

DISCUSSION

This is to express my sincerest appreciation of the paper "Towards a Living Culture" published in IPQ, Vol. XIV No. 2. The learned author describes this paper as a note, but it's definitely more than a note. In fact, some of the issues raised by Shri Sahu deserve further detailed discussion. I intend to place before the concerned some observations of my own regarding his overall idea of a "living culture".

Shri Sahu is very rightly keen on "counterposing a just culture against an unjust one" in free India (p. 160) Nietzsche, however, reminded us once that "The removal of God from the world deprives the idea of all meaning".¹ This is perhaps so because justice is a value which like any other value has very little, if any, rational basis or justification. Coming to think of it, justice is no more rational than injustice; and yet, we tend to consider justice *rational* because *rational* too has lately acquired high *value* due to the spread of scientific outlook. The unspoken dictate of our time is: "Human beings must be rational". This hidden "must" stands for the *value*-identity of *rational*. *Rational* is thus preferred to *irrational* not only because the former stands for expediency but also because it is considered right, proper and respectable. Because rationality is made valuable, we tend to believe that it is rational to be just. Value-laden words tend to get clustered in making a nearly total world-view which gradually acquires some kind of sacred power over human minds. Shri Sahu decries this magic power in the interest of a living culture. A living culture is indeed marked by its urge to and

capacity for change. The idea of sacredness is a threat to change. Science considers nothing as sacred – excepting, of course, the scientific spirit.

The scientific spirit in human beings urges us to look for the meaning of our social forms and mores – much of which is yet to be disclosed. Even this basic urge to look for meaning and systematic interpretation is also to be looked into. Once we begin doing that (as behavioural scientists and anthropologists have already begun), we cannot avoid taking note of persistent recurrence of the idea of *sacred* and *profane* in a variety of cultures. Any attempt to banish these words from cultural usage in the interest of keeping the culture alive and free from “superstitions” (p. 163 IPQ) may involve us in acting against the true spirit of scientific inquiry. A science of culture cannot thrive scientifically if culture is placed on an idealised pedestal where human beings cannot function spontaneously.

The trouble about human functioning and spontaneity arises largely from the fact that the readiness to act comes much ahead of man's proper comprehension of human conditions and/or natural surroundings. To cope with the immediate situation calling for action, human beings are made to evolve constructs of reality many of which can be seen later as defunct or superstitious. Had we been offered a chance to live in a group where all individuals were similar in disposition and equal in age and competence, we would have been free to fashion a different cultural mould. As human affairs now stand, human groups anywhere at any given time are marked by some degree of variety and, admitted or hidden, inequality. The interesting part of the story of natural groups is that there is a steady stream of new entrants (e.g. newborn babies) unaware of prevailing modes of evaluation requiring initiation. These aliens keep on reinterpreting, thereby restructuring, the code of the given culture in

terms of their level of understanding and felt need. The significance of this natural social process may not be overlooked.

Children's world-view, of course, may look very inadequate, perhaps superstitious too, to the adults belonging to the same *living culture*. But it is a requirement that living cultures provide enough space for children's imagination and activities. This I mention only to point out that in all cultures, different sub-cultures (such as the one of children's) are present making room for slight alterations in norms and imperative dictates, thus keeping the cultures free from stagnation. A careful study of this process is likely to give us a clue to a proper understanding of the emergence of values.

A hard line of formal reasoning makes us believe very firmly that nothing can be both "a" and "not-a". The presence of children in society offers us a refreshing digression. Children, in fact, concretely illustrate being both "children" and "not-children". Every moment they are outgrowing themselves. Since remaining "children" is not the goal of childhood, they continue to reach out for what they are not i.e., adults. This involves tension without which, of course, there could be no growth and no development of *values*. The child's yearning *to be what it is not* provides the basis for original value-experience of mankind. Apparently, there is nothing supernatural about it, but it can be viewed as something spiritual-meaning non-mundane. This yearning is unnecessary to maintain the status quo of *a child as a child*. In other words, *values* acquire a certain intrinsic quality because human beings, in the process of their attainment of full-blown individuality, need to reach out for things and ideas not required to maintain a status quo (but for the sake of the *idea of having it*). Significant individuals in human communities keep on enriching themselves by their capacity of outgrowing their earlier, limited ego. We know

a great man like Gautama Buddha as great because he could discard his identity as a prince and attain a new identity worthy of emulation. The process of evolution may be seen here at work. We can observe that human beings are yet to assume full human stature. So, the principle of evolution and the principle of spirituality can be seen as merging to support a living and morally engaging world-view. This *seeing* or vision is likely to emerge if a proper search was directed by us just as the principle of evolution was *seen* (discovered) by scientists through a painstaking research. No living culture can afford to lose sight of this scientific vision. On the other hand, no culture worth its name would throw away the vision of a seer. Much *knowledge* is stored in the form of myths, fantasy and old tales in ancient cultures. We would be in a position of enriching a living culture if we could decode hidden human messages contained in the body of those materials with the aid of evolving scientific tools. It is expected of the scientists that they would not only analyse but also synthesise the past with the future of mankind keeping the connecting link alive through the present.

Finally, a word about welcoming "noble thoughts from every side". Noble thoughts as well as significant visions are likely to arouse us, adults, to take a fresh look at our culture and, therefore, are welcome. Many adults, however, tend to lose balance under culture shock as they have neither the flexibility nor imagination necessary for the construction of a new model suitable for themselves. KCB's warning against "the surrender of our individuality" (quote: p. 168 IPQ) is meant for this group of adults easily taken in by *other* modes of living. Obviously, "noble thoughts" can ennoble only thinking selves. Self-identity is a basic issue in any cultural context. *Others* acquire meaning vis-a-vis Self; it would be a confused state of affairs if it were to happen the other way round. In our eagerness to emphasise

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