a harmonious and decent social order. Previously, we had to refer back to God in order to attribute those properties to mankind. Man had to be moral because a universal moral principle operated through him. In other words, man as man cannot be moral. Therefore, even today, if anybody doubts the dogmas of religion, he is condemned as immoral, which implies that man can be moral only under the coercion of a policeman, whether he is in heaven or at the street-corner. Man does not steal because of the policeman at the street-corner, and he does not commit a sin because of the policeman in heaven. I don't call this a very high moral principles.

It is only when we can prove that the ability of moral judgment is inherent in man as man, man as a biological being, that rationality, the ability to judge and discriminate, is also inherent in man as a biological property, that we can

possibly subscribe to the doctrine that man is the maker of history and of his own destiny. So long as man is ultimately subordinated to a super-human power, obviously he cannot make his destiny. To remove man's faith in super-human powers is a precondition for any improvement of his condition on this earth. That is what we mean when we say that a philosophical revolution must take place which will establish the scientific mode of thought in the minds of the Indian people in the place of the outworn fatalistic and paralysing religious mode of thought.

Having learned from our own experience and that of other countries, we have applied ourselves to the task of developing a new philosophy, which places man in the centre of things, man not as a mystical and mysterious being, whose essence is not known, but as a biological being endowed with reason and morality—a man who can stand on his own legs and who can therefore create his own world. Whatever was created in this world of men was created by man. If we know that we can act, not as instruments of a super-human being, but for our own freedom, then only can we open up a new chapter in human history.

Having accomplished the primary task of developing a philosophy, on which the human mind has been labouring everywhere since time immemorial, and the germs of which are also in our own ancient literature, we have now undertaken the task of carrying its message to the people. Therefore we call it a Renaissance Movement, a movement for the rebirth of Indian manhood. Renaissance does not mean revival of ancient India. The past is past, and we cannot revive it. But we can look into the past to find some truths which may transcend time and space, which can still serve our purpose of widening the frontiers of freedom, and which can still serve us as light for working out our future. But any real Renaissance must be the mental and spiritual rebirth of Indian men and women. Until now, man was an agent of gods, and expression of a divine will, a saint or a saviour. To be man for himself was not considered good enough. Man who is the creator of his destiny, who has created history from time immemorial, must not cease to do so again in our time, if we want a brighter future for those to come after us.

But before this message can be carried far and wide, we shall have to educate the educators. Every religion has its apostles. The Renaissance Movement has set to itself the task of creating a band of apostles, not of religion, but of freedom. Men and women inspired with the ideal of freedom will carry the word of knowledge which will dispel the ignorance in which the vast bulk of Indian mankind is submerged. In the light of scientific knowledge, the dumb-driven masses which now feel helpless and hopeless, will remember that they are men, endowed with the ability to do great and good things, and between these two we attach greater importance to goodness than to greatness. The world has had enough of Great Men, and they have led it near perdition. What the world needs today is good men, who can think for themselves. The Renaissance movement has set itself the task to see that the number of such good men in our country grows so that the light of truth and the message of freedom will be spread by them far and wide. In proportion as this message will spread, the foundation which is holding up the decayed Indian society with its suffocating air in which no man can breathe freely, will crumble and be pulled down.

But before you pull down the old house, be prepared with the material with which to build a better structure. And for that you have to remember that you can perhaps create good institutions, but unless you can have good men to work them, they will be of no use. Even if we had a faultless democratic Constitution, it would not work because the vast bulk of the people of our country lack the urge, the desire, the very knowledge of freedom and democracy. That will, that desire, that urge has first to be created and instilled in the people, so that they will bestir themselves. We do not want a social revolution from above. Structural changes imposed from the top do not work. Those who impose them become rulers, at best *for* the people.

A free society can be created only by free men, by people who live in harmony among themselves, not by politicians struggling for power and trying to cut each other's throats. A good society can be created only by good men. Until now the mistake was that we designed beautiful houses, but we neglected to make sound bricks. We apply ourselves to that

primary task of making the individuals conscious of their dignity, of their will to be free, of their innate rationality which makes them want to be free and good, because only such individuals can create a good and free society. As the number of such individuals grows, changes will occur in society which are bound to promote the social revolution which you all want, and which is a burning necessity. But don't expect anybody to bring it about for you. It will come only in this way. If I have succeeded in awakening in you at least the desire to think more about these ideas, I shall be sure that the army of free men will have grown. As the army of free men grows, freedom in the world will grow. In this way alone will freedom become a reality.

From the *Radical Humanist*
 Volume : XIX
 Nos. : 19 and 20
 Date : May 8, 1955
 May 15, 1955

RENAISSANCE AND RADICALISM

The relation between a political party and an organisation which has for its object to promote educational and cultural advance of the people. Politics, as understood not only in our country, but throughout the world, is associated by the so-called left-wing parties with economic problems. The relation between politics and cultural problems, the problems which concern the very core of human existence, is very rarely taken into consideration. The concern with these problems, in so far as they are of educational nature, are left to academicians and teachers ; and cultural part of the problems is left to artists, literatures and philosophers. But those who are at least generally acquainted with the thought currents of the modern world know that there is a growing anxiety about the separation of politics— not only political practice, but political theories— and the ideas and ideals which have been cherished by mankind ever since the dawn of civilisation as the prime motive of human existence. The problem of the relation between politics and morals is attracting the attention of a growing number of thoughtful people and outstanding philosophers of our time.

In Europe, the discussion of this problem no longer remains on the the academic and philosophical plane. It is penetrating the ranks of political parties, particularly their thinking sections. Unfortunately, the thoughtful section of the political movements is very small. That is not a peculiarity of our country. Thinking does not seem to have any relation with politics, because politics is supposed to be all action. A politician must be an activist. He must act. But any action presupposes some thinking ; that simple fact is being forgotten. Most of the political workers do not do the thinking themselves. They simply follow the leaders who claim to be guided by intuition, or themselves follow others who lived and thought in some remote past. On the whole, passion

and emotion rather than rational thought or even intelligent calculation are the motive force of political activities, which necessarily create chaos and confusion, pestilence and wretchedness, instead of taking the world towards a better social order and more harmonious human relations.

The relation of the fundamental problem of politics induced a small group of people in our country to organise a new type of political party as described by Professor Parikh. The question is : Can political practice be guided by rational thinking? In other words, can politics be reconciled with morality? They gave some thought to these problems. Having thought over the problems for a sufficiently long period of time, and having arrived at certain conclusions, they set to themselves the task of placing the problems before the thinking section of the people, and also submitted for their consideration the approach to these problems and their tentative solutions. Since our point of departure is an appeal to reason, we do not offer a cut and dried set of formulas to be accepted or rejected. At the same time, we do not believe that judgment regarding intellectual problems can be referred to the method of counting heads. The bold democrat is still to be born who would maintain that truth can be distinguished from untruth by the raising of hands in the market place. Therefore, we submit our ideas to the thinking section of the people. In doing so, we explain to them the reason which compelled us to raise these questions apparently irrelevant to purpose of a political party, and point out how very vital it is to face and answer these question, if politics is to cease to be a dirty game—a scramble for power. If they are convinced, they will join us in the task ; and ultimately, by collective intellectual efforts, we shall be able to find solutions of these problems more complete, more satisfactory, more rational, than the solutions we have so far arrived at.

Now, in order to accomplish the task we have set to ourselves, we shall have to multiply ourselves. We shall have to create a sufficiently large group of people who will not only have the conviction of our ideas, but also the ability to expound those ideas before the intelligent public. We hold annual study camps with the object of training such

individuals. Each All-India Study Camp is followed by provincial study camps. The result is that every year the number of this new type of political workers and thinkers is growing, although our very existence may yet be ignored by those who can make a great noise which only confuses people's mind and thus makes them predisposed to follow blindly. But as Professor Parikh and the President pointed out, India is reaching a stage in her history where the problems of her public life cannot be solved by shouting slogans. We have to do some serious thinking. Therefore, the atmosphere is getting more and more favourable for our appeal to reason and intelligence finding a response.

A political party alone cannot accomplish the task. It requires a good deal of research and study and investigations, which cannot be done by the average member of a political party. Therefore, we felt the necessity of founding an institution to carry on this part of the work, the result of which will be creation of an atmosphere in which the ideas of our party will receive greater hearing, and, at the same time, the activities of this institution will swell the ranks of the party with qualified members. That is the relation between the Renaissance Institute and the Radical Democratic Party.

We are unabashed in our pretensions. A minimum degree of intelligence, education and scientific spirit is the precondition for membership of the Radical Democratic Party. Consequently, the Radical Democratic Party will be a small party, in the beginning, at any rate. But there are so many big parties, and what have they accomplished? This question will before long be asked by all thinking people. The day of small parties like ours is coming.

Professor Parikh has spoken at some length about the implications of Nationalism and the perspective that its imminent success is opening up before the country. We can look at it from another point of view. What was really the fundamental motive of the nationalist movement? It was to usher in a Renaissance of India. Putting it in this way, perhaps, may make no meaning to you. So, let me be more explicit. What was the objective of the nationalist movement? The contention was that all the misery and backwardness and the deplorable conditions of our country were due to

the foreign rule, which therefore must end as the condition for any progress of the Indian people. The implication of the argument is evident: national freedom was not an end in itself, but the means to an end. The nationalist movement was so much concerned with the means for all these years, that the question about the nature of its end was not even raised; indeed, the end was forgotten and the means became the end. The foreign rule is on the point of disappearing; it is time to remember the end and to ask what it is. They say it is to restore India to her old glory to place India once again in the forefront of world civilisation. That is Renaissance. But the crucial question is: what is the inspiration of the past which we want to revive, and again, with what purpose? We cannot go back to the past; we can only seek an inspiration which will enable us to penetrate into the future. The present is only a moment between the past and the future. That present is so full of hatred and misery that we have forgotten what was really great in India in the past. It is necessary to understand what was the real greatness of the past, if that is to be a source of inspiration. For that, we must have the boldness of criticism, the knowledge of what human spirit has created since our old Rishis lived and thought. In other words, the time has come for us to be clear about the end. What do we want to do? If we are going to create in India a modern nation on the model of the U.S.A., Germany or Japan, let us not talk about a special Indian genius, of India's mission. Only the other day, they celebrated Tagore's birthday anniversary. But India is still to appreciate the greatness of Tagore. He is celebrated as the personification of the spirit of India, the poet and philosopher of Nationalism. It has been forgotten that more than twenty-five years ago Tagore characterised Nationalism as organised selfishness, and had the courage to go all over the world preaching that message. If we cannot live up to the spirit of the sage of our time, why talk about the sages who lived many thousand years ago?

There was a time when Nationalism was necessary as a means to an end. But now the time has passed. Let us not make a fetish of the means. Let us turn to the end. Nationalism was necessary to get rid of an obstacle in our

way. But now that the obstacle is out of the way, let us not organise our selfishness. Mother India is the naked, starving, illiterate millions of inhabitants of this country. But they have created a geographical goddess of her, and call upon her starving children to starve more, suffer and sacrifice so that the Mother can be great and glorious. There is no such Mother India, except in imagination. She is a fable, a falsehood, fabricated by those who want to be great and glorious themselves. That is the core of selfishness which is Nationalism.

Why was Tagore counted among the sages of our time? Not because he was an Indian; not because he was a nationalist. Tagore was a Humanist; otherwise, he could not be a great poet, and it is as such, as a poet and Humanist, that Tagore won a place of honour in the Pantheon of history. Let us not insult Tagore by ignoring the very values he cherished. The sages of ancient India also are immortal, inasmuch as they were upholders of human values. If we cannot appreciate the sovereign right of every man and woman, as human beings, how can we appreciate the spirit which inspired Tagore as well as our Rishis?

Most people are afraid of freedom, everywhere in the world; in our country, the proportion of those afraid of freedom is much greater. How can they appreciate freedom if they do not appreciate man? Freedom is not an abstract ideal; much less is it a mere political status. Freedom has no meaning unless it is conceived as a human value. It can be enjoyed, and thus become a reality, only by men and women as individuals. Freedom, therefore, in the last analysis, is a spiritual state. Hinduism talks of *nara narayana*. What does it mean? To see God in man. Yet, Nationalism sacrifices God walking on earth in the innumerable images of starving men and women on the altar of a geographical goddess. And Indian Nationalism claims religious sanction. The belief in a faith which is dead prevents a proper appreciation of, and inspiration by, the Humanist spirit which alone leads to freedom.

There was a time when we blamed the British for everything that was wrong in our country. Now they are going. We cannot explain everything any longer by the

presence of the British. I appeal to your reason. It is convincing to say that this vast country could be conquered by a few hundred adventurers from abroad simply because Clive was a clever forgerer or some other man did something else equally objectionable? Yet, the British conquest of India is a fact of history, which has to be explained ; that is a challenge to all the teachers of history in our country. How could a handful of traders coming from thousands of miles away conquer such a vast country? That was not possible unless internal conditions made for the fall and humiliation of India. How did those fatal conditions come about? To pose such obvious questions boldly and answer them dispassionately, are the tasks of historical research, Unless that is done, the past of India will not be revealed, the present will not be understood, and the future will remain dark.

In a textbook of history for the high school, I read that, on the eve of the battle of Panipat, three factors fought for supremacy, and the choice of God fell on the British. We ridiculed that way of writing history. But what is happening today? Now it is a fight between the Congress and the Muslim League, and the choice of God has fallen on the Congress. The British are trying to interfere with that divine dispensation. They created the Muslim League ; they divided India. Is it convincing so to blame the English for everything that goes wrong? If there were no internal reasons, could a Jinnah grow in the country? Is it really true that all the people who are killing each other throughout the country in this communal warfare are paid by the English? No. These are symptoms of a deep-seated disease. Perhaps we could not cure it because of the foreigners. But now they are gone or as good as gone. Now let us diagnose the disease, and try to cure it. The British conquest of India itself was a result of India's inherent weakness, social disintegration and want of the will to freedom on the part of the Indian people. All those regrettable causes have to be removed. They are deeply embedded. India was great and attained a high degree of civilisation. That was in a remote past. Thereafter, for two thousand years, she ceased to progress ; her social life was stagnant ; and the people lived on blind faith. During that dark age, any freebooter could come and conquer India. The

will to freedom was not there ; nobody wanted to fight for freedom.

That tradition is still there, and it is dominating our political life. To break from that dead past, India must be spiritually reborn. The evolution of countries is not an even process. There are ups and downs. A country which remains long in the backwaters, goes down ; others recover from the disease and again start on the path of progress and civilisation. The question for us is : Can India enter a new phase of progress and build a new civilisation? To answer this question, we must define what we mean by progress, by civilisation, by freedom.

The Radical Democratic Party has set itself this task. These terms have become mere slogans. Meanings must be put into them, so that, having at last reached a stage where constructive activity is possible, where we can undertake the task of building up a really new India, it should be possible for us to do so, and not to be misguided by slogans and catch-phrases.

Humanity has progressed a good deal since the time India was the home of an ancient civilisation. Contemporary India shares the ideals of modern mankind ; but modern ideals can not be attained by those who still remain wedded to old ideas. We must draw inspiration from the past, but traditional ideas must be subjected to criticism, and their positive essence brought up to the standards of modern knowledge. Old values must be revaluated. That is Renaissance.

The past of our country, our cultural heritage, is buried deep under rubbish accumulated during the dark ages. What is called the history of India and the history of Indian philosophy, cannot be simply taken for granted. As a matter of fact, there is no history of India, nor history of Indian philosophy. They talk about big things ; that is easy. Because there is no properly recorded history, legends and fairy tales pass as history. Recently, there is so much talk about Vikram era, for example. These legends and fairy tales cannot stand the test of criticism. There are now generally accepted standards for judging the authenticity of what has until now passed as history. But critical method is unknown. We are a nation of believers. We believe in our past greatness,

and with that belief it is simple to spin out legends and fairy tales.

Similarly, they talk about Indian philosophy. There are all sorts of Mantras and Sutras and Shastras ; but how many people try to subject them to the test of modern knowledge? They are simply taken as dogmas, final truths, revealed wisdom, to be taken for granted. That was not the spirit of Indian philosophy, and the greatness of India was the greatness of Indian philosophy. We decry western civilisation and proclaim that Indian philosophy has a message for the world. But these evangelists of an Indian spiritual message do not know to what an extent ancient Indian philosophy influenced what is today called western philosophy and civilisation. I am not one of them who maintain that all achievements of modern civilisation and technology could be found in the Vedas. But I want to point out the fact that the rationalist thought developed in ancient India, before she was overwhelmed by the counter revolution which destroyed Buddhism, went to the Greeks ; the Arabs inherited the legacy and passed it on to the founders of modern European civilisation. Ultimately, it largely influenced the history of Europe through the Renaissance. Hearing those echoes, European humanity woke up four hundred years ago, while we are still sleeping. That is the reason for the tragedy of our country.

How is it possible to make Hindus and Muslims indulge in this orgy of mutual killing, often in cold blood? Could Jinnah however perverse and devilish he might be, as painted by the Hindus, make the entire Muslim community go mad, unless they were so predisposed? The same consideration applies in the case of Hindu also. Have you ever stopped to think what is going on in our country? We are living in an atmosphere of mass insanity. These senseless, cruel, barbarous acts, committed in the name of religion, could not be otherwise possible. By committing these acts of barbarity, Hindus and Muslims alike think that they are buying tickets for their respective heavens. How do you explain a whole country full of people getting caught by this madness? This is not a civil war. This is mass insanity. The entire atmosphere is charged with insanity ; it is a case of

mass paranoia. These acts of senseless violence are symptoms of a dreadful disease, the germs of which are bred in the cesspool of social stagnation, cultural backwardness, ignorance and superstition. Rationalism has been killed and destroyed for centuries. Say Ramnam, go to the temple, listen to the preacher, and you go to heaven. Use different words, and the description becomes of the Mussalmans. Intelligence, reason, morality, thinking, individual responsibility— are all at a heavy discount ; and in their absence, insanity has caught the country by the throat, choking its spiritual life. The English are not responsible for this misfortune. It is our own heritage, our cultural tradition. The prophets of India's much vaunted spiritual culture, who perpetrated the greatest crime ever committed to humanity by destroying Buddhism, are to be thanked for the present condition of the country. Spiritual culture meant continuation of the religious mode of thought, which kept the mind in the grip of blind faith. To regard the life on this earth as of no importance, is the distinctive feature of India's spiritual genius. What does it really mean? It means abject resignation of fate, lack of initiative, spiritual inertia, absence of the will to freedom : Slavery accepted as providentially ordained. To change these conditions, it is necessary to recover the really great values of India's ancient culture. That cannot be done by mountebanks and charlatans who get cheap popularity in the daily press. That requires a great deal of painstaking work of real scholarship, inspired by a burning love for truth, spirit of enquiry and modern scientific knowledge. If there will be a sufficiently large number of qualified Indians to do this great work, it will be possible to make the positive achievements of India's past shine again so as to illuminate her path towards a more glorious future. Then the world may accept India's spiritual leadership. But let her be spiritually free, to begin with. Charity begins at home. The world indeed is crying out for a new spiritual leadership. There is no reason why India should not contribute to the satisfaction of the requirements of modern humanity caught in a profound social and cultural crisis. Will she rise up to the occasion? That is a challenge of history.

We of the Radical Democratic Party want to create the type who alone can offer the spiritual leadership of the world. These men will neither be Indians nor Europeans, but Humanists and cosmopolitans. We want to create in a growing number young men and women the ambition to grow up as cosmopolitan Humanists, and as such honour the past of India, free her from the shameful present and lead her towards a bright future, not as a unit of organised selfishness, but as a member of a cosmopolitan commonwealth. With that purpose we want to dissuade them from running after legends, and help them dig deep into the ruins of Indian history to rescue the real gems, the human values of Indian culture, which transcend space and time. That is the task of the Renaissance movement, to develop which is a part of the programme of the Radical Democratic Party. The ideal of freedom will never be attained, unless the movement will be led by spiritually free men and be inspired by the will to freedom on the part of every single of its members. The political and economic programme of the Radical Democratic Party is not a mere device to attract people. It is not a castle built in the air of the dreamland of promise. Those who propose to rear up a solid structure of political freedom and economic well-being for all must begin with the foundation. The Renaissance movement will lay the intellectual and moral foundation on which an abiding structure of democratic freedom can be raised. It will do the work of historical and archaeological discovery of the real achievements of ancient India's creative genius, and hand over these values to the growing generations, who will then come before the people with a new hope for the future.

These fifty years of struggle for freedom was it a mere mean struggle for power? It is dangerous to identify freedom with power. It is a deceptive practice on the part of those who want power not to free the people, but to keep them enslaved—in the gilded chains of national independence, national glory and national greatness. You must realise that power is not a liberating factor unless it is widely diffused, so as to be equally in the possession of all. Then it ceases to be power, and then, and only then, dawns the

era of freedom. Have we reached anywhere near that goal, now that the British are leaving the country, handing over power to Indians? All freedom-loving Indians must ask themselves this question. Meanwhile, the country, within the reach of the goal of national independence, presents a dreadful and depressing picture : the fifty years struggle for national independence seems to have left the legacy of hatred. The British are no longer there to be hated ; but hatred has become the most predominating popular sentiment : so let us hate each other ! Have we not hated long enough? Let us begin to love, and let us begin by loving each other. To the religious, Hindus as well as Muslims, I say that, by loving man, you shall be loving your God, if there is any God. To the secular politicians, I say : Let us not be just Socialists, nor nationalists, nor even internationalists ; but let us be Humanists. Otherwise, the Indian people will never move towards freedom, to create something new which will be really worth creating. The world in which the highest ambition of any country was to be either like the U.S.A or like Germany or Japan, is past ; its days are gone. Any attempt to reconstruct the world on that model will end in a cataclysm. We must give a new meaning to politics. Even in post-war Europe, politics has not yet acquired the meaning. They are grouping in the dark. Can we help them? We can, if we can help ourselves first by raising the political life of our country on a higher level— of morality and rationality.

If we can do that, then perhaps we shall be able to prevent the impending catastrophe of another war, after which we may not be there any more to write our history. There is no model for the development of India or of any part of the world. The world as a whole cannot be Americanised, Anglicised or Russianised. It must be humanised, because it is populated with human beings. Therefore, the Radical Democratic Party has adopted the creed of Cosmopolitan Humanism. It believes that political practice must respect human values ; that man is essentially rational, and therefore politics need not be a scramble for power, motivated by base emotions such as hatred, jealousy, distrust. If India's cultural tradition is

really what it is believed to be, then this new meaning of politics should appeal to Indians, and as the bearer of this new message, they will offer the tortured and tormented world a really spiritual leadership, not representing the supposed special genius of India, but the totality of entire heritage of mankind.

From *Independent India*

Volume : XI

Nos. : 28 and 29

Date : July 13, 1947

July 20, 1947

THE FAILURE OF PHILOSOPHY

Important question of moral philosophy have been raised in course of the discussion. They have been subjects of endless controversy amongst academicians and professional philosophers. No useful purpose will be served by our getting involved in the sterile controversy. The controversy was sterile because problems of axiology were discussed in abstraction. The crisis of our time is indeed a moral crisis ; but I would not start from that assumption. I would recommend a pragmatic approach to the problem of understanding the crisis of our time. Indeed, we should not start with the assumption that there is a crisis. Our point of departure should be a critical review of the contemporary world situation, which has compelled us to think as we have been doing for the last couple of years. Although we are discussing problems which until now were left to the tender mercies of academicians, they confronted us not as problems of pure thought, but as realities of actual life. For us, they are not simply academic problems to be treated with pure logic in abstraction. We are discussing them to draw some very concrete conclusions. I do not feel at all inspired with the mission of offering a moral philosophy to the world. To build the airy structure of a moral philosophy is a waste of energy. Morality must be felt, and for that we do not need books and libraries. They may only confuse.

The civilised world has been confronted with these problems not since yesterday, but for a whole period—nearly of two generations, during which time they seem to have baffled human intelligence : they have defied solution on the basis of theories or ideas with which mankind has been proceeding until now. Experience drove us to the conclusion that human history has reached one of those recurring stages when man has to take stock of things, look back on his past, examine current ideas and cherished ideals critically, in order to find out what is wrong or

defective in them, so as to have brought him to a state of frustration and despair and hopelessness. And then, on the basis of a critical appreciation of the knowledge acquired in the intervening period, reject some of his old values or revise them in the light of his present knowledge, or to think out and evolve new ideas and ideals, entirely new ideologies, as guide and inspiration for the future. I came to this conclusion over twenty-five years ago. I began talking of Indian Renaissance already in the early thirties. But at that time, I was far from looking at the problems as we do today.

For me, the problems were not abstract intellectual problems ; they were problems of life to be solved empirically. I began as a modern believing man, believing in something supernatural, superhuman, but who at the same time felt that the old idea of God would no longer do, and that we must rationalise religion, conceive God scientifically. I was a nationalist. The experience of the nationalist movement made me doubtful about its possibilities. Marxism offered a promise ; it appeared to indicate a more realistic and more effective approach to the problems which had puzzled the nationalist. The acceptance of Marxism as the philosophy of life implied breaking away from the old moorings of a rationalised religion.

But I have never been an orthodox Marxist. My attitude to Marxism was critical from the very beginning. That experience again, the attempt to solve the problems of life with the help of Marxism, brought me to the conclusion that Communism also was not a cure-all. I reached the conclusion that until the intellectual, cultural, spiritual atmosphere of the country was changed, it was not possible to bring about a political and economic reconstruction of the country, such as would promote popular welfare, establish democratic freedom and social justice.

It was experience, gained in the various attempts at improving the lot of Indian humanity, which led me step by step to the realisation of the fallacies and inadequacies of old beliefs, ideas and ideals. The need for a new philosophy was not felt introspectively. It was not the result of my personal experience ; it was deduced from a generalisation of human experience of an entire period.

Notwithstanding the pragmatically proved errors and inadequacies of the Marxist political theories and social doctrines, I was confirmed in the conviction that Materialism is the only possible philosophy. But conviction is based upon an intellectual judgment ; it is not a dogmatic faith. Therefore, it did not prevent me from admitting the force of the recent challenges to Materialism, particularly to its cosmology. It is also contended that Materialism cannot have an ethics ; that there is no logical relation between a philosophy of nature and a moral philosophy ; that even if Materialism could successfully meet the challenge to its cosmology, that did not qualify it to offer a logically deduced system of ethics ; therefore, materialist philosophy could not indicate the way out of the crisis of our time, which is a moral crisis.

A characterisation of the crisis will result from our critical review of the contemporary world situation. I shall not anticipate. Without anticipating, by offering *a priori* judgment, I may, however, express the opinion that a secular, rationalist system of ethics can be logically deduced from the mechanistic cosmology of Materialism. I may further add that a moral philosophy which can do without a metaphysical and super-sensual sanction is the crying need of our time. If our discussion will not lead to this conclusion, I shall readily abandon it. Meanwhile, I assume it for the sake of arguing the case of Materialism. If materialist philosophy is expected to yield an ethics such as will restore man's confidence in himself, it must be able to meet the challenge to its cosmology. It cannot stand, if its very foundation is blasted ; and the mechanistic cosmology is the foundation of Materialism.

The challenge to Materialism as a cosmology is half a century old. It was delivered by the physicists who at the turn of the century discovered that the atom was not the ultimate unit of matter, and on that evidence, hastily proclaimed the "dematerialisation" of matter. People began to doubt the relevancy or correctness of nineteenth century natural philosophy. Physics having revealed that the substratum of the world was not composed of "hard lumps of reality", philosophers imagined the imposing structure of Materialism was crumbling. That was the beginning of the crisis of our time. It was a new flare-up in the age-long

struggle between religion and science, between the religious mode of thought and the scientific mode of thought, between faith and reason, between mystic agnosticism and the empirically established belief in man's capacity to know. Being most probably the last lap of the life and death struggle, it has lasted long, and has placed civilised humanity in a dilemma.

We are experiencing on a world-wide scale what happened two thousand years ago in our country. Buddhism was the scientific thought of its time. It flourished for a period of nearly thousand years, and pushed Vedic Hinduism from pillar to post. But finally religion triumphed, thanks to the absence of positive knowledge, and general intellectual backwardness. The defeat of Buddhism was the greatest single misfortune experienced by India. She never recovered from the setback suffered in that remote period of history. The contemporary world is threatened with a similar danger. The scientific mode of thought, having driven religion from pillar to post, is meeting the final assault of the vanquished adversary. The sophisticated philosophies waging war against Materialism with "scientific" weapons, are all in the last analysis rationalised religion. Denying the possibility of man ever knowing anything, they preach a neo-mysticism and revive the teleological view of life, which is the expression of man's loss of faith in himself. That is the central feature of the crisis of our time. To come out of it, mankind must therefore have a philosophy which places man in the centre of the Universe, as the maker of his destiny, and celebrate the final triumph of science over religion.

They speak of a cultural crisis ; of there is such a crisis, it is experienced only by sophisticated intellectuals ; in reality, it is an intellectual crisis— a crisis of their intelligence. Otherwise, how can we explain the strange phenomenon of modern men, endowed with scientific knowledge, godless men, in search of soul, eager to enthrone a mathematical God in the place vacated by the old-fashioned God ?

Sankaracharya's scholasticism, which belongs to the highest order of intellectual effort, succeeded in re-establishing the religious mode of thought, so very badly shaken by Buddhism. The scholastics of our time may also succeed in doing a similar mischief— promote a religious

revival under the banner of the pseudo-scientific cults of empiricism, positivism, realism, so on and so forth. A self-contained philosophy beginning with a mechanistic cosmology and ending with a secular, evolutionary ethics, is the only guarantee against the danger— a philosophy which will give an integrated picture of human existence and explain human existence, including desire, emotion, instincts, intuitions, will, reason, without going outside the physical world, which is at least theoretically accessible to human comprehension.

But the crisis of our time is all-prevading, though it is not felt by the people at large as acutely as by the more sensitive and more alert few. Indeed, the victims of the crisis are not at all conscious of it. That makes it all the more difficult of solution. Therefore, to create a widespread consciousness of the crisis is the first thing to do. Whatever may be the cause of the crisis, it expresses itself in events of the daily experience of the common man and woman. They should be helped to learn the lesson of their own experience. A general consciousness of the crisis will thus be created pragmatically. Once that consciousness is created, the desire to understand its causes will spread.

Take for instance our own country. For hundreds of years, the mass of people has lived a life of misery. It was believed to be all due to the foreigners. Now the foreigners are gone. Is the condition any better ? Is there any hope of amelioration ? The people know that prices have gone up ; they do not get enough to eat and clothe themselves. The peasants produce as much as ever ; but food is not available at reasonable prices ; and the peasants have to pay three times or four times for the articles they need. Cloth is produced as much as ever ; yet there is scarcity and the prices soar higher and higher. This is a puzzling situation. Its anomaly can be easily brought home to the people at large, who at present are the dupes of demagoguery. It can be easily shown, without maligning anybody, that the situation need not be as bad as all that, and that the hardships and privations experienced by the people can be considerably relieved. The people then will begin to ask why then it is so. Enquiry always yields knowledge and knowledge brings power, which in this case is self-confidence. The loss of faith

in man's creativity is the cause of the crisis. That is the practical approach to the problem of the crisis of our time. If we begin from the other end, by raising controversial questions of axiology to be discussed in abstraction, we shall never come to grapple with the crisis in practice.

Turning to the world as a whole, one hears from all sides the talk of another war, while the crying need of the time is peace. Nobody wants war; yet war is on the offing. Every sensible man, who knows what modern war means, must be against it, not out of moral motives, but out of sheer selfishness. War today is a double-edged sword; it is bound to ruin both the parties; there is as much chance of losing as of winning, and every victory will be a Pyrrhic victory. Therefore nobody wants war; yet, war is on the order of the day. Who has placed it there? It seems to have become a matter of fate. Nobody wants war; everybody dreads the spectre of another holocaust; yet all agree that it is inevitable. The helplessness of man and the hopelessness about his future have reached the limit. That is the core of the crisis.

Look at the situation from another side. There are plausible political theories; all talk of democracy; yet nowhere there is government of the people, by the people. There is a big discrepancy between the theoretical picture presented in the nineteenth century and the actual picture of today. Why is that so? It is because man's mind, man's intelligence has failed to take full advantage of the knowledge acquired in modern times, and apply it to the solution of the problems of actual life. During the last fifty years, this failure has become more and more apparent, until the condition of man reached its present state of hopelessness and helplessness. Human ingenuity seems to be completely exhausted. It is not true that excellent theories have not been put into practice and hence the present pandemonium. That is only self-deception. We shall examine those theories. Meanwhile, this much can be said, that, if those political theories and economic doctrines were capable of solving the problems of modern life, the world would not have come to its present impasse. Liberal, democratic, Marxist theories have all been practised, and all found wanting. Hence the crisis; hence the frustration, despair and hopelessness. Fascism has been criticised and condemned. But how could

it take the modern world by storm? Fascism only proved the failure of democracy such as it has been conceived and practised until now.

The experience of contemporary history is a repudiation of classical, as well as revolutionary social, political and economic ideas. Everything is there in the world; it is possible to build up a better and freer society; yet, things go from bad to worse. Only one conclusion can be deduced from this realistic analysis of the situation. Ideas entertained and ideals pursued until now must have been defective and illusory. They might have been good enough for other times and different conditions. Now they are antiquated. Failure and disappointment are bound to follow from attempts to solve the problems of the twentieth century with the ideas of the nineteenth or the eighteenth centuries. Man's ideas have not been brought up to the level of the material progress made until now. This lag between material progress and evolution of ideas is the cause of the crisis.

To the discerning observer and critical student, the contemporary world conditions present a dismal picture of decay and degradation; the perspective seems to be either of a ruinous war or a slow breakdown of the fabric of modern civilisation, resulting in a relapse into mediaevalism. Is there no way out of the dilemma? Man's creative potentialities are unfolded today to a much greater degree; he knows much more; his ability to do things is much greater, than ever before. The situation, therefore, should not be so desperate. It should be possible to avoid the danger. This conclusion sets us thinking. There is something which has been inhibiting man's creativeness, his urge to go forward, to break down intellectual and spiritual barriers to the expansion of the frontiers of freedom.

That brings us to the need of a new philosophy. But before we proceed to a discussion and exposition of the philosophy of New Humanism, the conclusion should be reinforced by a review of the experiences in particular departments of public life. We shall submit political and economic theories, classical as well as revolutionary, to a logical examination and also to the test of experience. Now I shall summarise the general discussion.

In the initial statement on the Crisis of Our Time, three different theories of crisis are mentioned together with their respective suggestions to overcome it. Every one of them has proved either logically fallacious or pragmatically false. All of them claim to approach the problems of modern life from the rationalist and scientific point of view. Yet, the doctrine that the root of the crisis is man's loss of faith is common to all the three— all the three can be reduced to a common denominator— a teleological view of life, which is rationalised and mystified, more or less. The common theme is : Man, as man, is of no importance in the scheme of life and history. Faith in something mystic logically follows as the moorings of life. Leave that mooring and man must drift aimlessly and helplessly on the stormy sea of life. That is how the condition of the contemporary world is described and explained.

Sorokin's theory of culture cycles is dogmatic. Why cast human history in that pattern ? Why should it move in pre-determined cycles ? The belief in a First Cause or a Prime Mover obviously lurks behind the "rationalist and scientific" theory. The religious essence of the theory is also evident in its very structure. Idealist culture is the highest form of culture, and there is no ambiguity in Sorokin's conception of idealist and ideational cultures. Both the "spiritualist", while "sensate" culture is materialist. Materialism may be depicted as the devil of the drama ; but determinism cannot be easily disposed of. The teleological view is also deterministic. The movement of human history in the vicious circle of recurring culture cycles is a determined process. Indeed worse ; it is predetermined, because the determining factor is not inherent in the process ; it is a *deus ex machina*. Sorokin is frankly an advocate of religious revivalism ; he pleads for the restoration of faith. Therefore, his doctrine is not criticised simply by being characterised as religious. Its self-contradictoriness must be exposed. That also is evident. How does the evil of a sensate culture follow the good of the ideational culture ? If the ideal of human life is reached in the ideational, that is to say, devotional culture, why does man fall from the Grace again ? No, the dogmatic doctrine of culture cycles makes no meaning. Man moved away from the security of faith because that was security of

spiritual slavery. He must sail the uncharted sea of life until he discovers real security in the faith in himself. Sorokin advises him to return to the security of faith in a Providence.

Maritain and Berdyaev do not say essentially anything different. Man wanders away from his moorings of faith, experiences fear, and comes back. The common cry of all is : back to the religious mode of thought. Their new religious philosophy is differentiated from orthodox revivalism by a discriminating association with rationalism and scientific knowledge. But yet another attempt to reconcile faith with reason, theism or mysticism with Humanism, mediaevalism with modernism, is bound to be futile. The plea for a restoration of moral values deserves endorsement ; but the morality of the modern man requires no transcendental sanction.

The Marxian theory is also teleological ; history is created by the operation of the productive forces ; man has nothing to do with it ; he must recognise necessity and then he is free. Once you realise that you cannot be free, that you are bound hand and foot to some mysterious forces of production, then you are free ! The Marxist conception of freedom means slavery for the individual, and a society composed of voluntary slaves can never be free, except in imagination or propaganda literature. As a matter of fact, by the conversion to the modern faith of Marxism, man willingly surrenders his right to freedom, and cultivates a cynical attitude to morality. The exposure of the contradiction between the theories and practice of the optimistic nineteenth century helped the spread of Marxism, and the spread of this Jesuitic cult has aggravated the crisis of our time. It has discredited Materialism as antagonistic to moral behaviour and ethical values and has thus played into the hands of the prophets of a religious revivalism.

The breakdown of the old social and political systems and the pragmatic discredit of their theoretical sanctions brought about the crisis of our time ; the errors, inadequacies and failure (in the case of Marxism) of the ideologies either of reform or of revolution created an atmosphere of frustration, despair and disgust which aggravated the crisis. Civilised mankind is asked to choose between modern barbarism promising material well-being and security in a

socially regimented and spiritually enslaved life, or a return to mediaeval obscurantism in search of an illusory safety in the backwaters of faith. This conflict of ideologies underlies the process of political polarisation, which may any day plunge the world headlong in a titanic clash of arms. A large number of modern men and women who would go neither way are frantically looking out for an escape from the dilemma. The danger is almost overwhelming; still there is some hope. Therefore it is a crisis. The hope must become a confidence. Never in history has man's ingenuity been put to a greater test. Man will have the courage to decline the security of slavery, in one form or another, only by regaining faith in himself. The civilised world will survive the crisis of our time inspired by the philosophy of New Humanism.

When we wish to contribute to the development of the new philosophy, we do not claim any revelation. We do not suck anything out of our thumbs. Everything new grows out of something old. We must take advantage of the entire store of human knowledge and draw upon the entire history of thought. The new philosophy, the need for which we are feeling, can be deduced from the entire current of human thought, which has flown ever since the dawn of civilisation. The crisis of our time is the result of an inability to appreciate that great human heritage. There are abiding and temporary values. We have to find out the permanent values created in the course of human evolution. The elements of stability, of unity, of unfortunity, ideals pursued ever since the appearance of *homo sapiens*, should be the foundation of a new philosophy. A philosophy thus founded will have no difficulty in solving the complicated problems which have been baffling conventional philosophers. The solution however will not be theoretical, it will come from action inspired by the new philosophy.

Ever since the ancient thinkers abandoned physical enquiry for metaphysical speculation, philosophy was vitiated by the fallacy of dualism. Modern science finally enabled Materialism to conceive a monistic picture of the world. If the Universe is a cosmos, it is arbitrary to break it up into matter and mind. A monistic naturalism does not allow evolutionary ethics to distinguish a world of values from a world of facts. But at this stage of our discussion, I don't

want to speak on the theory of values, or deal with the problems of axiology. I only wanted to emphasise the point that a monistic philosophy cannot have a dualist ethics. Values are *sui generis* : they are born in our conscience ; they are not to be deduced from facts ; they are facts.

All the religious philosophers of the Middle Ages were frank dualists. The rationalist rebels against theology,—Descartes, Leibnitz, Kant—also could not get out of the vicious circle of dualism. And as long as you remain entangled in that vicious circle, you cannot conceive of man being free. In the context of a dualist philosophy, the only logical consistent ideology which can offer security, is religion, and the religious man must always bow before the will of God or the "Moral" law of the teleological order. Morality is equated with absence of freedom.

The ultra-modern empiricists also are essentially religious men ; they declare that everything beyond the reach of direct experience is metaphysical. From that apparently scientific premise, they deduce a neo-mysticism which goes to the extent of denying man's capacity to know anything outside his own body. The world is veiled in an impenetrable mystery, and in every dark corner a god can be easily imagined. The neo-mysticism of the ultra-modern empiricists instals God on the throne of man's ignorance.

In the realm of biology, the famous "missing link" is the mainstay of a dualist philosophy, which valiantly defends the long lost cause of religion. Man rises out of the background of an inanimate world. The theory of descent may trace his origin to the most primitive organism. But there the chain of evolution breaks. How can life emerge from dead matter ? That is the challenge of modern "scientific" dualism. Eminent biologists have taken up the challenge and their answer, based upon empirical knowledge, should satisfy philosophers having no axe to grind. The chemical composition of protoplasm known, the imaginary gulf between the *organa* and *inorgana* has disappeared. Even if empirical evidence and experimental data were really absent, the neo-vitalism of the ultra-modern philosophers should be logically ruled out.

What is the source of life, if not matter ? The breath of God. Whoever falls back upon that venerable fundamen-

talism, can hardly pass as a philosopher; and any other answer would suffer from the fallacy of something coming out of nothing. If the religious dogma of creation by an almighty God is not trotted out in support of a "scientific" philosophy, then life appearing as a novelty out of dead matter is to be recognised as an empirical fact which corroborates the logic of monistic Materialism. There is a red thread of continuity running through the entire process of evolution— organic as well as inorganic.

The veil of mystery lifted from the origin of life, man is to be regarded as a biological phenomenon; no human trait or behaviour needs be referred to any extra-physical sanction for explanation. Instincts and intuition are not mystic categories to be regarded as elementary indefinables. The soul is not a spark of the divine light; as the sum total of the intellectual and emotional excellence of man, it can be more appropriately called the torch of humanity. Conceived otherwise, the soul is a fiction. An axiology built on the foundation of the exact knowledge of the biological phenomenon called man, deduces all values from one supreme value. Thus dispelling all the confusion of academic moral philosophy, materialist monism alone can blaze a new trail for modern mankind. Applied to the problems of social existence, it can be called New Humanism.

What is the supreme value? One could almost say it is existence. But let us not run the risk of being identified with the ultra-modern cult of Existentialism, which with all its extravagances may not be altogether barren. However, I regard freedom as the supreme value from which all human values are derived. Freedom is the supreme value because the urge for freedom is the essence of human existence; and it is never in the danger of being mystified because it can be traced all the way down the process of biological evolution, indeed it is coincident, if not actually identical, with life. Since all ethical values are derived from the soulless animal heritage of man, they need no sanction which transcends human existence. Morality is a human attribute—of animal heritage. To be moral, one need only be human; it is not necessary to go in search of mystic, if not divine, sanction. Man need not be a slave of God or of his own prejudice (as in the case of modern

moral philosophers) to be moral. Humanist morality is evolutionary.

The function of life is to live. The basic incentive of organic becoming is the struggle for survival. It goes on throughout the long process of biological evolution, until in man it becomes the conscious urge for freedom—the supreme human value.

When the human species appeared, the first thing for it to do was to struggle with environments for survival. That was the beginning of an endless struggle for freedom. Since then everything that man has done, everyone of his act, cultural progress, scientific achievements, artistic creations—everything has been motivated by that one urge. Man is infinite, while the Universe is infinite, and his environment, in the last analysis, is the whole Universe. Consequently, his struggle for freedom is eternal; he can never conquer the Universe. Therefore, the urge for freedom is the only eternal thing in the world. This urge enables man to acquire knowledge; he conquers his environment by knowing it. In that process he solves another problem. What is truth? It is the content of man's knowledge. Truth is a value; but it is not deduced from facts; it is a fact, because it is objectively real. Quest for freedom, knowledge, truth—that is the hierarchy of Humanist axiology. Our values are not autonomous deities; they are inter-related, logically as well as ontologically. Therefore we say that freedom cannot be attained by immoral means, nor an enlightened man ever be a liar. Freedom, knowledge, truth are values to be appreciated together by living them.

Humanism is not a new philosophy. In the past, humanists approached all problems of life from the assumption of the sovereignty of man. But man remained unexplained, veiled in a mystery. Now we know approximately what makes man a man, what is the source of his sovereignty, his creativeness. It is his capacity of knowing, as distinct from the common biological property of being aware; and knowledge endows him with power—not to rule over others, but to create for the benefit of the race, and pursue the ideal of freedom further and further. As the content of knowledge is truth, the enlightened man finds in himself the sanction of the moral values cherished by him.

The humanist mission, therefore, is the pursuit of knowledge and dissemination of knowledge already acquired. If my understanding of the crisis of our time is correct (you shall have to judge that in this school), it calls for that mission which will enable the civilised world to get out of the present impasse.

In conclusion, let me recapitulate. I do not start with any *a priori* idea about the crisis. I do not look for it in the art and literature of our time, in the crumbling personality of sensitive people. That is a symptom of the crisis; but it is a minor symptom, a by-product. We must see how the crisis affects the life of civilised mankind as a whole. Intellectual and institutional equipments cannot cope with the requirements of the time. It is not a choice between two authoritarianisms; we must find a third alternative. The prophets of a revival of the teleological view of life, as the only way to bring man back to his moral moorings, preach spiritual authoritarianism as against the temporal brand. Their remedy may be more dangerous than the disease they propose to cure.

It took mankind centuries to revolt against the spiritual slavery which was the result of the original sin of ignorance. The standard of the revolt of man was carried forward during another several centuries by scientists, and philosophers who wisely accepted the leadership of science, and built up a philosophy, not of airy speculation, but on the solid foundation of positive knowledge. Eventually, a point was reached where old theories seemed to be challenged by experience. The tradition of religious thought, of the easy way of faith, had been lying dormant under the surface of modern culture. It took advantage of the opportunity, and started an offensive when scientists were puzzled and philosophers turned out to be pusillanimous. The structure of scientific knowledge, however, was not so very unstable as to collapse on the first offensive of an atavistic prejudice. Its weakness resulted from over-specialisation.

Different branches of science had surveyed various aspects of nature. The object of each branch of scientific knowledge was not the whole of reality. The fallacy was to make the partial view of physics, for example, a picture of the whole of reality. That picture was to be sought in an

integration of knowledge acquired by the different branches of science. To build that picture of reality was the function of philosophy. But academic philosophy, except in the short period of Enlightenment, had never fully broken away from religious or metaphysical traditions. Therefore it failed when the time came for it to take over the leadership of human progress. The root of the crisis of our time is to be traced in that failure of philosophy to justify itself. Therefore I call it an intellectual crisis; intellectually bankrupt men are naturally demoralised. Having lost faith in themselves, they project their moral crisis to the world. Why should I look at the world through their jaundiced eyes or coloured glasses?

Scientific agnosticism preached by modern scientific philosophers, ever since Mach and Poincaré and down to Bergson, deprived man of his distinction from other biological forms—the capacity to know. Fortunately, sophisticated philosophies leave the bulk of mankind untouched. They have not joined the stampede of the intellectual elite, the artists and literateurs, back to the illusive security of obscurantism and mysticism, under the leadership of prophets who declare that man cannot be moral unless he accepts spiritual slavery. We cannot give them confidence. They would scorn any philosophy which is not cast in their obscurantist academic pattern. And words have meaning; once we get involved in the mazes of their jargon and tendentious terminology, we shall be nowhere; we shall betray the humanist mission.

We must speak the language of the people; look at problems from their point of view, from the experience of daily life. Fortunately, they are not corrupted by the perversion of modern scientific knowledge as preached to the semi-educated middle-class. Scientific knowledge can be brought to them in a simple language. The old theories of the nineteenth century may be naive for the highbrow who cannot see the relation between science and life. Steam still has power; electricity can be harnessed for the benefit of man; medicine cures; biology explains a whole lot of things of daily experience; Darwinism is still to go to the masses, particularly in our country; psychology throws light on the mysteries of mental life. The people, particularly in

our country, require this kind of knowledge ; it will give them a sense of power ; their moral stamina will be reinforced in proportion as knowledge liberates them from the traditional bondage of ignorance fostered on the authority of religion.

Nor is it necessary for the people to grasp the intricate problems of sociology ; the breakdown of the economic system is a matter of their daily experience. It is not necessary for them to understand economic theories. They experience want when there is no reason for it. Once they are made conscious of their experience, they will feel the need for a reconstruction. Political problems can be similarly accessible to them in experience. Finally, we shall show them how they can take things in their own hands. But all these easy steps presuppose man's faith in himself. They will gain that faith also in the experience of doing things.

I see no other way out of the crisis. It is a creation of people who were to lead mankind. They have failed. A mighty resurgence of the common man and woman only can save modern civilisation. To inspire that resurgence, organise it, guide it to fruition—that is the mission of New Humanism. Let us be true to our own philosophy.

From *Independent India*

Volume : XII

Nos. : 35 and 36

Date : September 5, 1948
September 12, 1948

SCIENCE AND SOCIETY

The problems confronting the contemporary world were discussed in our last year's camp. The discussion led to the conclusion that the crisis of our time called for a new social philosophy which allotted a high place to morality in public life. The disgust with politics, that is an unscrupulous scramble for power, and disapproval of economic exploitation of the majority by a minority, are no longer confined to the parties of the Left. They are shared practically by all. Leaders of political parties, actually engaged in the struggle for power, sanctimoniously condemn power-politics. Parties enjoying the patronage of the upper classes proclaim their intention to establish a classless society. Businessmen, big and small, call themselves Socialists. One hears the cry for morality on all sides ; it has become incumbent on public men to talk of moral values.

Yet, there is little sign improvement. The law of the jungle, scramble for political power and lust for economic loot, reigns supreme ; no single country can plead not guilty to the charge without laying itself open to the graver charge of telling the untruth.

Nevertheless, the mere fact that the absence of moral scruples in public life is generally deplored, that lip loyalty is pledged to moral values, is significant. If, in practice, politicians cannot be true to their profession, that is not necessarily a proof of dishonesty. They are caught in a vicious circle. Engaged in a game, one must play it according to the rules. The fault of moralising politicians is the failure to realise that, so long as power remains the object of political practice, it cannot be handicapped by irrelevant scruples, it must be guided by the dictum—the end justifies the means. Caught in the whirl, even the best of men are bound to be pulled down to the lowest depth, which may appear as the pinnacle of power.

The disconcerting experience of the contemporary world compels thoughtful people to re-examine the fundamental principles of social philosophies from which different political theories— of the Right and of the Left, conservative and liberal, reactionary and revolutionary— are deduced. The experience is that in practice there is little difference, because capture of power, irrespective of the diversity of means advocated for the purpose, is the common postulate of all political theories. Morality in public life, therefore, presupposes a political theory which would not make capture of power the precondition for any necessary social change ; and the new political theory must be deduced from a social philosophy which restores man in the place of primacy and sovereignty.

Morality being the dictate of conscience, it can be practised only by individuals. Without moral men, there can be no moral society. Until now, all the architects and engineers of new social orders have reversed the order : they all postulated an ideal order as the condition for the free growth of human personalities. The Liberals believed that the ideal of a good life could be attained by good laws. As against their "reformism", Socialists and later on Communists maintained that economic reconstruction on the basis of common ownership was the condition for human development. The result has been eclipse of the individual by collectivities ; totalitarianism and dictatorship in political practice have been the corollary to collectivist social philosophies.

It is easy enough to place the individual in the centre of a social philosophy. As a matter of fact, individualism was the cardinal principle of the liberal social philosophy and political theory ; and Liberalism was the source of inspiration for the magnificent achievements of modern civilisation. But in practice, the principle of individualism to a legal fiction. The decay of Liberalism encouraged the rise of various collectivist doctrines which denied the possibility of individual freedom, ridiculed the idea as an empty abstraction, and proclaimed that, in order to be free, the individual must merge himself in the mass ; in other words, find freedom in self-annihilation. If Liberalism had made a legal fiction of the sovereign individual, the socialist and communist conception of freedom is a fraud.

The cause of the decline of the liberal social philosophy was the ambiguity about the sanction of morality. It started with the excellent principle that the individual was a moral entity and, as such, sovereign. That is an ancient belief ; in Europe, Christianity popularised it : man is a moral entity because he possesses the soul which is a spark of the divine light of the universal moral order. In the beginning, that was an elevating idea ; inspired by it, European humanity threw off the thralldom of the patriarchal and communal organisation of the mediaeval social order. But the religious faith in man's moral essence limits his sovereignty ; indeed, it is a negation of the liberating concept. In the last analysis, it implies that man as man cannot be moral ; to be so, he must feel himself subordinated to a superhuman power. With this paralysing sense of spiritual subservience, man can never be really free. Man's struggle against the doctrine of the necessity of his eternal spiritual subservience was the outstanding feature of the earlier stages of modern civilisation. Liberalism was born out of that struggle, which reached the highwater mark in the eighteenth century. The Enlightenment represented its afflorescence.

The shock of the French Revolution frightened Liberalism out of its wits. Natural religion was opposed to Materialism, and the sanction for morality was traced to a transcendental moral order. As against the transcendentalism of the early nineteenth century moral philosophy, liberal social reformers and political theorists advanced the utility principle of morality. If in the former, ethical values were metaphysical concepts beyond the test of human experience, the latter deprived them of any objective standard, and that amounted to a negation of morality. Between the two, the civilised world was thrown into a moral confusion.

At the same time, the practice of parliamentary democracy and *laissez faire* economics reduced the individual to a helpless position. The cumulative effect of moral confusion and social atomisation destroyed man's faith in himself. The collectivist ridicule of the idea of individual freedom corresponded with the experience of the bulk of the community. Having lost faith in himself, the individual welcomed the hope, offered by collectivist social philosophy, of finding security in the power of the masses.

The human factor disappeared from politics. To sway the masses by appealing to base instincts and evil passions came to be the essence of political practice.

It is clear that moral philosophy itself must be placed on a sound basis before it can have a wholesome influence on social doctrines and political practice. The crucial question, therefore, is : What is the foundation of ethics? Can man be moral by himself? Until now, the prevailing opinion has been that man can behave morally only under compulsion, either supernatural or social. This view about the source of morality nullified the time-honoured belief that man is a moral entity ; but that belief must be resurrected, and freed from its original limitation, if a really revolutionary social philosophy is to prescribe a rational political theory and a moral political practice.

A great advance in this direction was made during the earlier centuries of the history of modern civilisation, when its pioneers made certain secular postulates about the nature of man and his place in nature. Their bold speculative thought, progressively reinforced by the expanding knowledge of nature, culminated in the scientific naturalism of the eighteenth century. The approach was humanist, which discarded the dogma of special creation and traced the origin of man in physical nature. Growing out of the background of a law-governed Universe, man must be a rational being ; as such, he established the original society as an instrument for the development of his personality. The revolutionary discoveries of biology in the nineteenth century bore out the speculative postulates and rational hypotheses of the earlier thinkers. But just at that time, the ambiguities and inadequacies of Liberalism set the civilised world adrift towards a moral confusion.

The confusion was more confounded at the turning of the century when new discoveries of the physical sciences seemed to render untenable the classical concepts of substance and causality which were the corner-stones of scientific naturalism. A neo-mysticism, claiming the authority of science, challenged the pretensions of Humanism. Not only the objective validity, but even the reality of human knowledge was disputed. Exaggerated emphasis on epistemology confused cosmological and ontological thought.

An intellectual crisis aggravated the moral crisis.

Psychology preached irrationalism on the authority of science ; in the garb of vague concept of intuition, mysticism and transcendentalism returned to ethics. Man is irrational ; he is instinctively moved by the blind urge of dark forces ; therefore, the sanction of morality, either in private or public life, is the penal code and the police, or the priest. Except under the surveillance of these temporal and spiritual custodians of law and order, the law of the jungle would reign. The irony of our time is that the dreaded law of the jungle reigns supreme, nonetheless.

The only way out of this vicious circle is indicated by a moral philosophy which finds the sanction of its values in the rationality of the human being. But what is the sanction of the rationality of man? What is Reason? Is it again a metaphysical category, or a biological property? In the former case, the problem of the sanction of morality is not solved by tracing it in rationality. That is only referring one problem to another. As an expression of the reason in nature, rationality can be regarded as a biological function, and physical determinism is the Reason in nature. Otherwise, the classical concepts of natural law and moral order are meaningless. Modern sciences, physical as well as biological, put a content of objective truth in those concepts which were originally hypothetical.

The object of these brief introductory remarks is to make it clear that the subjects to be discussed in the Camp have a direct bearing upon the practical problems of the contemporary world. The crying need of the time is to harmonise ethics with a social philosophy and political practice. The sovereignty of man, which must be the foundation of any revolutionary social philosophy, can be deduced only from the fact that man is a moral entity. It has been a time-honoured belief, which could not be sustained in practice ; now the belief must be replaced by the knowledge of a fact : that man is moral because he is rational. The Universe is a moral order governed by laws inherent in itself. Man grows out of that background.

Ethics must be the foundation of the moral philosophy which is the crying need of our time. In order to avoid the quicksand of transcendentalism and the pit-falls of relativity,

ethics must be integrated in a general philosophy. We do not want to build yet another castle in the air which will not stand the test of the next storm. A humanist ethics based upon a naturalist rationalism can be built only on the rock-bottom of a mechanistic cosmology and a physical-realist ontology. Therefore, we must begin our discussion by examining the problems raised by modern physics. The next step is to find the connecting link between the world of dead matter and living nature. It is no longer a missing link ; it solves the problem of the origin of life. If we discover that life originates in course of the mechanistic process of nature, human rationality can be deduced from the background of the law-governed physical Universe : the imaginary gulf between physics and psychology is thus bridged and the most baffling problems of philosophy, the epistemological problems, are solved. Truth ceases to be a metaphysical concept ; it stands out as the content of positive knowledge. In the light of the basic nature of truth, the nature of other values is more clearly visible, and they can be rationally arranged in a proper hierarchy. Having thus obtained our moral values in the world in which man has his being and becoming, we shall be able to harmonise them with a social philosophy which indicates the humanist approach to the economic and political problems confronting the contemporary world.

From *The Radical Humanist*

Volume : XIII

No. : 22

Date : June 5, 1949

THE RIGHTS OF MAN

The General Assembly of the United Nations Organisation, in its next session, will adopt a Declaration of Human Rights. The draft of the document prepared by the commission which met at Geneva has just been published. Presumably, it is meant for a general discussion, which may still improve the draft which, as it is, is excellent. The rights enumerated therein will be proclaimed, not for immediate establishment, but "as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations." That may not be much ; but it will certainly be a step forward. A common ideal for the entire mankind is visualised, although the ways and means for its attainment still remain to be devised. Experience does not permit the expectation that the proclaimed rights can and will be established within the given institutional frameworks. If that lesson of a worldwide experience is not learned, a mere proclamation of the rights may not be more than a platitudinous declaration, which will be received with indifference and cynicism. That however will not be the proper attitude on the part of those who do not believe that the rights of man can be established simply by proclaiming them.

There is indeed little new in the draft declaration, which is an echo of the optimism of the eighteenth century. But in the present atmosphere of callousness, cynicism, despair and frustration, a revival of the tradition of the burning faith in man's destiny is heartening. Therefore the U.N.O. Declaration, reaffirming the Rights of Man, should be welcomed by freedom-loving people throughout the world. In an imperceptible and rather halting manner, the draft tends to go beyond the naive romanticism of the eighteenth century and the legalistic liberalism of the nineteenth. That tendency should be encouraged as against the stubborn resistance of conventional prejudices as regards concepts as well as institutions. An enthusiastic endorsement of the

ideal, notwithstanding its defects, will be a mighty challenge to all forms to totalitarianism which threatens to destroy the rights of man and dismisses with contempt the very concept of individual liberty.

Lest high hopes were raised only to be followed by disappointment, which would accelerate the process of the demoralisation of public life, it should be permissible to point out some defects in the draft which might reduce the rights to a formality, but actually facilitate their abrogation. Firstly, there are some concepts which in practice have proved to be devoid of any content. Couched in such abstractions, a document is bound to be platitudinous. The experience of history proves that there are no inalienable human rights. As against that abstract declaration, rights of man have all along been actually alienated. This has not happened during the second world war and the years immediately preceding it, as stated in the draft. Such a palpably false reading of history only raises the illusion of the good old days which never existed. Had the rights of man proclaimed in the eighteenth century been really established, the tragedy of our time would have been obviated. The liberal optimism of the nineteenth century was followed by disillusionment and cynicism because the proudly proclaimed rights of man mostly remained on paper. Practice went against professions, institutions stultified principles.

The framers of the draft were not quite oblivious of the lesson of history. They have made a suggestion regarding political institutions, though rather half-heartedly. The right to participate in the government *directly* is recognised ; but the deception of formal democracy is not boldly exposed. The fiction of the people voluntarily delegating power to their "freely chosen representatives" is still kept up. Unless this fiction is destroyed, democracy will not have a chance, the rights of man will not be established. This problem of adjusting institutions to principles must be boldly faced if the danger of a new disillusionment is to be avoided.

The makers of the draft have gone quite far in that direction ; only logical deductions are to be made from the premises. An effective approach to the crucial problem of adjusting institutions to concepts is indicated in the

declaration that human beings "are endowed by nature with reason and conscience." That declaration rules out the metaphysical concept of law which introduces teleology into political philosophy and logically leads to the totalitarian theory of the State. Yet that metaphysical concept of an impersonal law was the cornerstone of liberalism, and that fallacious notion lingers in the draft of the Declaration of Human Rights.

As the corollary to this serious defect, a mechanical, rather dogmatic, notion of morality vitiated an otherwise excellent document. Rights will be restricted by the requirements of morality. Unless the fundamental principles of morality are deduced from the premise that man is by nature endowed with reason and conscience, how are the requirements of morality to be judged and by whom? It is left to the arbitrariness of the people in power. Morality is a matter of conscience ; man, by nature, is endowed with conscience ; the logical thing to do will be to create conditions which will enable everybody to listen to the voice of conscience and act accordingly.

Happily, the framers of the draft declaration have also suggested movement in this direction. Having made the conventional recommendation of free and compulsory education, they specify the purpose of education in some detail. If governments will adopt these principles of education, there will be no call for their acting as the mentors of the people and in that capacity override the rights of man on plausible pretexts.

Owing to timidity or looseness of thinking, positively dangerous concessions have been made such as will amount to abrogation of the most elementary rights of citizenship. There should be no "unreasonable interference with privacy, family, home, correspondence, etc." The corollary is that reasonable interference is allowed. Again, who is to judge what is reasonable? The people in power. If so inclined, they will override the elementary rights of citizenship.

There are other details which could be pointed out as flaws in the document. Let us hope that further discussion and consensus of bolder opinion will improve it before formal adoption. In any case, the declaration will mark a turning point of political thought. Its crucial importance is to be

found in the concluding paragraph which places cosmopolitanism, a brotherhood of rational and moral men as the ideal. The pernicious doctrine of unlimited national sovereignty is repudiated, though again rather timidly, by implication. The doctrine of non-intervention is discarded. National States will not be the masters of the destinies of their subjects or citizens. The rise of a cosmopolitan authority as the custodian of the rights of man throughout the world is heralded at the conclusion of the document, which therefore must be hailed as of historic importance.

From *Independent India*

Volume : XII

No. : 29

Date : July 25, 1948

THE INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY

A discussion of this as of any other subject, to be fruitful, must begin with the so-called first principles. Once we are clear about these, details can be logically deduced. This may appear to be a very abstract approach to a problem. But even if some of the first principles seem to be contradicted by experience, yet once the experience is properly analysed, a harmony between the principles and the experience can generally be arrived at.

In any case, everybody has his way of looking at things ; in my method, I am inclined to take a logical approach to problems rather than what is called the empirical or pragmatic approach.

There are two views regarding the relation between individual and society. Any discussion must be on the basis of those two views. There may be a discussion regarding the views themselves— and there is a good deal of difference between those two views. In order to have a correct understanding of the relation between individual and society, we shall have to judge which of the two views is correct.

In the beginning, I shall state those two views, which are known to you. One view is to take society as given and then to find out the ways and means for adjusting the individual's relation to the society: Society is given ; the individual is a part of society ; he lives in it. Therefore, to have a harmonious life, the individual must adjust himself to society.

The other view is just the reverse ; it regards the individual as the basic unit and society as the creation of man. Man created society for his purpose, and the logical corollary of this view is that social relations,— political, economic, ethical, spiritual— all the various kinds of social relations must be adjusted so as to promote the purpose of the life of the individual.

It is easy to see that the view about the individual's relation to society is bound to be very different when judged from these two different first principles. Before I proceed, I should say that I accept the latter point of view, although the former

point of view happens to be prevalent among most social thinkers and theorists of our time. The former is also an older point of view ; it is the view which was more or less held by various religions, because it can be connected with the belief in creation : that the world was created at a time, and that the human being came on this earth as part of an organisation which already existed, and in which he has very little to say and, therefore, has to adjust himself to it.

The other view seems to be empirically sounder. It is not for me here to discuss the religious connotation of the first point of view, whether the world and man was created. We shall leave that outside our discussion.

Now, we cannot examine the point of view that society was given unless we assume a supernatural origin of society. This view is not tenable. The other view, that society is the creation of man, is logically more consistent as well as empirically demonstrable. Of course, this view accepts the scientific theory about the descent of man ; that, as soon as the human species came into existence, it felt the need for corporate life. In order to combat the forces of nature and defend themselves against various adversaries, they felt the need of some organisation, and that is how society was created.

This view, in course of time, has rejected the early seventeenth century conception of Social Contract : that once upon a time primitive human beings met in a kind of conference and entered into a contract by which social relations were henceforth to be governed. Just as the human species itself, social organisation also came into being in the early stages more by accidental circumstances, and only in course of time evolved into more and more complex forms.

The fundamental question is about the purpose of human life. There also we have to take a point of view which can be examined in the light of positive verifiable knowledge. If human life has any kind of super-human or divine purpose, I do not know it and that does not come within the purview of a scientific discussion. The question about the purpose of human existence has to be examined in the light of the human being as it is, and the question can be answered only on the basis of the known biological functions of the human organism.

Life by itself has no purpose. Only when life expresses itself through the very highly complex human form and

develops such expressions as intelligence, will and consciousness, then we can attribute purpose to life. Therefore, the proposition is regarding the purpose of human life, not of life by itself.

To come to an agreement on this purpose is of very great importance, because a social organisation and the various social relations will be harmonious and ethical only to the extent that these relations will promote the purpose of human life.

Although on the subhuman level life has no purpose, yet the roots of the purpose of human life can be traced in the subhuman biological evolution. The purpose of human life results from the characteristic feature of subhuman biological evolution, namely, the struggle for existence. On the prehuman level, this struggle consisted in mechanical adjustment and natural selection. But after the appearance of the human attributes of will and intelligence, this struggle is carried on a higher level, no longer mechanically, by mechanical adjustments, but by intelligent choice, and the pursuance of that purpose presupposes judgment. Ultimately, that judgment, the capacity of judgment, is the function of morality and all ethical values.

The struggle for existence on the human level, when carried on according to a conscious will and intelligently, becomes the urge for freedom. The struggle for existence is a mechanical expression of that urge. The environments of a biological organism press upon it from all sides, and unless the organism was capable of struggling against the environments, survival would not be possible and life would have perhaps been extinguished soon after it generated.

The struggle for existence on the human level becomes the conscious struggle for freedom. The creation of society itself was an expression of this urge. The various forces of nature, wild animals and other natural enemies would have destroyed the human species ; the co-operative effort of the human species was necessary to free itself from the danger of extinction.

From the positive aspect, once the primitive human being was sufficiently differentiated from the animal ancestry to develop distinctive habits of dietetics, the acquisition of food for subsistence could no longer be carried on by individual efforts as in the case of lower animals. Originally, hunting and fishing, and eventually agriculture, had to be

conducted with co-operative efforts. This negative necessity to assist each other against the attack of wild animals, and the positive necessity to earn a livelihood, formed the basic urge which induced human beings to evolve the original civil society.

If these fundamental considerations are borne in mind, then we get a standard by which the relation between the individual and society can be guided. Society originated with the purpose of enabling the human being to conduct the struggle for existence with more and more efficiency. Now, as the human organism developed, the original need for acquiring food and the instinct of reproduction were supplemented by various other more complicated human instincts and desires. Therefore, very early in the development of the human being as a part of society, the struggle for existence ceased to be analogous to the biological struggle for survival. In order to exist in a society and build up a society which would help him to live and grow as an individual, the human being had to adjust himself to the needs and desires and sentiments of other human beings also.

Civil society, and later on political society, was created ; subsequently, it had to be economically organised, and society became more and more complicated. But all this was done with the original purpose of helping man to develop the potentialities inherent in him as a biological organism.

Life develops consciousness, then will, then intelligence, and the requirements and purposes of human beings accordingly became very diverse and covered a wider and wider range of his existence. Ultimately, the biological urge for existence, that is, the urge for freedom as biological struggle for existence, became what is really the necessity of a human being to evolve his personality, his individuality. If we take that view, then we can immediately pass on to a judgment on the moral validity or political justification or the economic equity of any social organisation. Any social organisation which inhibits the possibility of a free development of the human personality is contrary to the original purpose with which human society was created. Therefore, there is no contradiction between the fullest freedom of the individual and a harmonious social order. Such a contradiction results from the view that a social order is something over and above the individual, has a

purpose of itself, and whenever the purpose of the individual conflicts with the imaginary purpose of the social order, there develops dis-harmony in society. The solution of the problem becomes more and more difficult in proportion as society has become more and more complex.

To be able to develop his personality, the human being requires certain elementary things. He must have his physical existence guaranteed, and it is a matter of experience that in proportion as the human being is freed from the necessity of diverting the larger part of his energy to gaining the prerequisites of his physical existence, in that proportion the finer aspects of human life can develop. We see the difference between a primitive and a highly developed group of mankind in the leisure time it affords, after the effort necessary for maintaining physical existence, as a precondition for the intellectual, moral and spiritual development of the human being.

That being so, the first purpose of any social organisation is to guarantee every member the prerequisites of physical existence. Thereafter, everybody being biologically endowed with a mind, the ability to acquire knowledge, this capacity has to be cultivated. The process of this cultivation leads to organised cultural and educational activities. That is the second purpose of a social order, (the first included economic organisation). When a large number of people live together, and the development of human beings being unequal, there is always the possibility of conflict, which may develop violent forms. Hence political organisation is always a necessity, but the purpose of the political organisation i.e., the State, should be no more than to maintain conditions under which it will not be necessary for any man to kill another, or for communities or nations to attack each other for what one may possess and the other may lack.

Once conditions of peaceful existence and continuance of physical well-being as well as equal possibilities of acquiring knowledge and developing intelligence are created, the individuals should be left to themselves. Because here knowledge about what is called human nature will enable us to make a correct judgment. This is another question on which there are differences of opinion and much confusion. But unless we are clear about what is the essence of human nature, we cannot arrive at a correct judgment on the relation between individual and society.

According to the view which traces human development on the highest level to the sub-soil of human existence, human nature is essentially rational. The original creation of society was a rational act. Perhaps a number of our predecessors, as yet hardly differentiated from their animal ancestry, struggling for existence against wild beasts, saw that all of them did the same thing and realised that, if they acted together, they could combat the common enemies with greater chance of success. That rational judgment led to the foundation of civil society.

This human instinct can be traced further down in the process of biological evolution. What is called instinct is only a primitive form of rationalism. This knowledge of the mechanism of biological evolution leads to the conclusion that human nature is essentially rational. But in course of time, various other views of life developed, which made men forget that they are rational. To believe in super-natural powers appeared to be the fundamental trait of human nature. Consistent with that belief, the human being by itself is not capable of judging what is good and what is bad, a harmonious relation between the individual and society is not possible. There may be harmony, but it will be coercive. If we have a community fully sharing certain beliefs, everyone equally loyal to their beliefs, then we may have a harmonious society, but it may not be a free society. Because if a member of that community suddenly begins to doubt that any particular belief which he had been taught may perhaps not be true and wants to investigate if that belief is really correct, he immediately becomes an element of discord—the harmony is disturbed. To maintain harmony, his freedom must be curtailed or he will be expelled from that society. So, either society ceases to be harmonious, or it decomposes.

Therefore, a harmonious relation between individual and society consistent with freedom is possible when we start from the hypothesis, deduced from biological knowledge, that every individual is capable of rational judgment, and the purpose of a social order is to allow every individual to develop that capacity. It is not possible to make a programme or blueprint for guiding the relation between individual and society. It will become harmonious in proportion as the individual grows as a free human being capable of making rational as well as moral judgments.

Morality, in the last analysis, is a matter of rational judgment, unless it is referred to something super-human. When we are discussing a social problem, we are leaving aside the practice of referring human problems to extra-human forces. It can only be said that, unless the ability of moral judgment was inherent in the human being itself, the fundamental urge of freedom cannot be fulfilled. Because then man must abide by certain rules or norms which have been laid down for him by outside agencies. Man is not the judge; he cannot be good by choice, but only by conforming with certain rules and regulations imposed on him.

The problem of morality can also be exemplified as a problem of social behaviour. If I am conscious of the urge for freedom, if I feel that in order to develop myself intellectually, morally and spiritually, I need a certain social organisation in which other individuals will not encroach on my freedom, I shall immediately realise that I shall be able to have such a social organisation only if I am prepared to guarantee the same things to the other members of society. This view, you see, comes very close to certain religious views which lay down certain moral behaviour; in proportion as man's ability to make rational judgment increases, his capacity to make moral judgment also increases. Therefore, instead of troubling ourselves with the problem of finding ways and means of adjusting the relations of individual and society under an unjust social order, we must tackle the problem at the root.

A society should be so organised as to guarantee to each of its members what he requires for the development of his personality, as an individual. There we come back to the two original views. If we take the view that society is given, and the members of a good society are good human beings and those of a bad society are bad human beings, then we have the impossible task of reforming society, leaving the individuals as they are.

Various social theories have been developed, on this basis and most probably those views predominate today which hold that society must be reformed, and then individuals will become better. That view has been held since the dawn of civilisation, and it has not brought us very far.

A good society can be created only by good men. A rational society, a moral society only by rational and moral men. Since the potentialities of goodness and reason are in every human being, they can be developed. When we live in an

oppressive social order, it becomes very difficult to do so. But the necessity to do so becomes all the greater. And if we look at the problem practically, barring the crassly dictatorial regimes, in a modern civilised social order, there is ample scope for the individual to develop as a free intellectual moral being, if he wishes to do so.

But the wish is often lacking, because many think that they live in a society of thieves, and to succeed in such a society, a man must be a thief amongst thieves. The criterion is success. That is one way of adjusting individual relations with society. But that does not lead us anywhere.

The other way, which was led to its logical culmination by 18th century Liberalism, namely, to create a good society by making good laws, also has not proved to be very successful. Therefore, I am of the opinion that, to have a harmonious social order, to be able to live in peace with society and with ourselves, to behave morally and intelligently, depends very largely on the individual. Those who want to solve the problem of the individual's relation with society should apply themselves to the task of making more and more individuals conscious of their potentialities, convincing them that by birth they are capable of rational judgment, and therefore also of moral judgment, and therefore of being free.

This view of the most baffling problem of our time attaches supreme importance to the efforts made by individuals, and by independent groups of individuals. Although there are differences in certain matters of theory and principle, for practical matters our approach is the same : We attach more importance to the moral potentialities of the individual and the efforts to develop those potentialities. If these efforts are given priority and are conducted with sufficient vigour, conviction and determination, the problem which has baffled social engineers and architects may cease to be baffling before too long, and human civilisation may yet overcome the crisis in which it finds itself today.

From *The Radical Humanist*

Volume : XVIII

No. : 44

Date : Oct. 31, 1954

M. N. Roy (1887-1954), an outstanding revolutionary personality of the twentieth century, joined the underground revolutionary movement in Bengal in 1905 at the age of 18, and by 1915 emerged as one of its principal organisers. After the failure of the plan of armed insurrection against British rule he went in search of German arms which took him through Indonesia, Korea, China and Japan, the United States, and eventually landed him in Mexico. Here he was converted to Marxism and founded the Communist Party of Mexico (1919). From Mexico he was called to Moscow by Lenin, and in the next few years became one of the top theorists and organisers of the Communist International. He founded the emigre Communist Party of India in Tashkent in 1920. In 1927 he was sent as Chief of the Comintern's delegation to China to guide the Chinese Communist Party, and eventually broke with the Comintern in 1929 by openly opposing its extremist strategy adopted at the Sixth Congress.

On his return to India Roy was arrested and spent six years in jail during which he wrote his nine manuscript volumes of "Prison Notes". In the following years he moved beyond the ideologies of nationalism and communism, and between 1946 and 1948 formulated his alternative philosophy of radical humanism.

Besides taking an active and leading part in revolutionary movements in India, Mexico, Soviet Union, Germany, Middle East and China, Roy was a highly original thinker and prolific writer whose works run to more than a hundred titles and cover history, philosophy, sociology and political economy. Among his major works are *India in Transition* (1922), *The Future of Indian Politics* (1926), *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in China* (1930), *New Humanism* (1948), *The Russian Revolution* (1949), *Fragments of a Prisoner's Diary* (1940-50), *Reason, Romanticism and Revolution* (1952-55) and his unfinished *Memoirs* (1964).

