

SACH

South Asian Composite Heritage

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South Asia Cultural Diversity : Under the 'Veil' of Repression

Cultural diversity in South Asia forms part of its common heritage. It is a defining characteristic of humanity. Cultural diversity is strengthened by the free flow of ideas, and nurtured by constant exchanges and interaction between cultures. Writers, poets, filmmakers, artists and activists in South Asia region have made their invaluable contributions in preserving the cultural heritage. The songs, paintings, films, online blogs and poems that are being targeted and banned now are precious parts of the future heritage of humanity. Free expression in South Asian countries has never been under a bigger threat than today. The threat comes in the form of blasphemy allegations, forcing journalists, writers, film makers and bloggers to self-censor. These incidents of targeting writers, film makers and killings of media persons in the past years express dark times for free expression in South Asia. On one hand, certain states are becoming increasingly repressive, limiting freedoms, imprisoning writers, artists and activists who challenge their power. On the other, there are radical religious or political movements, suppressing art that they cast as offensive. Some of the most visible cases are often radical Islamist movements, but there are also ultra-nationalist and cultural supremacist movements growing across the region, who attempt to silence expressions of diversity.

In India director of a Bollywood Hindi film Mr. Sanjay Leela Bhansali and actor Deepika Padukone received several threats from a fringe Hindu caste group called Karni Sena for the film Padmavati (title changed to Padmavati) as a result the film could not be released in December 2017. Several political representatives from ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) supported the protestors who demanded that the director and lead actress be beheaded and demanded that Padmavati be banned because it insults a fictional Rajput heroine dreamt up by a medieval Muslim poet. In April, 2017 in Pakistan a 23-year-old journalism student Mashal Khan was shot dead by a mob after a heated discussion about Abdul Wali Khan University, and activists are pointing to archaic blasphemy laws and their frequent misuse for revenge and personal gain. Yameen Rasheed, 29 year old liberal Maldivian blogger was brutally stabbed to death in the stairway of his apartment building in April 2017. Rasheed, who ran a news blog called 'The Daily Panic', was known for poking fun at politicians in the Sunni-dominated Maldives. In Bangladesh a series of ghastly attacks on bloggers in the past few years has showcased the deteriorating state of freedom of expression in the Muslim-majority country. People are now feeling more threatened to express their views online. Local media have reported scores of attacks in the past few years that have killed at least 35 people and injured over 130. After Bangladesh witnessed a spate of killings of secular activists, Pakistan is experiencing a government crackdown on liberal bloggers, journalists, academics and activists. At the same time, religious fanatics are targeting secular social media activists, who have to go into hiding or self-censor to save their lives. The incidents horribly encapsulate the latest picture of threat and danger emerging from the violent discourse overtaking parts of South Asia, which is eroding the very essence of democracy. Across South Asia, civic space is shrinking and culture of free expression is more threatened by any ragtag outfit that claims monopolistic authority over long historical and cultural traditions that have always been diverse and dialogic in its expressions.

Of Mountains, In Plains

Poem by **MOHAMMAD TABISH**

I call all those birds of snow,
Who can sing me the songs of sleep
Bring tidings from the vale of cold
Where the season is of fall

Far from my country, blind;
Its dark and I'm away from home,
Wandering inside memories,
The nights are of recall

Burning chinars,
Stark poplar trees,
Brittle leaves crushed under feet
The season is of fall

Rich has his warm floor to sleep,
And the poor gathering wood from fallen trees,
The bear had his share and fell asleep;
Escaping winter inside dreams

The night is ripe, its midnight
My drunken slumber strayed;
Having lost its way
Left me with open eyes.

Away from the country of fall,
Here in plains, incomplete
Bearing the weight of many skies,
I often visit people inside my eyes

Poetry Against Violence : A Prayer for Peace

By **K SATCHIDANANDAN**, INDIA



POETRY has ever been a conversation with self, with the other that we tend to call society, with nature and with mystery that envelopes all beings. Octavio Paz, wrote in his introduction to *Poesia en Movimiento* (Poetry in Motion) an anthology of contemporary Mexican poetry: "There can be no poetry without history, but poetry has no other mission than to transmute history. And therefore the only true revolutionary poetry is apocalyptic poetry." Later he adds: "The poet is one whose very being becomes one with his (read 'her') words. Therefore only the poet can make possible a new dialogue."

Pablo Neruda, another great poet of our times, advocated "impure poetry" in his 1935 manifesto, *Towards an Impure Poetry* that carries the dust of distances and smells of lilies and urine: "The used surfaces of things, the wear that hands have given to things, the air,

tragic at times, pathetic at others, of such things, all lend a curious attractiveness to reality that we should not underestimate..." He had said in that manifesto. In 1966, again he wrote: "I have always wanted the hands of people to be seen in poetry," and added: "I have always preferred poetry where the fingerprints show. Poetry of loam where the water can sing. Poetry of bread where everyone may eat." We know how this intuitive connection to the masses remained a feature of his oeuvre right from his Residence on Earth and became more intense as he grew turning him into a biblical prophet of sorts, the voice of the voiceless, reminding us of another great poet of our time, Czeslaw Milosz the Polish poet., to whom poetry was "a participation in the humanly modulated time" and who believed that the poetry that does not address the destiny of nations is useless. According to him, "in a room where people unanimously maintain a conspiracy

of silence, one word of truth sounds like a pistol shot." He warned the wrong-doers: "You who have wronged a simple man/ Bursting into laughter at his suffering.../Do not feel safe. The poet remembers. You may kill him- a new one will be born./Deeds and talks will be recorded" (You Who Have Wronged).

The greatest poets of our time, from Octavio Paz, Pablo Neruda, Bertolt Brecht and Mahmoud Darwish to Rabindranath Tagore, Faiz Ahmed Faiz and Bei Dao are united by what Paz calls the apocalyptic element: that one finds in the poets we have cited besides a range of poets from Walt Whitman, Garcia Lorca, Paul Celan, Primo Levi, Yannis Ritsos and Cesar Vallejo to Paul Eluard, Louis Aragon, Leopold Senghor, Aime Cesaire, Nazim Hikmet, Mahmood Darwish, Anna Akhmatova, Cavafy, Zbigniew Herbert, Wislawa Szymborska and Ko Un, not to speak of earlier poets from Shakespeare to Alexander Pushkin, William Blake, Baudelaire, Rilke, Mallarme, Machado and Alexander Blok just to take a few names. Their texts instantly make visible the now-obscure links between mantic practices and poetry, between magic, shamanism, possession and oracle on the one hand and poetic vision, inspiration, power and incantation on the other. The poet thus re-enchants the disenchanted world by turning poetry into a symbolic act intended to transform the world. Like all genuine poetry, their works oppose totalization, generalization and standardization and are hard to be appropriated by those who turn art into a commodity in the great culture market as well as those who loudly declare their commitment to a simplifying ideology or a political monolith proving that art is oppositional and questions all hierarchies and all the rigid systems and regimes that produce violence of every kind.

This apocalyptic and symbolic function of poetry has assumed a new urgency in our time that, to me, has been marked primarily by violence in its diverse incarnations. The dore Adorno, the well-known thinker from Frankfurt once said that poetry is impossible after Auschwitz. The statement, clearly, was

not meant to be literal; it was an intense comment on the violence of our times that works against creativity of every kind. Indeed the Holocaust produced its own variety of great poetry: remember Nelly Sachs, Abba Kovner, Paul Celan and several others who still remind us of those ominous days of the genocidal mania. It was about such poetry that the Polish poet Tadeuz Rozevicz had said in his introduction to the anthology of post-War Polish poetry: "...poetry for the horror-stricken, for those abandoned to butchery, for survivors, created out of a remnant of words, salvaged words, out of uninteresting words from the great rubbish dump."

The history of poetry in our time has also been a history of censorship, exile and martyrdom. We have the examples of Lorca and Neruda, Nazim Hikmet and Ossip Mandelstam, Anna Akhmatova and Bella Akhmadulina, Ai-Ching, and Stu Tao, Shamsur Rahman and Tasleema Nasrin, Benjamin Molois and Kensaro Wiwa, Cherabandaraju and Saroj Dutta, Subbarao Panigrahi and Safdar Hashmi, Najet Adouni and Al Idrisi Kaitouni, Sepide Jodeyri and Zuhair Kutbi, Wael Saad Eldieu and Adel Labad, Mehdi Moosavi and Muawiya al Rawahi, Saw Wei and Jin I Choi, just to take a few examples, who had all raised their voice against some form of dictatorship, discrimination and injustice for which they had to suffer insult, imprisonment, life in a labour camp, exile or death. Plato who had kept poets out of his ideal republic should be pleased that he has had several followers in our time: Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, Franco, Pol Pot, Mao, Pinochet, Id-i-Ameen, Sani Abacha, Ayatolla Khomeini, Saddam Husain and many other champions of totalitarianism and fundamentalism of diverse hues, from Burma, Tibet, Indonesia and the Koreas to Russia, China, Iran, Egypt, Syria, Turkey, Tunisia, and Saudi Arabia, at times even avowed democrats eager to defend the status-quo. They have found their new heirs in many of the present leaders of the world from Trump and Brexit to Modi and Orban, whose power, once free from the democratic system

that restrains them to an extent, can be fatal to cultural freedom and every form of diversity. James Joyce once said of writers, "Squeeze us, we are olives", meaning the writers yield their best under oppressive environments. While it is true that various forms of oppression have produced some of the most passionate poetic works of our time, it is equally true that they have also silenced a lot of real and potential poets. Brecht was right when he asked, "Will there be poetry in dark times?", and answered, "Yes, poetry about dark times". Remember, in his poem 'To the Posterity' he had bemoaned the cruel times when a talk about trees could be a crime since it also carried a silence about so many crimes. We too are passing through a bleak time when all optimism looks facile and the only honest poetry seems to be of despair and sarcasm.

And yet, whatever the mode of response, it is impossible for the genuine writer today to ignore the violence that threatens to drown our beautiful world. Blood floods our bedrooms and our drawing rooms are strewn with corpses and that is often the blood and corpses of those who have neither drawing rooms nor bedrooms. Even the ivory towers of pure aesthetes are being swept by the winds of violence and change. Poets can no more be comfortable with a historicity, even if they transmute it, as Paz says, into apocalyptic visions.

Violence in our time springs from so many sources. Indeed there are the big and small wars often engineered by divisive forces and imperialist agencies, we have seen, from Vietnam to Iraq to Syria how wars can be conjured up by hegemonic nation states. Tagore had seen Nationalism itself as a violent ideology as it is based on hatred of other nations and peoples than the love of one's own nation and people and led to a form of collective hubris and greed that inevitably led to direct or indirect war. Today we understand his meaning even better as Nationalism is being turned into a ritual performed under pressure, a form of theocratic jingoism based on discrimination that claims omnipotence.

Another form of violence springs from

social inequalities: of class, caste, race and gender. Capitalist violence that emanates from greed and consequent exploitation- "capitalism comes into the world dripping blood", said Karl Marx-, upper caste violence based on discrimination, denial of opportunities and silencing of historical memory, the violence of the White races against the Blacks and Browns, non-tribal people against tribal populations, and patriarchal violence that takes several forms from linguistic and emotional violence to the physical one, inevitably produce counter-violence from the victims who try to resist the violence from above; but even counter-violence, however sympathetic we are towards it, is also violence and as Brecht says, even anger against injustice contorts our human features. By now any intelligent student of history knows that violence cannot end violence and "an eye for an eye only turns the whole world blind", to recall the words of the greatest spokesman of non-violence in our times. We have seen this dark logic at work in the countries that sought to change their destiny through violence: they had to employ greater violence to sustain their regimes until some of them collapsed for lack of any means to know the truth, why, to know even their own people's thoughts, as they had silenced all opposition by brute force- which is blindness of the worst kind.

Another is communal violence, of which we have seen some rabid outbursts in India recently. This happens when religion gets divorced entirely from ethics, from God, if you want, gets congealed into dogma and fanaticism and begins to create a scapegoat, an 'other' in its own image held responsible for every suffering that one endures. It shows patriarchal proclivities, manufactures an artificial tradition and a distorted history dismissing elements that do not suit its design and uses racial symbols and archetypes to appeal to the popular unconscious. Thus it is also a form of cultural and historical violence. This communalism shares with fascism its basic features, what Umberto Eco calls ur-Fascism in his book, *Five Moral Pieces*, an ideology that sees dissent as betrayal, defines nation negatively to the

exclusion of minorities thus promoting xenophobia, fears difference, advocates action for the sake of action, rejects modernism, looks at pacifism as collusion with the enemy, scorns the weak, appeals to the middle classes, encourages the cult of death, upholds machismo as a value and opposes all non-conformist sexual behaviour, treats people as a monolith, derides parliamentary governments, promotes what George Orwell would call 'new speak' that sees everything as black and white, and avoids any kind of intellectual complexity, limits the tools available to critical thinking, fears writers, artists and thinkers and creates a cult of tradition taking truth to be already known.

Techno-fascism too is a form of corrupt power as it ruins our physical and spiritual environment, exploits the natural resources with no consideration for posterity, pollutes our air, earth and water and imposes on everything the tyranny of the rational, measuring everything in numbers and quantities and rejects all that is incalculable, immeasurable and unsayable—which is the very substance of poetry—as they are impossible to digitize. It also produces speed that Milan Kundera in his *Slowness* calls the 'ecstasy of technology'. The speed of modern life leaves little room for meditation or even the pleasure of reading and writing. He speaks about the need to retrieve that lost joy of slowness, of lying on the meadow, 'idly gazing at God's windows', a joy getting lost in the louder and faster entertainment provided by the machines.

Another kind of violence comes from the market that forces the writer to be loud and to join the bidding in the culture market while art demands subtlety, suggestion and understatement: it is like a subterranean current that slowly works on the foundations, uproots the status-quo values and creates new ones. Market is the new Midas turning everything it touches not into gold, but into commodity and artists, who answer its temptations, are sure to sell their soul to this Mephistophilean spirit since genuine art, by its very nature defies commodification and totalization.

Baudrillard spoke of globalisation as the

"greatest violence of our times" as it imposes cultural amnesia in its victims, forcing them to forget their indigenous traditions in art, culture and knowledge and turning them increasingly into unthinking mimics of the West. Local cultures are the repositories of culturally learned responses built up over thousands of years from which poetry often draws its sustenance. Its loss is no less dangerous than the loss of genetic diversity. Western universalism is trying to drown the pluralistic and polyphonic cultural mosaic of countries like India. The agenda of globalisation is monoacculturation, that is, to homogenise and standardise cultures whereas difference and diversity are the very soul of many cultures in the East. Globalisation kills languages both through jargonisation and the selling of the monolingual idea. It is more a command from above than a decision from below; it anthropologises culture by reducing ethnicity into a brand name. It is a form of recolonisation that brings back colonial imaginaries.

Poetry moves from subjects to gestures and is essentially political not only because of the messages and sentiments it conveys concerning the state of the world nor only because of the manner in which it might represent society's structures or social groups, their identities and conflicts. It is political because of the type of space and time that it institutes and the manner in which it frames this time and peoples this space. The defence of aesthetics is the defence of imagination, pleasure, sensual and intellectual freedom, curiosity, play, experimentation and openness. It opposes the capitalist world view by resisting utilitarian co-option: the shape of a poem, cadences, surprises, sounds and spaces cannot be commodified nor taken as booty. Art is anathema to oppressors as it always generates new ideas, forms, desires, possibilities, energies and love of existing in the world.

Poetry opposes all forms of regimentation and invests the quotidian with layers of meaning. Avant-garde poetry is the inscription of the unresolved contradictions between the aesthetic promise and the realities of oppression

in the world. It breaks down the obvious orders and unsettles traditional patterns in an attempt to redefine the sensible. It resists simple interpretations. The aesthetic regime disrupts the boundaries between and redistributes the sense created by other practices. Poetry, by its very nature, interrogates the hierarchical organization of the community and creates experiences that disrupt the results of domination in everyday life. Poetry contributes to resistance by reconfiguring the realm of appearances and reframing the way problems have been posed. It contests the way capacities, voices and roles have been apportioned in the existing order. Poetic practices redefine what can be seen and said (as defined by the hegemonic forces that constitute and embody the State) and the implicit estimations placed on the members of communities. They deny the rigid identities stamped upon us by the police order and provoke counter-histories that would offer new forms of experience and exchange between art and life.

Genuine poetry has always opposed violence in its direct and oblique, tangible as well as intangible, forms, and more than ever it needs today to raise its profoundly human voice against all forms of violence, the ones we spoke of and the ones we may have overlooked. Paz had foreseen the contemporary situation: "Reality has cast aside all disguises and contemporary society is seen for what it is: a heterogeneous collection of things 'homogenized' by the whip or by propagandas, directed by groups distinguishable from one another only by their degree of brutality. In these circumstances, poetic creation goes into hiding." Poetry, even with its element of play, is no mere combinatorial game that a machine can play. It is more than a mere permutation of a restricted number of elements and functions. It always tries to say what it cannot say and its power comes from its willingness to give a voice to what is voiceless and a name to what is nameless. It advances on the blank page as Nicanor Parra would say. Poetry becomes important, as Italo Calvino says of literature in general, not when it reproduces

established values, given truths or ready-made slogans. It is an ear that hears beyond the understanding of common sociology, an eye that sees beyond the colour-spectrum of everyday politics. It promotes self-awareness through a criticism of the status quo and the cultural and material violence it perpetrates. The truth it discovers may not necessarily be of immediate use, but it is sure to gradually become part of social consciousness. It is the undeclared mission of poetry today to retrieve the past without being atavistic, to disentangle the effects of power from representations, to re-establish the almost-lost connections between man and nature, to redefine the boundaries between the self and the other and the self and nature in the context of man's species-arrogance that cripples the environment as well as his own moral and spiritual life, to re-sensitize man to suffering, alienation and solitude and to give positive non-violence and love which is its greatest expression the central place it ought to have in all human discourse.

Lorca who spoke of the "duende", that sudden epiphany, the vision of godhead, the intangible mystery in the context of Arabic music, also was speaking of the thrill and terror of what Paz calls the apocalypse. But this is not a moment of ignorance, but of awareness of the highest kind, awareness filled with deep concern for all living things that the Buddha, that great pioneer of the philosophy of non-violence, would have qualified as 'karuna' or compassion.

Let me conclude with Paz's own inspired words before I read some poems as an appendix: "We must find the lost word, dream inwardly and also outwardly/decipher the night's tattooing and look face to face at the noon day and tear off the mask" so that finally we can say, "I am history/ A memory inventing itself/I am never alone/ I speak with you always/ You speak with me always/ I move in the dark/ I plant signs."

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Courtesy : Indian Cultural Forum

America's South Asia Policy and Pakistan

By **SUNIL KUKSAL**, INDIA



THE US President Donald Trump unveiled an expansive new strategy for Afghanistan and South Asia on August 21, 2017. The new policy ruled out a hasty withdrawal of troops from the war-torn

Afghanistan and sought tougher approach towards Pakistan in its fight against terrorism. The announced American strategy sharply differs from the past in terms of addressing concerns regarding Pakistan's role in Afghanistan. Trump administration issued an unambiguous warning to Pakistan to stop extending support to the terrorists "immediately" or face unacceptably harsh consequences. The new policy gave the signals that the US relations with its strategic partner Pakistan are facing setbacks which will have wide ramifications for political stability and peace in South Asia region. Pakistan being an important ally of the US war against terror has played a key role in the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan due to its geographical proximity and perceived influence over the Taliban and other insurgent groups in Afghanistan. The war is jointly being fought by the US and a NATO-led coalition forces against Taliban regime and other Islamist groups with its epicenter in Afghanistan. Political stability in Afghanistan is crucial for peace in South Asia region. Strategic interests of key stakeholders such as the United States,

Russia, China, India and Pakistan in the region and particularly in Afghanistan have repeatedly shaped the strategic power dynamics in the region often causing disruptions in the peace building process.

A few months after the adoption of new strategy, the United States on January 4th, 2018 announced the suspension of nearly all security-related assistance to Pakistan until Islamabad could prove its commitment to fighting terrorism. The State Department spokeswoman said the aid freeze would last until the Pakistani government "takes decisive action" against the Afghan Taliban and its allies in the Haqqani network blamed for stoking violence in Afghanistan and prolonging a conflict in south Asia that has become America's longest war. This decision came just days after U.S. President Donald Trump had accused Pakistan, on Twitter, of giving "safe haven to the terrorists" and called Pakistan as liars and cheaters. United States also added Pakistan to its special watch list of countries engaging in "severe violations" of religious freedom under the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act. The annual list cites countries that have "engaged in or tolerated systematic, ongoing and egregious violations of religious freedom. Pakistan's government quickly decried the move as politically motivated. However, Pakistan's Prime Minister, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi remarked that the US financial assistance was "very, very insignificant" and that Pakistan was "on

the forefront of the war on terror”.

Strategic experts feel that strategy to cut aid is not likely to yield any results as happened in the past. For more than a decade, the US has tried to bring into play Pakistan’s perceived influence over the Taliban and other insurgent groups in Afghanistan to force them into giving up their militancy campaigns. The Obama administration froze or canceled part of its promised aid to Pakistan on various occasions for this reason, like when it suspended \$800 million in aid in 2011 just two months after U.S. Navy SEALs captured Osama bin Laden in the garrison town of Abbottabad just 120 kilometers north of Pakistan’s capital, Islamabad. In 2015, \$300 million of the Pentagon’s Coalition Support Funds were made conditional on Pakistan acting against the Haqqani network terrorist group in Afghanistan. The Haqqanis are considered to be backed by important elements within Pakistan’s security establishment, and their attacks are allegedly launched from Pakistan. The US also withheld \$350 million in military aid in 2016. In fact, over the

last couple of years, the security situation has worsened dramatically in Afghanistan. According to some reports, the militants now control more than 40 per cent of the country and even more alarming development is that the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is emerging as a new threat.

Washington’s aid cut can have a number of consequences for ongoing peace efforts in the South Asia region and especially for Pakistan. The long-term fallout from the spat could heighten Pakistan’s domestic political crisis — complicated by a constitutional tangle in Baluchistan province. Islamabad has been in a state of political turmoil since July 2017 when Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was forced to step down as prime minister over corruption charges, hours after the country’s Supreme Court unanimously ruled to disqualify him from elected office. His Pakistan Muslim League continues to rule, but faces a strident opposition and remains in conflict with the all-powerful military. For Pakistan, deteriorating relations with the US and NATO, an economy in deep



trouble and the Baluchistan situation could mean a more political instability as the country is going to face general elections within 90 days of June 5, 2018.

Pakistan's main leverage with the US lies in its geographical location and its role in Afghanistan. For the US, aid cut would increase the risks for the 14,000 US and NATO forces in Afghanistan. Pakistan controls the only supply line into the landlocked Afghanistan for international troops and has influence over the militant groups that are fighting there. The US uses Pakistani roads and airspace for delivering war supplies to Afghanistan that stretches through Pakistan from the port of Karachi. Experts say that if Pakistan shuts off this access, the alternative would likely involve using Central Asian countries north of Afghanistan and more aircraft to deliver supplies, which is far more expensive. It could also force Pakistan to embrace the US's rivals, China and Russia, to compensate for Washington's rejection.

The US decision also leaves Pakistan's ruling elite in a dilemma. If the aid suspension remains in place, China will be forced to help Pakistan because it cannot afford any sort of political or economic instability in the country. China's growing engagement in Pakistan and Afghanistan has the potential to escalate U.S.-China proxy war in South Asia. Pakistan has already allowed more space for a Chinese role in Pakistan as well as Afghanistan. China quickly defended Pakistan just hours after the US announced the cuts, and said it plans to move forward with its multibillion-dollar infrastructure project. Chinese moves in recent past suggest the country may be looking to exploit Washington's decision to slash Pakistani aid in order to gain geopolitical advantage over the US in the region.

Beijing, after all, has made strategic economic commitments to Islamabad. Right after Trump's tweet, the State Bank of Pakistan on 2 January 2018 stated, that

"Chinese Yuan (CNY) is an approved foreign currency for denominating foreign currency transactions in Pakistan." In other words, Pakistan and China would be able to replace the US dollar for transactions in China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects. China and Pakistan plans to extend their \$57 billion (Rs 365 crore) China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to Afghanistan. The planned trade route will run through Balochistan, close to the Afghan border, down to the new deep-sea port of Gwadar. Pakistan is hoping the corridor could generate billions of dollars of revenue. China hopes that the economic corridor could benefit the whole region and act as an impetus for development. China is investing more than \$ 55 billion dollars in Pakistan to build infrastructure spur of roads, railways and power stations in its One Belt One Road project as part of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and more recently, a new development deal worth \$60 billion for infrastructure and energy projects till 2030 has been signed between Pakistan and China. For China, Pakistan serves as an anchor for its One Belt One Road policy.

China has even more pressing reasons than its bilateral relationships for seeking peace in South Asia region. China already faces the negative outcomes due to Afghan conflict which has bled into its own borders, radicalizing China's Uighur community of Xinjiang Province on its western border. Political uncertainty and insecurity in Afghanistan will further destabilize Pakistan and other Central Asian republics. These outcomes could diminish the prospects of international projects like "One Belt, One Road" (OBOR) and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The introduction of the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative, which seeks to enhance connectivity and cooperation among countries from the Pacific Ocean to the Baltic Sea, includes plans to significantly enhance Chinese presence in South Asia.

Absurdity of Epic Proportions : are People Aware of the Content in Jayasi's Padmawat?

By **PURUSHOTTAM AGRAWAL**, INDIA



MALIK Muhammad Jayasi belonged to the Chishtia order of Sufis. His miracle-legends have been part of popular memory. The most stunning miracle he performed — the Padmawat — has been around physically for five centuries. Jayasi composed his magnum opus in 1540 in Awadhi, its manuscripts were mostly found written in the Persian script. Taking the legend of Padmini from the oral traditions of Rajputana, Jayasi created a fascinating texture of legend, history and mythology (Hindu as well as Islamic), drawing liberally from his vast knowledge and life experiences. Padmawat was apparently an instant hit in the literary circles of north India, and was also translated into Bengali in the sixteenth century itself. Thus, to Jayasi goes the credit of taking the Padmawati legend to Bengal; wherefrom a number of novels, plays and poems glorifying the Rajputs were to emanate

in the nineteenth century.

Ever since Ramchandra Shukla, the most influential historian of Hindi literature, published his edition of Padmawat (1924), its excerpts have inevitably been included in Hindi syllabuses, from schools to post-graduate programmes. Shukla situated the text in a historical context in which after initial conflicts, Hindus and Muslims were coming to terms with each other: "A century ago, Kabir had already castigated bigotry of every kind. One is not sure of the pundits and mullas, but ordinary people had recognised the unity of Ram and Rahim...only those sadhus and fakirs could hope to win popular admiration who seemed beyond discriminating on religious lines... For Hindus and Muslims alike, it was time to open up to each other. People were tending towards sharing rather than distancing. Muslims were willing to listen to the Ram story of the Hindus and Hindus were ready to hear the Dastan of Hamza... and sometimes both tried to explore pathways to God together."

To Shukla,



Padmawat was a luminous signpost of this shared search of the pathway to God. He wrote about Padmawat with as great a passion and critical acumen as he did about his most favourite poet - Tulsidas. Taking a cue from the "last stanzas" of the epic, which supposedly "hold the key" to Sufi content "hidden" in the text, he thought it was an allegory of Sufi spiritual practice. But, Mata Prasad Gupta, the great text-critic and scholar of the early modern vernacular literature of north India, in his edition of Padmawat (1963), based on a comparative study of sixteen manuscripts of different periods, comes to the convincing conclusion that the so-called 'key stanzas' were "added to the text much later." He concludes that far from an allegory of any kind, Jayasi was, in fact, composing a richly layered poem of human desire and love.

Jayasi was a practising Sufi, but he did not compose Padmawat to propagate or preach Sufism or any other edition of Islam. He wrote it to celebrate human love, luxuriating in all its aspects - desire, wandering, coupling (described in uninhibited, moving erotica), jealousy, separation, struggle, suffering and sacrifice. If at all he wished to preach anything, it was human, carnal love, which in its deep reaches becomes sublime and transforms the mortal human into the immortal and divine ('manush prem bhayau baikunthi'). At the end of his epic, he is confident that 'anybody listening to this poem, written in blood and tears, is bound to feel-and sing-the pain of love him/herself'. He writes of the inevitability of death and identifies with the universal human desire to leave behind memories: "Who in this world does not long for abiding fame? / I hope the readers of this story also remember my name."

His hope did bear fruit. Even if he is not as popular among the masses as Kabir, Tulsi, Mira or Surdas, his Padmawat fired the imagination of scholars of both literature and history. Apart from Shukla and Gupta mentioned here earlier, the two most important works are: a fascinating Bhashya (a scholarly commentary) on Padmawat by Indologist

Vasudeva Sharan Agrawal and a thought-provoking monograph by eminent poet, critic and Lohia acolyte Vijay Dev Narain Sahi.

It is important to internalise all this to see the current controversy in perspective. Please note that Jayasi glorified a Rajput legend of valour, and in the process cast one of the most powerful and competent Muslim kings as the anti-hero of his narrative. But, he was not penalised by his Muslim peers or benefactors. He presented a brahmin Raghava Chetan as the real villain of the piece, and brahmin sentiments were not hurt. He described with abandon the beauty of Padmini and her love-making with Ratansen, he did not hesitate to describe the jealous fights between Padmawati and Nagmati (Ratansen's first wife) and Rajput modesty was not outraged.

As is expected of a great poet, Jayasi put love and life in the ultimate existential perspective of transience in the face of impending death. In a poignant poetic move, at the end of his saga, Jayasi makes victorious Alauddin reflect not only on his pyrrhic victory (duly noted in the ironic manner he talks of how 'Chittor was taken over by Islam') but also on the nature of insatiable desire. He picks up Ratansen's ashes from his pyre (also the pyre of his two wives) lamenting: 'I actually wanted to avoid this' and continues, 'Desire is insatiable, permanent / but this world is illusory and transient / Insatiable desire man continues to have/ Till life is over and he reaches his grave.'

Contrast this poignancy with the absurd theatre playing out around a film that in all likelihood will only reiterate smug, self-satisfied stereotypes of Rajput 'valour'. The 'warriors' are announcing rewards for chopping off a woman's nose ostensibly in defence of the honour of another. It's not really about the honour of a woman, but an unmitigated male chauvinist fantasy that denies the woman any individuality, a chauvinism that finds expression in a woman self-immolating or in widow-burning. The glorification of this medieval fantasy continues unfortunately, in subtle and not so subtle ways. Bhansali's film is going to contribute to this glorification. This

is the sub-text of claims that the film actually upholds Rajput 'honour'.

Personally speaking, I just detest Bhansali's obsession with vulgar opulence and cannot forgive him for massacring the beautiful self-destructive tragedy of Devdas. But criticising someone for lack of subtlety or genuine understanding of a subject is one thing and issuing death threats is quite another. It is no surprise that many BJP leaders are implicitly or explicitly endorsing such threats. Of late, the Congress chief minister of Punjab has also endorsed the 'right to nurture hurt sentiment'. The violence of 'hurt sentiments' persists despite the 'No Objection' certificates issued by journalists Ved Pratap Vaidik, Arnab Goswami and Rajat Sharma, none of whom can be 'accused' of being left-liberal or 'secular'.

It's true that 'freedom of expression' is not limitless, but the limits are set by law, not by armed mobs invoking hurt sentiment. Also, irrespective of the historicity or otherwise of the persona of Padmawati, even an artist as uninspiring as Bhansali has a right to poetic licence. Given the present state of historical knowledge, the character of Padmawati can only be described as legend, and legends happen to be more deeply entrenched in the cultural memory of a people.

This begs the question: what makes your memory or sentiments so brittle? Even if someone has a different take on a shared memory, why should it bother you if you are so attached to it? Asking this question will take the wind out of the politics of hurt sentiment, and put the matter in the realm of rational enquiry which, of course, is anathema to all warriors of hurt sentiments.

Finally, the absence of rational argument doesn't by any means indicate the absence of calculation. There is nothing 'spontaneous'

about organised, aggressive display of hurt sentiment of any kind. It is always politically motivated, the gist of which comes out clearly if the right questions are asked. So, ask why there is no outrage against the boss of the production house. Ask if it's mere coincidence that just before the Gujarat elections, the electronic media is obsessing about this 'burning' issue while ignoring seemingly 'mundane' issues like the Rafale deal, the plight of farmers and the bloodshed on the jobs front.

Among all bhakta and sufi poets, Jayasi was the most insistent on his poetic persona. He was also painfully conscious of his 'ugly'



appearance and bodily deformities, and confronted them with confidence in the power of his poetry: "Muhammad, poet of love, ugly and frail, causes laughs and jeers / but hearing his verses, nobody can hold back tears."

The poet was conscious of his bodily deformities and could use his poetry as an antidote. Are we willing to face the deformities of our souls, our minds? Are we blessed with an antidote, or just condemned to inch towards a fractured social psyche, a violent society and a dysfunctional state?

(The author is a leading scholar of early modern vernacular literature, a novelist and public intellectual)

Courtesy : <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/cover-story/story/20171204-padmawati-karni-sena-malik-muhammad-jayasi-sanjay-bhansali-1092364-2017-11-24>

Finding A Way Out : The Current Upsurge of Fascism

By **PRABHAT PATNAIK**, INDIA



THERE is at present an upsurge of fascism all over the world, though it is often described as 'nationalism' or 'right-wing populism'. Such terms, however, are misleading, and reflect a neo-liberal mindset. The pejorative use of the term, 'nationalism', serves implicitly to laud neo-liberal globalization as its contrast; it is also misleading because it does not distinguish between the 'nationalism' of a Gandhi and the 'nationalism' of a Hitler. Likewise, the term 'populism' is used these days to characterize all redistributive or welfare state measures, contrasting them unfavourably with neo-liberal measures of 'development'; to apply it to the current fascist upsurge is misleading both because it promotes such a tendentious use of the term and also because the implicit suggestion of a transfer to the people does not figure anywhere in the agenda of these movements.

The current fascist upsurge, of course, is not a replication of the 1930s. Today's context is different; and even within any particular context each such movement has its own country-specific features. But the term, 'fascism', is apposite because at least four features common to all fascist upsurges can be found in the current upsurge as well.

The first is supremacism and the associated repression of the 'other': white

supremacism in the West, Hindu supremacism in India and so on. In fact, 'supremacism' describes these movements more accurately than 'nationalism'. When a leader of the fascist German party (AfD) exclaims that while walking down a German street he does not meet a single German, he is obviously identifying German-ness with a white skin, and ruining the citizenship of less 'congenial' people. This is a symptom of supremacism rather than nationalism.

A second feature of fascism is the apotheosis of unreason, of which supremacism itself is an expression. Propositions like 'the blacks are inferior' or 'the Dalits are inferior' or 'the Muslims are inferior' are themselves indicative of unreason. But this unreason is sustained by a more pervasive appeal to unreason, a more general assault on reason, of which hostility to the intelligentsia, a complete disregard for evidence in any argumentation, a running down of centres of learning, physical attacks against dissenters, and browbeating the media, are some obvious symptoms.

Third, fascism is a movement, as distinct from mere skulduggery by some violent gangs, though fascism may use such gangs and the latter may have fascist mindsets. In Latin America, for instance, murderous gangs have been used against the Left for decades, especially during the years of military rule. But military rule cannot be called fascist for this reason, because fascism,

unlike military rule, is sustained by a movement.

Fourth, the fascist movement at a certain stage of its career invariably makes a deal with big corporate capital, which alone enables it to acquire centre-stage presence and, if possible, come to power. Fascists knocking on the doors of State power, fascists in State power (which is the case in India), and fascists converting their hold on State power to set up a fascist State (which we have not yet seen anywhere at present), can do so only on the basis of the support of corporate financiers. Behind Narendra Modi's rise too there is the solid support of the Indian corporate-financial oligarchy.

This last point also gives a clue to the reasons behind a fascist upsurge. Fascist, semi-fascist, and neo-fascist movements exist as fringe phenomena in most societies. They suddenly erupt into prominence in periods of economic crisis. This happens not because, as is often believed on the Left, the corporate houses get worried about a working class challenge to their hegemony at such times and prop up the fascists, but for precisely the opposite reason, namely the traditional establishment parties are incapable of finding a way out of the crisis and the Left is too weak to assert its agenda. Fascism, which starts out pre-eminently as a middle-class petty bourgeois movement, acquires strength at such times, not because it offers any solution to the economic crisis, but because it changes the discourse altogether, by projecting a 'messiah' who would miraculously cure the ills of society. (The appeal to unreason becomes essential for such projection.) And because of this acquisition of strength it gets 'adopted' by corporate capital to buttress its position.

Walter Benjamin, the well-known philosopher and theorist of culture who was

himself a victim of fascism, had seen it as arising from a "failed revolution". This had certainly been true of Germany, and of Europe in general, where a series of working class uprisings had occurred in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution, whose failure had left the working class divided and debilitated. But the question that arises is: why in the present era, when there has been no revolutionary attempt anywhere for at least



four decades, should there be such a weakening of the working class movement, and of the Left as its political expression, that the current capitalist crisis is producing a world-wide fascist upsurge as opposed to a Left upsurge?

An obvious reason for this is the weakening of the trade union movement everywhere as a consequence of globalization and the neo-liberal policies associated with

it. The globalization of capital, which entails outsourcing of activities from the advanced countries to low-wage third world countries, constrains the trade union movement in the former. In the latter, on the other hand, the undermining of petty production and of peasant agriculture that also occurs under neo-liberalism, ensures that labour reserves swell in spite of such outsourcing from the advanced countries, as displaced peasants and petty producers pour into cities in quest of jobs whose increase is not large enough even to absorb the natural increase in workforce. Such swelling labour reserves obviously cripple trade unions, apart from the ever-present fear that union militancy would drive investment to other destinations. Besides, privatization, a ubiquitous phenomenon under neo-liberalism, weakens the trade union movement everywhere, since trade unions invariably tend to be stronger in the public compared to the private sector.

There is a second reason for the weakening of working class politics, which has to do with its not shaking off the ideological hegemony of neo-liberalism. It is not just the likes of Tony Blair of the British Labour Party and Gerhard Schroeder of the German Social Democratic Party, who have been the instruments of such hegemony. Even the Marxist Left, notwithstanding its criticism of neo-liberalism, has not drawn the inevitable conclusion from it, namely the need to put capital controls in place, and hence to delink to an extent from globalization, for pursuing an alternative agenda. And in countries like ours where the Marxist Left has ruled only in some states, it has often pursued conventional policies on the grounds that the Centre alone can effect a shift away from neo-liberalism.

But where the Left has broken away from neo-liberalism, it has managed to challenge the fascists. Bernie Sanders, an avowed socialist, who presented a different, anti-Wall Street, agenda, got substantial support from the people, and may have even beaten Donald Trump had he continued in

the presidential contest. Jeremy Corbyn, who has come out with a new Left agenda, including even nationalization, has revived working class politics in Britain to an extent where the vote share of the fascist United Kingdom Independence Party went down from 11 per cent in the previous general election to just 2 per cent in the latest one. In France, where Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Left Party together with trade unions has been spearheading opposition to the neo-liberal agenda of the president, Emmanuel Macron, Marine Le Pen's fascist party's vote share has gone down from 23 to 13 per cent between the presidential and parliamentary elections, reducing it to just eight seats in Parliament. In fact, its votes are marginally less than those of the Communist Party and Mélenchon's party put together. In spite of their not fighting the parliamentary election together, they got 27 seats, which is way above the fascists. The fascist upsurge in short can be reversed if the Left breaks out of neo-liberal hegemony and offers the people an alternative concrete agenda.

What does all this mean for India where the Left is divided over whether to have a broad anti-fascist alliance that includes the Congress or whether to shun any alliance with neo-liberal parties? The foregoing would suggest that this debate should be turned upside down. The point is not who is 'touchable' and who is not; the point is to push for an alternative agenda and ally with whoever comes on board. Such an alternative agenda has to be minimal but significant. Even an agenda with just two points, a State-run national health service offering free and quality healthcare to all, and a chain of quality State-run neighbourhood schools providing free education to all children, will go a long way in changing the ethos of this country.

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Youths' Divergent Cultural Views, Myths and Practices in Tamil Nadu

By **MUGILAN PERUMAL**, ISD, INDIA



THE youth are one of the enthusiastic and dynamic communities in the society. They have the power either to create divergent cultural harmony or to create cultural war. The cultural harmony at times appears like fleeting experiences which remains the least celebrated social event across societies with immense cultural diversities. It is mainly the youth with their skills and capacities can make it visible to the whole society. On the other hand, as Herbert Hoover rightly quotes,

“Older men declare war. But it is only youth that must fight and die”

In this context, the old men (society) ignite cultural war, but youth are the eventual sufferers for vested interests. Whereas youth can act both a catalyzing and galvanizing factor in promoting harmony and peaceful co-existence of all groups and identities. In order to explore diversities in understanding and perspectives among youth towards culture, myths and practices in their respective societies largely responsible for generating conflict as well as establishing peace, Institute for Social Democracy (ISD), New Delhi conducted three ground level workshops on Composite Heritage in southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu for young graduating students in colleges in August 2017. Young participants were drawn from diverse social and economic backgrounds and regions. The participants freely expressed their views on social and

cultural aspects such as Inter-Caste Harmony, Historical Monuments, Regional History and Myths, Gender and Caste Discrimination.

Cultural practices in a given social cultural milieu form an important part of composite heritage which also contribute in maintaining social cohesion. Participants were familiarized with the theoretical underpinnings of composite heritage, the current debates and issues around them. In various working sessions youth shared their view points and experiences faced in day to day lives and narrated various instances as an integral part of regional positive Composite Heritage.

- **Musiri Village, Trichy :** The handloom weaving as a crucial component of regional composite heritage has been the traditional occupation of people in the village. Although the technology is overtaking their occupation, the outsiders still like to buy those handloom products. This helps the local people to continue to preserve the traditional occupation.

- **Semmedu Village :** In the slum area, there are three communities living, but they are having separate places for worshipping. Ironically, they all belong to the same religion. One of the voluntary organizations with sustained efforts pursued children from all three communities to build a common temple to come together and worship without differences and discrimination.

- **Avaniyapuram Village, Madurai :** The festival had been stopped for more than 13 years in the village due to conflict between the two communities. The village faced terrible

experience of not getting rain for few years that devastated their livelihood. A resident of the village once possessed by God told the villagers that the two communities should celebrate the festival in order to have the agricultural land flourished and to improve their livelihood sources. As a result the two communities got together and started celebrating the festival.

- **Porathakudi Village, Trichy :** Dalits were not allowed to enter the temple and this is not uncommon in the entire nation. Some Dalits wanted to escape from this kind of discrimination and converted into Christianity. Now, they have been made priests in the church and enjoying the privileges that were unexpected and unthinkable in their previous religion.

- **Vellore Region, Trichy :** There are 8 villages which together celebrate mega festival each year. They have certain rules and regulations to organise the festival harmoniously and peacefully. But as a practice villagers used to have their caste names in their T-shirts whenever they celebrated the festival. But later such practices were forbidden by the village community in order to avoid caste based conflicts.

- **Pannar Village, Trichy :** This is the only village which has a Dalit priest in the temple. He performs all the rituals and pujas and offers *prasadam* to all and sundry in the village.

- **Chariot Pulling :** In one of the villages in Trichy, the Dalits pull the chariot first which is then followed by other caste people. The practice is followed on the belief that the Dalits have superstitious powers and as a result they are given first priority. This belief has made Dalits as a respected community in the village.

REGIONAL HISTORY AND MYTHS :

- **Kumari Kandam :** It is believed that the Kumari Kandam (submerged in Indian Ocean) where Tamil people lived for several years.

- **First Mosque in India :** The first mosque "Juma Masjid" in India is situated in Edappally in Trisur district of Kerala. It was built in 629 AD by Malik Deenar. Although it was vandalized during the Portuguese period,

the mosque is still preserved and protected by the local people of Kerala.

- **Formation of Kerala :** A youth from Kerala explained about the formation of Kerala region from the story of Purana of Mahabharata in the Vedic literature. Parasuram ("Parasu" means 'axe' in Sanskrit) is the sixth avatar of Vishnu. He killed all the Kshatriyas who were brutally ruling the region and filled five lakes with their blood. In order to get rid of all his sins, he threw the axe which fell on the land called Kerala. This story was shared by a Christian youth and everyone in the region believes in this myth.

- **Onam Festival :** This is the only regional festival celebrated by all the communities regardless of any differences. The Mahabali King who ruled Kerala once was loved by his people and also protected the rich culture of Kerala. Moreover, he belonged to the lower caste community and always recognized as a kind Asura King of Hindu mythology. The Onam festival is celebrated in recollecting and remembering his benevolent regime.

PARTICIPANTS' VIEWS AND REFLECTIONS ON CASTE, RELIGION AND GENDER :

There was a debate conducted among the youths on caste and reservation. A youth conducted an activity to understand about the reservation and caste system in India.

The four participants with different characteristics (One is independent, person with legs tied, person with hands and legs tied and a blindfolded Person) were invited for the activity and they were told to reach the same goal. An independent person (upper caste) and person with legs tied (semi-upper caste) only could reach the goal without making much effort. The person with hands and legs tied (lower caste) was more sluggish and the blind person (Tribal community) could not even figure out where he was moving (unaware of education). This was the situation in 1940s and even now in most of the parts of India. Before independence, majority Dalits and Tribes had never been exposed to education and could not get high profile jobs in the society.

They were merely made to do menial jobs and considered them to be slaves. After independence, the constitution was framed which gave some rights and special provisions to the minorities, Adivasis and Dalits. This is why the reservation plays a vital role in trying to bring all the communities to work in the same sector without any discrimination.

While continuing the debate about the evil practices of casteism, some youths reflected upon the identity and a few incidents of caste based violence.

Caste is an Identity : Few youths were so enthusiastic to talk about caste as their identity and pride. They thought the caste was formed and practiced by their ancestors and it is a badge of honour in their society. They desperately wanted that the caste should exist as an individual identity.

Pappapatti and Keeripatti Villages : The villages are located in Madurai district and constantly face reservation based election. If any Dalit contests for election, he/she would either be puppet of the upper caste or gets killed. In one of such incidents, a village panchayat Dalit president was killed by the

upper caste mob. He was beheaded in the bus and mob took his head throughout the market to give a warning signal to the lower caste people who dare to contest the election. They also announced that lower caste people can only dream of becoming the village president, but it would never be possible in reality.

As BR Ambedkar quotes,

“If you turn any direction, caste is the only monster that crosses your path”

The caste identity is deeply entrenched in the community and it is considered as a matter of dignity and integrity. The youth can have fruitful relationship with a person from other communities in institutions like schools and colleges, but the caste plays a crucial role when it comes to marriage. The major issue is the killing of married couple (inter-caste) in the name of honour. If a bridegroom from historically despised caste (Dalits) marries an upper caste bride, it would escalate violence between these two communities and sometimes the newly married couple would be killed to escape the shame and ignominy.

Religion: The youth were asked a question along with the explanation of whether the



religion and god are the same or different. 95% of the participants said that the religion and god are different. The religion makes people fundamentalists and triggers violence within religion groups and against other religions. It stifles the fundamental rights of the human beings from the day they are born (especially lower caste community in the Hindu religion). The religion also creates trouble and limits the freedom of movement particularly for women who are not allowed to go out of their home.

Gender Discrimination : A few young participants were overtly aggressive in expressing their views against women's rights. They said the girls/women have started wearing *sudidhar/chudidhar* and modern dress instead of saree and this undermines the inherited cultural practices. Other instances like the women now do not respect elders and husbands particularly in the urban areas. Changes are taking place, but they affect men emotionally and psychologically. In the name of morality, they expressed their wicked attitude towards women. Women are misusing the law in their favour and there are growing number of false cases related to dowry and as a result of which the men get adversely affected. This leads to suicide and brings disgrace to the men's whole family. The girls' education is an indicator of the gender equality which is ensured in the region. There are more girls getting educated even in rural areas and this is the greatest improvement when compared with the previous generation. It was also expressed that the women should serve food for her family members and she has to take food later. These kinds of gender stereotypes have developed over hundreds of thousands of years. Due to this, more and more women face mal- or undernourishment and not been able to have healthy lifestyle. But, many believed this practice because a woman gets husband's DNA if she eats the leftover food by her husband.

During the debate, some of the incidents related to women were shared by young male as well as female participants. They responded that the women have been, if not physically, but mentally subjugated at home, office and

society as a whole.

Moreover, sexual violence and related crimes are common in India and girls/women are the primary targets. Eventually, the society would label and blame only the victims (women) and reckon them as impure and disgraceful to their families. The legal system in India is often ineffective and too late when it comes to deal with the sexual harassment cases. Participants also drew upon one of the examples that was Balkis Bano case, a gang-raped victim during the Gujarat riot in 2002. Her case was covered by high officials. After her fifteen years of relentless struggle, the Mumbai high court gave rightful justice and proved that she is a victim, not a convict or criminal.

Perumbavanur Village Issue : Jisha belongs to a lower caste community from Perumbavanur village, Ernakulam district, Kerala. She was a law student at the Government Law College, Ernakulam where she was found dead. The unidentified persons gang raped and killed her in April 2016. Her case went viral especially among the college students and youth who held relentless protest. They also started mobilizing opinion through social media by launching a campaign "Justice for Jisha". The perpetrators were arrested and punished as per the law. This campaign brought justice to the family of Jisha in Kerala.

The cultural war and cultural harmony often create a clash of ideas in the mind of young people in deciding which is to be practiced and which is to be neglected. In Tamil Nadu, people like Periyar (also known as EV Ramasamy) and others had consistently fought against religious atrocities, caste based violence, gender discrimination and other evil practices. One of the greatest achievements of Periyar is that he urged people to dispense with caste names in order to get rid of the caste identities. He also conducted a number of inter-caste marriages to root out the caste based discrimination through self-respect movement. People like him are a few in numbers to bring change and Composite Heritage is the finest tool to encourage rational thinking among youth to strengthen cultural harmony.

The World and the “I”

By **CHRISTOPHER CAUDWELL**

...Continued from previous issue



BUT now we must summon into being another world, also lying behind the word – the world of feeling – the ego. Just as the cry was connected not only with something outside and terrifying but also with some state inside, the being terrified, so all words, besides indicating some outer entity, include also an inner attitude towards that entity. Brutes, animals, beasts, living organisms, are words all indicating similar real entities, but each with a different group of feeling-tones.

It may be asked: Why not have a different word for the feeling-tone, another for the object, and so increase the plasticity of language and facilitate clarity? The answer is: it is not in the nature or possibility of experience; for the separation between feeling-tone and real object is an abstraction. In reality they are one – part of the one active subject-object relation. We may separate the conscious field into real (or objective) qualities and apparent (or subjective qualities), but the separation is artificial.

Mechanical materialism, for example, started from the Position that only Chose qualities are real into which the observer does not enter. Thus, first the world was stripped of colour, feeling, scent and temperature, for these could easily be

demonstrated to have a neural component. Einstein advanced this a stage further by demonstrating the dependence of size, weight, duration and motion on the observer – these too were therefore eliminated and only the tensor was left invariant; but the development of quantum mechanics impugned even this and nothing invariant was left but a probability “wave” – i.e., a mathematical function. Hence the search for complete objectivity only leaves us with a bunch of equations – that is, of thoughts. Mechanical materialism turns into its opposite – solipsism.

But the idealist’s programme is just as disastrous. Starting from the opposite programme, “All is mind that has nothing material about it,” he is driven to exclude everything but the absolute Idea or concept. But a concept is “something” in a human brain, and a human brain is matter. Thus the idealist is left with nothing but material human brains. Or if he denies that concepts are dependent on human brains, he is an absolute idealist, and his world is made up of real things, ideas existing objectively apart from men.

This dualistic see-saw is inevitable as long as the concrete genesis of experience is ignored – its active subject-object relation – man’s struggle with Nature. For in every given experience there is a like and an unlike, i.e. something given in previous experience, and something not given. The something already encountered is the object, the something new is the having of the experience – that which makes us able

to differentiate this object or this encounter with the object from others. For example, we may pass the same rose every day, but the "setting" of the day is different, and therefore our attitude to the rose. That newness or difference is, in that particular experience, our subjective attitude to the rose – the "feeling-tone" of that experience. Of course there is also something located "out there" which accounts for the feeling of newness. And there is in our experience, in the subjective side of it, also "recognition," recognition of the rose as a flower, as an object, as something real.

This "feeling-tone" inheres in all experience: there is the reality, the objective sector of the conscious field on the one hand, and on the other hand the subjective attitude towards it. One is the field of the "I," the other the field of the Universe. We may say that every real object has as a result of our experience subjective associations adhering to it, but of course there are not attached mechanically, but depend on the setting internal and external. A rose in one setting has different associations from a rose in another.

This in its most general form is the law of the conditioned response, the law that fluid reality is classified by the instinctive responses, and that these classes elaborate, shift and change according to experience.

The simplest form of this instinctive classification of external reality is of course numerical – mathematics. The most elementary art of self-consciousness is that which separates the "I" from Nature, and this recognition of separation, of discontinuity, when sympathetically introjected into objects, makes possible the conception of numerous things. Thus mathematics is that order of experience in which the subjective content is almost nil, so primitive is it. It is not correct to speak of mathematics as bare of quality, for already we have the difference between the qualities of the numbers, in itself a

reflection of the difference between "I" and other. But it is almost bare of quality, and for that reason, as we have already noted, the language of mathematics is most purely symbolic. But since it is based on the most fundamental part of self-consciousness it seems the least objective and most "ideal" of the sciences.

Since all other language, however rigidly objective and symbolic, necessarily deals with categories of quality, since in fact the sphere of any given science is defined by the particular qualities with which it is concerned, all other language necessarily contains varying amounts of feeling-tone – of that subjective essence of experience which is part of "quality."

Quality can only be apprehended and distinguished subjectively. But directly it is no longer new and has become a social fact, it can be established objectively and is drawn into the sphere of quantity. Thus, once we have recognised socially the colour blue, it can be associated with a certain wave-length, and becomes an objective fact. It can then be considered objectively. But from its first appearance as something strange and unique to its last vanishing as a mere figure on a dial, it retains some element of the subjective.

This shift of subjective experience into the more objective sphere is important because it enables us to understand how feeling-tone can never be completely separated from the object in experience – and therefore in the word – and how we can yet have words for feelings only – e.g. "afraid," "fear." But "afraid" and "fear" indicate here objective realities. The mind can introspect and then watch other people, so that its feelings, projected into the social world, become objective, become objects of contemplation for it. In the experience indicated by "afraid," we have both the subjective state it objectively refers to, and the subjective feeling-tone in thinking of people being afraid.

Thus experience weaves back and

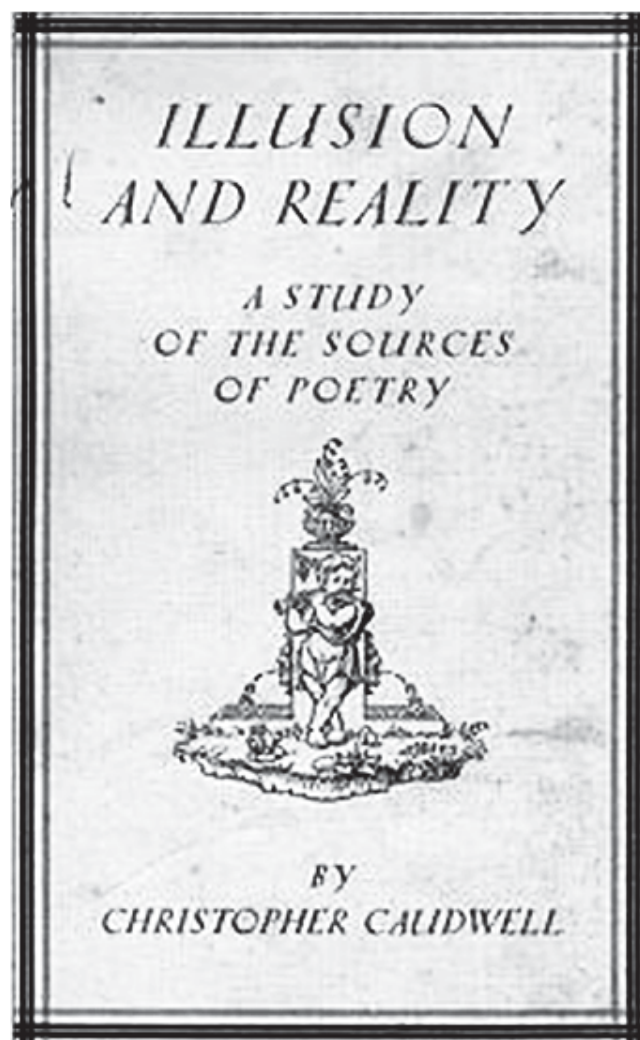
forth on itself, always modified by its settings, always generating fresh tones and complexes and yet, in so far as it is activated by the Word, always symbolic of external reality and internal feeling.

Just as the word refers to a portion of objective reality, i.e. is the stimulus for the idea of it, so it is the stimulus for a portion of feeling-tone. Due to the limitations of vocabulary, any given word is in fact the potential stimulus for a whole series of possible classes, entities or movements in outer reality – for example, the word “sea.” By combination grammatically with other words, however, only part of these meanings are released – it is seen to refer only to the sea, or to sea in certain conditions. The same selection applies to the possible feeling associations of a word, not all of which are generated at any time.

We saw that we were able to communicate part of our experience of outer reality to others because of the existence of a common perceptual world with agreed symbols. In the same way, we communicate our feelings to others because of a common feeling world with agreed symbols. This common perceptual world was nothing but the “real” world, or truth as reflected in the consciousness of society. What, then, is the common affective world? This common affective world is nothing but the “I” which men construct as a result of their social experience.

We know the dilemma of the critical idealist, who cannot know what matter is like in itself and so denies matter, and of his opposite the behaviourist, who cannot know how other men are for themselves and so denies consciousness. Now the idealist is refuted by practice, by showing that matter can be made to exhibit certain phenomena by certain operations, and when all these possibilities of change have been explored

the thing-in-itself becomes a thing-for-us. In the same way, the behaviourist is refuted by practice, by our relations with our fellow men, in which we count on their having instinctual drives like ourselves, leading to like actions, and “feel ourselves” into them sympathetically, so that their



consciousness-of-themselves becomes behaviour-for-us.

The common lives of men in association – far more powerful than the life experience of one individual – have summarised a whole range of transactions with outer reality, which are thus accessible to each and constitute the

known Universe. In the same way associated man has amassed a whole world of affective experience which is thus easily accessible and constitutes the common ego or Mind. Now a civilised man's view of outer reality is almost entirely built up of the common perceptual world: he sees the sun as a fiery star, cows as animals, iron as metal, and so on. The extraordinary Power and universality of language guarantees this. But it is just as true that his whole emotional consciousness, his whole feeling-attitude to the sun, iron, cows and so forth, is almost entirely built up from the common ego which enables us to live in close relation as men.

Once again we must emphasise that neither the common perceptual world nor the common ego makes men think or feel in a standardised way. On the contrary, they are the very means whereby man realises his individual differences. To members of an animal species, the world looks very much alike because it is such a simple world : their lives cannot differ much within a narrow range. To a human being born in a highly civilised society, the world is so complex and elaborate that his life can be unique – completely realisable of his genetic individuality. In the same way, animals of one species must have a very similar emotional life : their emotional world is so simple. But the social ego has been so subtilised and refined by generations of art and experience, that an individual can realise his emotional

peculiarities to the full within its frame.

A sunset is nothing to a beast; art makes it what it is to us. When words arouse a feeling-tone in us, we draw it from the social ego; otherwise how could a mere sound exactly arouse, like a note on a piano, a corresponding emotional reverberation selected from a socially recognised scale of values?

It is precisely because the complex social world and social ego offers such possibilities of realisation for the individuality, that we hear in modern civilisation so many complaints of the strangling of individuality by society. No such complaints are voiced in savage society, for the possibility of freedom does not yet exist. Man is too simple and cabined. When the development of the productive forces has been accomplished by a corresponding development in the social world and the social ego, giving man undreamed-of possibilities of self-realisation, and yet the utilisation of these forces is manifestly held back by the productive relations, then on all sides arise protests of "emotional starvation" and "crippling of personalities" in a world of rich consciousness, complaints which are the ideological counterpart of denunciations of malnutrition and unemployment in a world of plenty. They are part of the continually increasing volume of protest against modern society. They are the harbingers of revolution.

to be continued...

Courtesy—Illusion and Reality

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