

UNITY IN DIVERSITY

The phenomenon of diversity in our country is truly awe-inspiring. The task of limbering one's way through this diversity to an idea of an "Indian culture and tradition" seems to be almost a hopeless one. We do talk about "a main-stream of Indian culture". But such talk frequently is of a merely consolatory talk the character of wishful thinking. This is not, however, to say that the idea or rather the ideal—of one Indian culture is an illusory one. The image of the diversity, forming a truly organic and vital unity, which haunted Gandhi was not a mere fiction of his imagination : Gandhi was not a man given to fantasies. However, it should not be surprising that with lesser men than Gandhi the image does often take on the character of fantasy and when this happens the dangers involved may be quite incalculable. [One can compare these dangers to the dangers of fantasy to the moral life. The greatest threat to the moral life comes from our almost compulsive propensity to fantasize ourselves. And a self-deluding self (the *aham* of *ahamkāra*) is capable only of sentimentality not of true moral concern.]

It is not our purpose, in this paper, to address ourselves to the task indicated above. There will be an element of false humility even in saying that such a task is beyond our capacity. We want merely to ask, with respect to two of the main divisive forces within our society—language and religion—the question, what ought to be my attitude to another language and to another religion ? The question as we conceive it, is primarily a moral one; and we presume it will be agreed that it is important to ask it in this form before a *political* answer to it is sought.

A. Let us first take the phenomenon of linguistic diversity. However, a question which it is important to ask before we consider the phenomenon of linguistic diversity is : What is it to have a language at all ? Or is there something distinctive about a language using creature *qua* language using creature ? It may seem obvious that man's capacity to use language marks him off in a most radical way from other terrestrial creatures. It has of course been a matter of debate whether some lower animals might also not be language using creatures in however rudimentary a form.

But this debate must, so it seems to us—either remain inconclusive, or, if it is decided at all, the grounds for saying that the lower animals at least the ones we have known so far cannot properly be called language—using creatures at all are much stronger than any for the opposite conclusion. Let us explain. It may be thought quite naturally, but to our mind unjustifiably—that the only conclusive evidence for whether or not any of the lower animals speaks (or uses) a language would be provided in a situation where we, language using creatures, could, as it were, enter the mind of the lower animal in question, and see what goes on there. Thus for me to be certain that dogs, for instance, speak a language, it would be necessary for me to know what it would be like to be a dog from the inside, as it were. But such a thing, as can easily be shown, is logically impossible, in spite of Kafka and fairy tales to the contrary. It follows, therefore, that if we insist on the kind of evidence we have talked about, the question whether or not animals other than us speak a language must forever remain inconclusive.

But, fortunately, there is another, more hopeful approach available; and this is to examine certain crucial features of our language to see whether their explanation must not be in terms which are radically different from explanations available of features of animal behaviour which might *prima facie* be thought to embody a language. The following may be regarded as some of the crucial features of our language : our ability always to use words and combinations of them in such a way as to say things in the language which might never have been said before: our ability to represent the past and the future as well as the present, to make general statements, and therefore, also to give reasons for or against such statements, to lie, to promise and so on. Now an important truth about all these features of our language—a truth whose proof we cannot go into here—is that they cannot in principle be explained in terms of the causal laws of our sciences. Such laws—if there were any—would have been more complex versions of the classical Pavlovian principle of conditioned reflex.

But as Noam Chomsky has brilliantly argued and as much of Wittgenstein's philosophical work clearly shows such laws cannot in principle exist. On the other hand it does seem as though a fairly good case can be made out for saying that all sub-human

animal behaviour, including behaviour which might seem to be linguistic, might admit of explanation in terms of the causal laws of our sciences. This is not to say that so such laws do in fact exist—but only that there is no logical implausibility in the suggestion that they might. And if this is so, it does seem rather sharply to mark human in so far as they are language using creatures—off from other terrestrial creatures.

B. Given that man is unique in being a user of language, there can be various different kinds of intellectual puzzlements about this capacity of man's. Some of the specifically philosophical puzzlements are: how is it possible for a word to have a meaning at all? Does language reflect reality; or, does not in some sense constitute reality? Are there some features of a language which are indispensable in the sense that nothing could as a language at all if it did not incorporate these features? In what way, if any, is a language connected with the sense of identity of a linguistic group?

It is the last two of the above questions that are relevant to our present purpose. Let us take the first. Immanuel Kant argued, we think, with considerable plausibility that our capacity to think at all depended necessarily on our being able to bring a set of concepts to bear upon the object of our thought. Of course—so one might say—*all* thinking must be thinking through concepts. But Kant's point was that the concepts in terms of which we think about the world and ourselves must include some which are such that without them *no* thinking—not just thinking about a particular object or area of our experience but *no thinking at all*—would be possible. Such according to Kant would be the concepts of space, time, substance, property, causality and so on. There can be a dispute about Kant's list of such concepts, but it seems to us, as indeed to many others, that Kant's central argument for his general position—the argument known as the transcendental deduction of the categories—cannot be refuted. But what is the significance of Kant's general point for the question about language that we are considering? One way of answering this might be as follows: The relationship between thought and language has been a subject of lively debate in philosophy: some believe that not only is it the case that no language is possible without thought, but also that no thought is possible except in language. Some however

deny the latter: there might be thought which is inexpressible in language, and some talk about "ineffable" experience. But there is a weaker thesis which, we think, is fairly non-controversial. And this is the thesis not that *all* thinking would be impossible without language, but that all *conceptual* thinking would be impossible without language. And the validity of Kant's thesis about indispensable concepts must range at least over all thinking which is conceptual. But all conceptual thinking must be embodied (capable of being embodied) in language, a very important consequence follows from the validity of Kant's thesis. And this is that any language—if it is a language at all—must necessarily have room for concepts without the application of which no conceptual thinking would be possible. This means that different languages must have a common core, namely, the core which embodies what Kant calls the categories. And although one might quarrel with Kant's list of the categories, it does look as though the correct list must include at least some from Kant's e. g. space, time, negation, cause, substance. This establishes a truly fundamental unity among all languages—a unity consisting in the fact that they all share a *basic* (central) conceptual framework. There may be variations in details, in certain kinds of sophistications and discriminations, but the fundamental structure must be the same. Also, although the "categories" (*a priori* concepts) might change through history, their central application must remain more or less unaltered, permanent (eternal). Thus take the concept of time. This may vary widely from language to language—and therefore, some might say—from culture to culture—but whatever the variations, the centre of the concept must be the same. This centre would consist of distinctions such as before, after, at the same time, as early, late etc. And there could be no language in which one could talk about one's experiences, and which, yet, did not have room for distinctions such as the above.

An important corollary of this fundamental unity of all languages is that it ensures the mutual shareability of human experiences. Also, since all human languages must equally share the same basic equipment, it is impossible that any language can be, in any fundamental sense, inferior to another language.

C. But the most conspicuous fact about human languages seems not to be their unity, but rather their extraordinary diver-

sity. The question that interests us about this phenomenon is that of some of the logical—or, if you like, quasi-logical-implications of a language's being distinct from another language. The point about "logical" or "quasi-logical" is that the answer it seeks is not based primarily on many detailed empirical investigation of the phenomenon of the differences between one language and another, but rather on the philosophical contemplation of the concept of language itself. In this sense, our concern is different from that of, for example, some of the anthropologists and linguists.

In recent times, many people—sometimes of otherwise radically different intellectual persuasions—have made two connected points out language : (i) that it is not the case that there is first an inner (mental) world of "ideas" or "meanings", and that then language is used to represent this world of meanings. (This theory of language has a fairly respectable antiquity both in India and in the West). And (ii) that what really gives life to the utterances or marks which constitute a language—i. e., what makes these utterances and marks a language at all—is their intimate connection with the activities of the users of the language in question. The interesting point about (ii) is that this position is wide enough to include within it widely divergent philosophical theories about language. Three such philosophical theories are : the theory of psychological behaviourism (associated with the name of Skinner), the theory of *philosophical* behaviourism which is quite radically different from Skinner's theory and, in many ways, is logically exclusive of the latter (a theory much favoured by Anglo-American philosophers in the sixties); and a theory associated with the name of Wittgenstein and frequently confused with the second. This is not the place to discuss the relative merits of these theories. What we wish to do is merely to draw upon one or two basic contentions of the third of these theories—which we consider to be the most illuminating—and see if they throw any light on the question which we posed at the beginning of this section, and possibly also on the question, "What ought to be my attitude to another language ?".

One of the ideas that Wittgenstein introduces during the course of his discussion of the problem of meaning in his *Philosophical Investigations* is the idea of a "form of life". The idea is by no means a clear one, and Wittgenstein's own use of it cannot

be said to be wholly coherent. And also a variety of philosophers have so both used and abused the idea that it is—like many great ideas—in danger of being completely vulgarised. However, it seems safe enough to say the following : consider, for example, the language of greeting. Greeting a person is not just a matter of uttering a particular word or set of words in his presence and at the same time to cause him to hear it. It is connected with an extremely complex variety of bodily gestures, tone of voice and what one does (including what one says) before and after what may be regarded as “actual act of greeting.” Take the word “Namaste”: it may be accompanied by the folding of hands (and imagine the extraordinary variety of ways in which hands may be folded and could still count as a gesture appropriate to greeting) by a smile (and think of the different kinds of smile that may be appropriate here), by a bow of the head, by touching the person’s feet (and here again think of the variety of ways in which these may be done).

But this is only a fragment of the activities associated with the language of greeting. Greeting a friend is different from greeting a mere acquaintance; and greeting a son is different from greeting a friend of one’s son. Also think of the numerous ways in which an overt act of greeting may in fact be intended and communicated as some thing quite the opposite, e. g. as an insult. And what follows an act of greeting very frequently determines the “quality” of the act. It is clear that whatever it is that determines the meaning of the language of greeting must allow for the possibility of such a complex network of activities, whose connections with one another are subtle, pliable, without any sharp boundaries and pregnant with new possibilities. This network of activities may be called a “form of life” ; but it is perhaps best to reserve this term to all that is embodied in the domain of a *whole* language—a language which can be *individuated*. Greeting in one language will undoubtedly be similar to greeting in another language—but each has its own individual “flavour”, subtleties, nuances and in short—its own life which it gets from its connections (just as complicated and pliable as the connections among the activities coming relatively specifically under it), with activities associated with other parts of the language in question. And we can say that a language which is distinct embodies a vast network of mutually related and mutually meaning endowing,

open-ended activities which can truly be called a distinct form of life. Aristotle had said with tremendous insight that a man's body is the form of his soul. We may say—varying the Aristotlian idea a little—that the language of a people is the form of their soul. If Kant had shown—although he would not perhaps have liked *this* way of putting his point that everyman's soul must have the same basic structure, it seems equally plausible to say that the variations between one "soul" and another are at least partly a function of his native language.

One of the most beautiful statement of the Wittgensteinian idea of a form of life is the following by Stanley Cavell :

We learn and teach words in certain contexts, and then we are expected and, expect others, to be able to project them into further contexts. Nothing insures that this projection will take place (in particular, not the grasping of universals, nor the grasping of books of rules), just as nothing insures that we will make, and understand, the same projections. That on the whole we do is a matter of sharing routes of interest and feeling, modes of response, sense of humour and of significance and of fulfilment, of what is outrageous, of what is similar to what else what a rebuke, what forgiveness, of when an utterance is an assertion, when an appeal, when an explanation, all the whirl of organism Wittgenstein calls "form of life". Human speech and activity, sanity and community, rest upon nothing more, but nothing less, than this. ["The Availability of Wittgenstein's Philosophy" in *Must We Mean What We Say* CUP 1976, (p 52)].

This, we think, makes clear our point about a language being form of the "soul" of a people. We can also see why a language should afford a special bond of unity among its native speakers. It represents a unity and coherence of activities which, in some sense of the term, *defines* the bounds within which the speakers of the language seek and find their collective as well as individual self awareness. While economic, political and other factors might undoubtedly be important in making a language a symbol of identity and unity, the most important thing which underlines the sense of unity among the speakers of a native language is the inevi-

table sense of participation in what we have called a form of life. One must, however, remember that a language can accommodate within itself—within the same form of life—an incredible amount of variations; and occasionally, the variations shade into a distinct language.

D. To return to the question with which we began this essay; What ought to be my attitude to another language? A language is sometimes criticised on grounds such as the following; (i) that it is a distorted version of another language (e. g. “Assamese is a distortion of Bengali”); (ii) that it does not have a script (“no tribal language in the North—East has its own script”); (iii) that does not have a literature (“the Miri language does not have a literature and, therefore it is only a ‘dialect’”); (iv) that it is incomplete (inadequate) (“the Bengali language says much better what the Apatani language can say only inadequately”).

To take these in order (i) Two languages may be very closely similar to one another, and can thus be shown even to have a common origin; but this does not make either of them an inferior version of the other or of the “original” language. A language—or a form of life—is what it is and not another one in a different guise. The individuation of a language is undoubtedly a difficult task, and often in the actual act of individuation, considerations other than “linguistic” (in the broad sense in which a language encompasses a distinct form of life) may be involved. Such consideration may be political, economic, historical, racial and so on. But the claim by a group that their native language is autonomous and distinct, although motivated partly by any or all of these considerations—(is there ever a “pure, unmixed” motive of any human action?),—is almost invariably associated with the perception, by the group, of significant differences in their form of life. To think that this language is a distorted version of one’s own may exhibit an arrogance and insensitiveness which could be compared to the arrogance and insensitiveness of thinking that there is no way of looking at a thing other than one’s own.

(ii) To criticise another language on the ground that it does not have a script is peculiarly misplaced. The script of a language is not an internal part of it. It stands, as it were, outside the language in a way in which the activities we have talked about cannot stand outside the language, and it gets whatever “life” it

has from the language and not the other way round. A script without a language is "dead", but a language without a script is still very much a language, not less of a one. The presence of a script may undoubtedly help in the growth of a language insofar as it facilitates the exploration of the possibilities of the languages, but such explorations can take place, and have taken place without the help of a script. The absence of a script is not a criterion of the poverty of a language.

(iii) The third kind of criticism is, however, serious. The possibility of literature is inherent in any language, and it is in literature that the bounds of meaning of a language are continuously explored and extended.¹ A language which has not developed a literature has not, as it were, "realized" itself. But is there in fact a language which does not have a literature? If the emergence of literature is not thought to be dependent on the existence of a written tradition—and it will be merely silly to think so—then, we do not think there is in fact a language without a literature. For, literature will then include stories, songs, legends, "myths" (if that is the correct word), parables, incantations and so on. It is quite safe to say that there isn't a language which does not have a good measure of all these. In fact quite frequently, the primary source of creativity given in a written tradition of literature is to be found in the symbols employed in these stories, songs etc.

(iv) In a sense, no language is complete, because it must always be possible for new things to be said in it. But when a language is criticised as being incomplete what is meant is that things are (can be) said in the language—but vaguely, confusedly or inadequately while the same things can be said clearly and adequately in another language. And this is not true. An attempt to "improve" a language by inducting elements into it from a different language so that the "same" things may be said more completely in the former cannot succeed, because the result of such an attempt is not that the *same* things are said less confusedly in the language but that something *different* is also said in it now. When Wittgenstein says that any given language is "complete, he means that you fall into a confusion if you try to provide a more ample and more perfect system for what may be said in it. Whatever may be said in your new system, it will not be what was said in the original language game". (Rush Rhees, *ibid* p. 102).

If what we have said about the relationship between a language and a form of life is on the whole correct, then it is quite clear that a language must afford a specially intimate access to the culture of the people whose native language it is. A culture, of course, includes things like the way a people cultivate their land, bury their dead, celebrate marriages, build their houses and so on. And a study of the culture must include a study of all these and more. But these peoples' language which of course, include its literature is not *another* of these cultural things that they have. It embodies, as it were, the *special* "life" and "tone" of the entire culture. That is why mastering another language is not just a matter of mastering its grammatical rules, vocabulary and accent. It is much more importantly a matter of understanding nuances of gestures, pauses, voice, and subtle difference of action and reactions. In the absence of such an understanding, speaking another's language with a mastery over its grammar etc., is speaking it without grasping the "life" of the language. And one's access to another culture based on what might be called a mere "mechanical" understanding of its language (its grammar and pronunciation) is therefore bound to be a superficial one. Also, therefore any assessment of the culture based on such an understanding of its language must be fraught with danger—both intellectual and moral. There will be a great danger of assimilating it to one's own and applying to it one's own criteria of evaluation. If the assimilation is wrong the evaluation is bound to be wrong (some one who thinks of polyandry as practised in some societies as indicating an extraordinary moral depravity in the women of these societies, makes this type of mistake of assimilation and evaluation).

We would like to conclude this part of the essay by quoting Ivan Illich. Illich speaks here only of silences; our belief is that there are hosts of other things about a language to which Illich's points about silence equally apply. But in *spirit* what he says is the same—(only more eloquent)—as what we have been labouring to say. Thus Illich :

To learn a language in a human and mature way, therefore, is to accept the responsibility for its silences and for its sounds. The gift a people gives us in teaching us their language is more a gift of the rhythm, the mode and subtleties of its system of silences than of its system of

sounds. It is an intimate gift for which we are accountable to the people who have entrusted us with their tongue. A language of which I know only the words and not the pauses is a continuous offence. It is as the caricature of a photographic negative.

It takes more time and effort and delicacy to learn the silence of a people than to learn its sounds. Some people have a special gift for this. Perhaps this explains why some missionaries, notwithstanding their efforts, never come to speak properly, to communicate delicately through silences. Although they speak with the "accent of natives" they remain forever thousands of miles away. The learning of the grammar of silence is an art much more difficult to learn than the grammar of sounds.

As words must be learned by listening and by painful attempts at imitation of a native speaker, so silences must be acquired through delicate openness to them. Silence has its pauses and hesitations, its rhythms and expressions and inflections; its durations and pitches, and times to be and times not to be. Just as with our words there is an analogy between our silence with man and with Government. To learn the full meaning of one, we must practise and deepen the other. (Celebrations of Awareness, Pelican 1970).

II

A. Let us turn now to the second of the two questions we posed at the beginning of this essay: What ought to be my attitude to another religion? Our answer to this has of course been, "secularism." But the difficulties with this idea have hardly ever been explored with any degree of seriousness. The idea has generated three principal lines of thought—all, to our mind, crucially mistaken: (i) a vaguely relativistic conception of the interrelationship between religions; (ii) a reduction of the sphere of religion to the private and the "inner"; (iii) the hope that with the spread of the "scientific temper" all religions will in any case die a natural death.

To take these in order: (i) The idea of relativism has regained

a certain amount of intellectual respectability in recent times mainly through the efforts of the academic discipline of anthropology. The phenomenon, as we see it, is also a feeble and somewhat self-deluding attempt on the part of Western intellectuals who are concerned with the study of *other* societies, to atone for the past (and present) "sins" of their society. But relativism whether cultural, moral or religious — is born of confusion. The general argument for relativism, as Bernard Williams puts it, consists of three propositions: "that 'right' means (can only be coherently understood as meaning) 'right for a given society', that 'right for a given society' is to be understood in a functionalist sense; and that (therefore) it is wrong for people in one society to condemn, interfere with, etc., the values of another society".² And as Williams rightly says: "The view is clearly inconsistent since it makes a claim in its third proposition, about what is right or wrong in one's dealings with other societies, which uses a non-relative sense of 'right' not allowed for in the first proposition."³ One could construct an exactly parallel argument for the relativity of religions: "Right in religion" means "right for a given religion"; "right for a given religion" is to be understood in a functionalist sense, and therefore it is wrong for people belonging to one religion to condemn, interfere with, etc., the values of another religion. And the same criticism would be applicable equally well to this argument; for the notion of wrong used in the conclusion is non-relative, and this is ruled out by the first proposition of the argument. But although relativism is thus mistaken, its heart is almost in the right place. There is all too frequently a tendency on the part of the practitioners of one religion to criticise and condemn practices in another religion as "superstitious", "immoral", "animistic" and so on. The element of truth in the argument from relativity is that such criticism nearly always arises from misconceptions generated by assumptions of superiority of one's own religion and its practices. But to say this is obviously very different from saying that no religion has a right at all to talk in an evaluative way about another religion.

(ii) There is obviously a sense in which one's religion is a matter of one's inner, if you like — private life. It is the potential source of one's as we say, "inner" strength, "spiritual" joy and harmony. But when in the name of secularism religion is relegated

to the sphere of the inner or the private, the words are given a sense which, in some ways, radically distorts the very notion of religion. "Inner" in this sense means "divorced altogether from man's social life". And understood in this way, religion soon comes to be identified with what is sometimes called "religious behaviour" i.e., performance of rituals, prayer, meditation and so on. And these, while they might be connected with man's "spiritual" vision, whatever that might mean, have so it is claimed — nothing essentially to do with man's social (which includes political) existence. As Mr. Pettigrew in Anthony Burgess' novel 1985 puts its "Do I make myself at least a little clear? I have nothing against the inner vision so long as it is controlled by him who holds it, kept sealed from the outer world, cherished behind locked doors. The outer world cannot accept the inner vision without pain, for the values of the outer world are of a substance so different from the inner one that they cannot meet — as phosphorus and water cannot meet without dangerous conflagration. Now, you will ask, what are the values of the outer world? They are simple, and their simplicity is the inevitable attribute of a generality. They consist in all that men possess in common — the need to live, which means the need to live, which means the need to work and to be paid for that work." (p. 159). The answer on this view of religion, to the question, "What ought to be my attitude to another religion?" would appear to be clear enough : Just as I must not let my religion which is private to me get mixed up with my public (social) life, I must not in any way interfere with, or even show any (indecent) curiosity about another person's religion.

The element of truth in the inner world theory is that one's religion is not something that one makes a public show of or flaunts for this implies vanity and vanity is irreligious. But this of course has nothing to do with the divorce between man's religion and his social life. As a matter of general belief the dichotomy that has frequently been made between man's inner (mental) and outer life suffers from grave logical difficulties.⁴ But in the case of religion, the mistake is so obvious that it is a wonder that it has been made at all to and make with such persistence. Spirituality is undoubtedly something that man achieves "within" himself; but this within is as though nothing unless it manifests itself *without*. Gandhi saw this with the greatest clarity :

"I do not believe that spiritual law works on a field of its own, it expresses itself only through the ordinary activities of life. It thus affects the economic, social and political fields." (*Young India*, 25 September, 1924).

"You must watch my life, how I live, eat, sleep, talk, behave in general. The sum total of all those in me is my religion". (*Harijan*, 22 September, 1946).

"Religion which takes no account of practical affairs and does not help to solve them, is no religion." (*Young India*, 7 May, 1925).

"If any action of mine claimed to be spiritual is proved to be unpractical, it must be pronounced to be a failure. I do believe that the most spiritual act is the most practical in the true sense of the term." (*Harijan*, 1 July, 1939).

"I cannot conceive politics as divorced from religion. Indeed religion should pervade every one of our actions." (*Harijan*, 10 February, 1942).

The motive, however, behind the attempted divorce between one's religion and one's outer life is not far to seek. For the religious person his religious vision is necessarily also the source of his moral life. The moral life of the religious person is bound by among other things the following concepts: unity, infinite perfectibility, the necessary reality of God and of person — the mutual togetherness of the virtues in which togetherness alone they can count as virtue, what creates the possibility of the togetherness of the virtues in the religious person — as perhaps even in a non-religious person — is their being mediated by *love*. God is the supreme example of this togetherness.

No man can exhaustively embody goodness; only God does this. For man the moral life is a perpetual *pursuit*. How, then, it may be asked can one be certain that the moral pursuit is not ultimately an illusory one? i.e. might it not be the case that the idea of moral perfection is after all empty? This indeed may be a central question in moral philosophy. And there might be ways of answering it in the negative without bringing God into the picture. (See for instance, Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, pp. 64-66). For the religious person, however, God and therefore goodness — exists *necessarily*. And this is not so much a matter of

proof as, "a clear assertion of faith? [it (The ontological proof) is often admitted to be appropriate only for those already convince] which could only confidently be made on the basis of certain amount of experience" (p. 63).

Given this idea of morality, as embodied in a religious vision, —intolerably sketchily presented as it is — it is not difficult to see why religion cannot be seen to have an organic place in contemporary social life. The insight which informs modern civilization— if one dares to talk about such a thing — is that selfishness is an essential condition of man; that man, constituted as he is, is incapable of overcoming, even in the slightest possible degree, his original all-engulfing selfishness. (Freud, Marx, Nietzsche). The religious idea of *love* as unifying and integrating the moral life is therefore incapable of manifestation in the "outer" world. To insist that it only creates confusion and is a hindrance to an enlightened and systematic pursuit of the self which is after all the best thing that can possibly be done. But understandable as the relegation of the religious to the "inner" is, it is nonetheless based on a grave mistake which leads to an incredibly distorted view of the religious life.

(iii) Turning now to the third of the three lines of thought which the idea of secularism has generated or at least is associated with; all religions are basically irrational; some may be more irrational than others, but since irrationality, is, as it were, an essential part of the stuff of religion, the "scientific mind" looks at them all with equal intellectual disfavour. The scientific "spirit" hopefully will continue to spread among mankind, and with this the fundamental irrationality of religion will show itself with increasing clarity; and thus we shall one day see the complete disappearance of the phenomenon of religion from this earth.

The charge of irrationality is made in two ways : One way is to say that religious awareness — or, better, religious discourse — like any other kind of discourse must be bound by the same criteria of rationality as are implicit in science; but had although it is so bound, it fails, beyond repair, to satisfy these criteria. The other way is to say that religious discourse falls entirely outside the bounds of scientific discourse, and as such, is, not so much irrational as totally unintelligible (in a non-reductionist sense). The first makes an assumption which is false, namely, the assumption that the idea

of rationality implicit in religious talk (or activity) as the same as that embodied in science. (By science here is meant, of course, any mode of human activity which deliberately conforms to the assumptions, principles and method of the natural sciences). To take two areas of human activity which perhaps are much more crucial to man's existence than science — morality and artistic activity — neither is "scientific" in the sense in which the term is being used. "Science can instruct morality at certain points and can change its direction, but it cannot contain morality. Moral concepts do not move about *within* a hard world set up by science and logic. They set up for different purposes, a different world."⁵ The same is true of aesthetic pursuit and of religious awareness.

There may be connections between the moral, the aesthetic and the religious (as we have already partly hinted) such that any way of making one of them genuinely intelligible must have a central bearing on the other two. One might then say that the same idea of intelligibility and therefore of rationality — is operative within the three areas. But even if they did not, as it were, have this strength in unity, the thesis that because morality, aesthetic activity and religion are not bound by the limits (criteria) of science, they must therefore be unintelligible (and irrational), cannot be justified except in a question-begging way.⁶

Thus it is that the idea of secularism as spelt out in any of the above three ways cannot yield an adequate answer to the question: "What ought to be my attitude to another religion?". There are, of course, "non-secular" answers available to the question i.e., answers within one or another particular religion. Unfortunately, however, frequently an answer in terms of the theology of any particular religion tends to be self-laudatory, and, correspondingly, other-deprecatory. And it is precisely because a person of a given faith may be genuinely dissatisfied with such an answer available within it, and yet lose neither his faith nor his religiosity, that it is important to seek a non-theological answer to the question which will not, at the same time, be "secular" in any of the above three senses. Gandhi attempted such an answer with tremendous intellectual and moral urgency, and this attempt still remains, to our mind, the most insightful. We shall conclude by a consideration of this.

Interestingly enough Gandhi also spoke of "secularism"

as providing the proper framework for regulating the inter-relationship between religions. But his use of the term (fairly rare, as it happens) is radically different from the ways in which the term—as we have tried to indicate—has generally been employed. “Secularism” for him, meant “equal respect for all religions”—and equal respect springing neither from any idea of relativism, nor from the belief that what is private to another person must be respect what is private to oneself, nor, of course from the idea that since all religions are irrational, they deserve — all of them — equal (dis) respect.

The Gandhian argument for equal respect for all religions is an argument from, one might say, the unity of all religions. It is based on the following statements which Gandhi believed to be true of religion as such : (i) each religion has a centre which may be said to consist of man’s insight into his own transcendental core, which, in its turn, is inextricably bound up with his morality; (ii) each religion is also associated with a network of beliefs, doctrines, legends and stories; and (iii) there is also a mode of worship, peculiar to every religion.

On (i) consider the following passages :

Let me explain what I mean by religion. It is not the Hindu religion which I certainly prize above all other religions, but the religion which transcends Hinduism, which changes one’s very nature, which binds one indissolubly to the truth within and which ever purifies. It is the permanent element in human nature which counts no cost too great in order to find full expression and which leaves the soul utterly restless until it has found itself, known its maker and appreciated the true correspondence between the maker and itself.”

Young India, 12 May, 1920.

There is no religion higher than truth and righteousness.

Ethical Religion, p. 49.

If a man reaches the heart of his own religion he has reached the heart of the others too.

Polak, p. 41

Gandhi's assertion here about the "heart" of religion, about "true religion" is not an empirical one in either the sense that he arrived at it by means of an empirical investigation of different religions of the world; or that the discovery of a religion which did not have such a core would falsify his claim. Although Gandhi's knowledge of both Christianity and Islam was profound, he did not study either religion with a view, as it were, to confirming his hypothesis about "essence" of religion. Gandhi's belief springs on the one hand, from his "original" (in the Kantian sense) conviction that it is impossible that God does not exist, and on the other hand from the idea that the mark of a true religion is that it affords primarily an insight into this truth. If it is claimed that there could be a religion which does not afford such an insight, Gandhi's reply would be either that the religion in question has been fundamentally misconceived by its critics (who were most likely to have been people belonging to a different religion), or that an unlikely even — the full potentialities of the religion have not been realized. In the latter case, as Gandhi would argue, it is the task of people belonging to another faith not to criticise the religion so as to persuade its adherents to abandon it, but rather to *help* it realise its *own* potentialities. This point will become clear from a consideration of the other two statements.

(ii) Gandhi believed that the network of beliefs, doctrines, theories and stories associated with any religion is the product of a particular culture and tradition, and that, therefore, they are historically conditioned. As such, they are subject to changes (they could, for instance, be made philosophically more sophisticated); open to newer interpretations, and even to partial rejection. No such network of beliefs etc., can therefore claim absolute finality or perfection. They are all more or less imperfect. "And if all faiths outlined by men are imperfect, the question of comparative merit does not arise. All faiths constitute a revelation of truth, but all are imperfect and liable to error. Reverence to other faiths need not blind us to their faults. We must be keenly alive to the defects of our own faith also, yet not leave it on that account, but try to overcome those defects. Looking at all religions with an equal eye, we would not only not hesitate, but would think it our duty, to blend into our faith every acceptable features of other faith." (*Sabarmati*).

The argument in the passage quoted is clear enough : The Doctrinaire (for want of a better word) aspect of any religion cannot claim perfection, but just as this aspect of a religion is liable to error, it is also always open to improvement. This cannot, however, be a ground for giving up one's traditional faith in favour of another — the reasons for this being that (a) one's own faith affords the perception of the 'truth of religion' and can ensure the possibility of the spiritual life just as much as another, and (b) it is better to endeavour to remove the shortcomings and defects of one's own faith than to give it up altogether and embrace another which is just as likely to have its own shortcomings and defects. Further, according to Gandhi, one's traditional faith, "however crude", is "uniquely valuable to one", because the first step to any authentic self-awareness is the realization of one's profound indebtedness to one's own tradition.

(iii) Every religion has its own mode or modes of worship. But one thing that is common to all these modes of worship is their use of what Gandhi calls "symbolism". Symbols vary widely from one religion to another, or even within the same religion; by *as* symbol no one symbol or set of them can claim logical superiority over another. Logically each one is on a par with another whether it is an idol, or a sacred grove, or a sacred stone or a tree, or a holy river, book or a temple, mosque or a church. One chooses one's mode of worship according to one's tradition and inclination — none is in principle, preferable to another.

If we now put (i), (ii) and (iii) together, the conclusion is clear; no religion, in principle, deserve more respect than another — in other words, every religion must be equally respected. In Gandhi's words : "God has created different faiths just as He has the votaries thereof. How can I even secretly harbour the thought that my neighbour's faith is inferior to mine and wish that he should give up his faith and embrace mine? As a true and loyal friend, I can only wish and pray that he may live and grow perfect in his own faith. In God's house there are many mansions and they are equally holy" (*Harijan*, 20 April, 1934).

The only proper relationship between religions is, therefore what Gandhi calls an "international fellowship". The idea of the fellowship is to be understood in terms of mutual co-existence

based on (1) mutual respect, (2) a sincere preparedness to learn from one another, and (3) a desire to *understand* another faith such that it is untainted by a wish to criticise and undermine the faith.⁷ (Such an understanding, says Gandhi, will “give one a grasp of the rock-bottom unity of all religions and afford a glimpse also of the universal and absolute truth which lies beyond the ‘dust of creeds and faith’”. *Young India*, 16 December, 1928).

The great advantage of the Gandhian concept of “fellowship” over the concept of secularism is that it is, unlike the latter, based on a clear-sighted recognition of the extraordinary power—spiritual, intellectual and moral—of the true religious vision. Secularism, in any of the varieties that we have considered must, on the other hand, deny the very *seriousness* of this visions. And how can one even presume to solve the problem of the relationship between different religions, if one’s starting point is the assumption that religion represents a point of view — a form of life which is ultimately non-serious, i.e., which cannot be taken seriously for its own sake but only for the sake of things *other* than the religious point of view or the religious form of life? It seems to us also that the Gandhian idea of “fellowship” can obviously yield concrete principles of action which could have an immensely greater practical impact than our notion of secularism.

We conclude with what we take to be Gandhian thoughts about tribal religions and the great phenomenon of conversion in the North-East region of our country; (i) The idea of “international fellowship” must naturally be extended to tribal religions. (Although Gandhi did not make a specific study of any tribal religion, we are absolutely certain that he would have been in total agreement with the statement of the Red Indian chief quoted in the appendix to this paper). (ii) Conversion from one religion (say, a tribal religion) to another (say, Christianity, Islam or Hinduism) frequently involves a violation of the principles of fellowship. (iii) When conversion is based on the violation of the principles of fellowship, some of the likely consequence are : (a) the convert’s loss of spiritual moorings; (b) an increasing identification of religion with what Gandhi calls the “dust of creeds”, (c) A conscious *and* deliberate denial to oneself the sources of creativity inherent in one’s own past resulting in a sense of inadequacy which may have quite unexpected manifestations.

It seems fairly certain to us that the large scale and systematic conversions that have taken place in the North-East in recent decades have in fact been attended to a greater or less extent, by the consequences that we have just mentioned. It is quite extraordinary that academics in this country seem to give no importance at all to this.

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NOTES

1. Language is something that can have a literature. This is where it is so different from chess. And if we include folk songs and stories then literature is immensely important in almost any language, important for the ways in which things said in the language are understood. It has to do with the 'force' which one remark or another may have in that language, for instance. And in this way it has to do also with what is seen to make sense and what is not". Rush Rees, *Discussions of Wittgenstein*, London, 1970.
2. B. Williams : *Morality*, Cambridge, 1976, p.36
3. *Ibid.*
4. Much of Wittgenstein's later work is devoted to a passionate exposure of these mistakes.
5. Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, London, 1970, p. 38.
6. Some of the problems connected with this are discussed in my book entitled *Philosophy of Psychoanalysis*, Simla, 1977.
7. Gandhi believed that one whose desire is "pure" in this sense, should, in studying another religion, follow a particular rule—and this is that "one should study them (all great religions) only through the writings of known votaries of the respective religions. For instance, if one wants to study the *Bhāgavata*, one should do so not through a translation of its made by hostile critic but prepare by a lover of the *Bhāgavata*. Similarly, to study the *Bible*, one should study it through commentaries of devoted *Christians*."

APPENDIX

In 1855 President Franklin Pierce of the United States made a "request" to Chief Sealth of the Suwamish tribe of Indians (who, live in what is now the State of Washington) to "sell" his land to the government. In reply, Chief Sealth sent the following letter to the President :

"The great Chief in Washington sends word that he wishes to buy our land. The great Chief also sends us words of friendship and good will. This is kind of him, since we know that he has little need of our friendship in return. But we will consider your offer, for we know that if we do not do so, the white man may come with guns and take our land.

How can you buy or sell the sky, the warmth of the land? The idea is strange to us. Yet we do not own the freshness of the air or the sparkle of the water. How can you buy them from us? Every part of this earth is sacred to my people. Every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every clearing and humming insect is holy in the memory and experience of my people.

We know that the white man does not understand our ways. One portion of the land is the same to him as the next, for he is a stranger who comes in the night and takes from the land whatever he needs. The earth is not his brother, but his enemy, and when he has conquered it, he moves on. His appetite will devour the earth and leave behind only a desert. The sight of your cities pains the eyes of the red man. But perhaps it is because the red man is a savage and does not understand.

If I decide to accept I will make one condition. The white man must treat the beasts of this land as his brothers. What is man without beasts? If all the beasts were gone, man would die from great loneliness of the spirit, for whatever happens to the beasts also happens to man.

One thing we know which the white man may one day discover : Our God is the same God. You may think you own him as you wish to own your land. But you cannot. He is the God of men. And this compassion is equal for the red man and the white man. The earth is precious to him. The whites, too, shall pass perhaps sooner than other tribes. Continue to conta-

minate your bed and you will one night suffocate in your own waste. When the buffaloes are all slaughtered, the wild horses all tamed, the sacred corner of the forest heavy with the scent of men, and the view of the ripe hills, volted by talking wines, where is the thicket? Where is the eagle? And, what is it to say good bye to the shift and the hunt? The end of living and the beginning of dying.

There is no quiet place in the white man's cities. No place to hear the leaves of spring or the rustle of insect wings. But perhaps because I am a savage and do not understand. The clatter only seems to insult the ears. And what is there to life if a man cannot hear the lovely cry of the whippoorwill or the argument of the frogs around a pond at night? The Red Indian prefers the soft sound of the wind itself cleaned by the midnight rain, or scented with a pine. The air is precious to the red man, for all things share the same breath, the beasts, the trees, the man. The white man does not seem to notice the air he breathes. Like a man dying for many years, he is humbled to the smell.

We might understand if we know what the white man dreams, what hopes he describes to his children on long winter nights; what visions he burns into their minds; so that they will wish for tomorrow. But we are savages. The white man's dreams are hidden from us.

And because they are hidden, we will go on our own way. If we agree, it will be to secure our reservation you have promised. There perhaps we may live out our brief days as we wish. When the last red man has vanished from the earth, and the memory is only the shadow of a cloud moving across the Prairie, these shores and forests will still hold the spirits of my people."

PS : This article was originally written for a volume (yet unpublished), in honour of Prof. K. J. Shah.

