



Re-Visioning Paradigms







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Essays in Honour of David Selvaraj

Edited by
Mercy Kappen
M. Sudhir Selvaraj
S. Theodore Baskaran

Visthar





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Contents

Foreword	
– <i>Romila Thapar</i>	7
Re-visioning and Questioning	
– <i>M. Sudhir Selvaraj</i>	9
CELEBRATING DAVID SELVARAJ	
1. The Journey of an Obsessive-Compulsive Dreamer	
– <i>Mercy Kappen</i>	17
2. French Beard and Faith-Based Activism	
– <i>S. Theodore Baskaran</i>	35
RETHINKING DEVELOPMENT	
3. Persisting Inequalities, Inhumanities and Injustices	
– <i>Shobha Raghuram</i>	45
4. Reading Development as a Disaster	
– <i>S.P. Udaya Kumar</i>	62
5. From Bhopal to the Bakken: A Transnational Tale of Two Aquifers	
– <i>Caitlyn Schuchhardt</i>	77
6. How to Live Happily with Torture	
– <i>Ashis Nandy</i>	91



7. The Changing Structure of Indian Labour and Impact on Democracy – <i>Mohan Mani</i>	100
8. The Fate of Indian Democracy under Knowledge Economy	111
REVISIONING PARADIGMS	
9. Reimagining Justice – <i>Corrine Kumar</i>	135
10. Anna Swaraj (Food Sovereignty) – <i>Vandana Shiva</i>	157
11. Gandhian Economic Thought and Sustainable Development – <i>Jeevan Kumar</i>	164
12. An Exploration of Inter-faith Spaces – <i>Dexter Maben</i>	180
RE-ORIENTING PEDAGOGIES	
13. The Art of Living – <i>Douglas Huff</i>	191
14. The Dilemmas of a Spirit-Inspired Activist – <i>Dhyanchand Carr</i>	2014
15. Theatre as Pedagogy in Religious Studies – <i>Victoria Rue</i>	216
16. Pedagogy of the Oppressor: Re-envisioning Freire and Critical Pedagogy in Contexts of Privilege – <i>Chris K. Bacon</i>	226
AFTERWORD	
The Dance and the Dancer – <i>David Selvaraj</i>	238
<i>About the Contributors and Editors</i>	241



Foreword



Visions are not static. Nor do they exist without a context. Visions can be chiselled, they can mutate, and they can sometimes take forms that are seemingly unrecognizable when compared to the original vision. But something of the original vision is present in whatever form it may take subsequently. The recreation of the vision in new forms arises because in understanding the meaning of a vision it is necessary to ask questions of both the vision and its context. It is through asking questions that the vision takes on new forms that may be as relevant or more, as the original.

There was a time some decades ago when we all had a vision of ourselves as part of a society, and as part of a nation. It was the vision of an integrated society that was moving towards a future where human rights and social justice were instinctively protected.

That is not the future that we have arrived at today. Our society is fragmented by diverse loyalties, foremost among which are caste and religion. Human rights have sometimes to be fought for, through desperation and angst, and occasionally even uncalled-for violence. Social justice exists in the Constitution but its presence is not always reflected in social and political practice. Our actions are not invariably guided by an innate reasonableness but are known on occasion to grow out of fantasies some of which turn harmful.

In short we have come to a point when we have to retrieve our





Re-visioning Paradigms

original vision or create a new one. Such a vision has to help us overcome the inequities of the present. This involves understanding and restraining at least the three most problematic current threats to the future. We face fundamental questions that cannot be brushed aside and have to be answered. Will neo-liberalism and the market economy continue to widen the disparity between the wealthy and the impoverished to such a degree that we may end up with a new variety of discrimination against fellow humans? Will the problems of controlling environmental change continue to ensure luxury for some and a near unsustainable existence for many? Can we universalize a way of educating ourselves to ensure that whatever vision we create for the present and the future, we recognize the fact that it has to draw on moral and ethical choices that can no longer be dismissed? The need to choose is becoming imminent and the wrong choices will shatter the vision.

Choices can no longer be arbitrary. They have to be understood in context and analyzed. The decisions arrived at should be through reasonable arguments and perhaps a small and hopeful leap of the imagination. That may either restore the vision or provide a viable alternative. An attempt has been made in this book to gather the thoughts of those who have been anxious about the answers to these questions. The thoughts come from trying to understand and analyze the context that gave rise to the original vision and its mutations since then, and to where we have arrived in the present, and of course to what should be the vision of the future.

Hopefully those who read these explorations will add to them their own thoughts and ideas. What eventually may emerge is a vision in keeping with the objectives of what we originally envisaged as a world that asserted the necessity of human rights and of social justice, a world free from the fears of both political tyranny and environmental destruction.

New Delhi
1 October 2015

Romila Thapar



Questioning and Re-visioning

M. Sudhir Selvaraj

Another world is not only possible, she is on her way
On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing”
– *Arundhati Roy*

Where is the Life we have lost in living?
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?
– *T.S. Eliot*

The title *Re-visioning Paradigms* is laden with meaning. It is meant to be bold and creative; challenging individuals to question the world around them. The authors and editors believe a serious rethinking of the current state of affairs is essential; if not vital. Despite having contributions from some of the greatest thinkers of our time, this is not purely an academic journal. Rather it is a collection of essays from academics and activists from India and abroad. Through research papers, reflections and poetry, contributors challenge us to join them in rethinking development and re-visioning alternatives.



What is 'Re-visioning'?

We live in a mechanistic and fragmented society; reflected in our education and knowledge systems. While we clamour for being a knowledge society we have forsaken wisdom. Re-visioning is a process of returning with humility to the realm of wisdom. It calls for a renewed imagination. The word "vision" implies creating a better iteration. It suggests that better alternatives exist and must be explored. Re-envisioning is a process which involves approaching a subject with a critical lens and suggesting solutions, as well as methodologies on how to implement these.

Do not be mistaken, with this publication we are not seeking a complete overhaul of existing paradigms but rather encouraging readers to critically analyse them and to revision adjustments and alternatives in living and learning. Hopefully, these will lead to a more fair and just society. The title of this book reflects this strain of thought.

Why the need to Re-vision?

Since independence, the economic and political path India has tread has brought us to this point – divided and degraded. Every possible schism exists in India. As of 2015, we are a country which has 90 billionaires¹ while over 720 million people live on less than \$2 a day. For a 'secular' country, acts of religious intolerance not only continue but they have increased. Within the first 300 days of the current political regime, human rights activists have documented over 600 cases of violations of religious freedoms.² This has led us to be classified as a country suffering from 'severe persecution' by Open Door's World Watch List 2015.³

As we celebrate our independence and freedom from foreign rule each year in great pomp and show, we must also remember those whose freedom is not in their hands. The WalkFree Foundation in their annual Global Slavery Index 2014 ranks India in the top five countries where modern day slavery persists; number 1 in absolute terms. Their estimated 14,285,700 include modern day slaves such as those trapped in bonded labour and the Devadasi

system, among others.⁴ In a Thomas Reuters Foundation Global Poll of Experts, India was ranked the most dangerous place amongst other G20 countries for women due to high instances of female foeticide, infanticide and human trafficking.⁵

After more than three decades, the relentless pursuit for justice by victims of the Bhopal Gas Disaster serves as an example of the government's skewed leanings towards corporate interests over its own citizens. This is just one example. Plachimada and Kudunkulam can also be considered.

While we pride ourselves on entering the ranks of economic superpowers, it has come at a serious cost to the environment. While we celebrate the success of our exploration in space, we still have not figured out how to develop a sustainable model of agriculture on the ground. The families of the 5650 farmers who committed suicide in 2014⁶ may agree. It is time for Re-visioning.

How have we Re-visioned?

This publication is one small step towards Re-visioning. It has been compiled in celebration of the life of David Selvaraj, an activist-scholar who has dedicated his life to re-visioning and raising questions – primarily revolving around creating a more just, sustainable and inclusive development. It is only fitting that the first two articles introduce the man to those who have not had the privilege. In their pieces, long-time friends and colleagues **Mercy Kappen** and **Theodore Baskaran** share about his work and philosophy. As one of them noted, David is truly 'an obsessive-compulsive dreamer' who is passionate about translating his dreams of 'another world' into reality. This volume, however, is not intended to be a biography, rather a tribute to the ideas and work that David has dedicated his life to.

For this publication, we have invited activists and academics from around the world to Re-vision with us. Since our contributors represent a plethora of disciplines, backgrounds and interests it may be difficult to see a common thread that binds all these articles together but it exists. All the articles adhere to our process of *Re-*

visioning.

Re-visioning is done in stages. The first is taking a serious evaluation of the current state of affairs in our country. It is only by doing this that we can identify the problems and gaps that exist. We call this stage *Rethinking Development* and it answers the question ‘What is it?’. The second stage is called *Re-visioning Paradigms* which is process of dreaming of ‘what can it become?’ And thirdly, we have *Re-orienting Pedagogies* which answers the question ‘How can we make it like that?’ The stages of Re-visioning also form the structure on which this publication is designed.

The first section on *Re-thinking Development* serves as a reflection of the current economic and political model of development by scholars and practitioners. **Dr. Shobha Raghuram** and Dr. **S.P. Udaya Kumar**, in their articles, provide an overview of development in India. Udaya Kumar presents his view that development must be viewed as a form of disaster. Raghuram continues this argument; through her reflection on several disasters that persist today. These disasters have no end; for victims or for the country at large.

Elucidating on one of the disasters that Raghuram refers to is **Caitlyn Schuchhardt**, a young Ph.D. student from the United States who uses the Bhopal Gas Disaster as a case study to analyse a disaster-in-the-making in the mid-west states of North Dakota and Minnesota. Her essay serves as a warning cry for those in these two states as she notices similar structural and ethical environments that lead to the Bhopal Gas Disaster.

Iconic thinker, **Dr. Ashish Nandy** in his article ‘How to Live Happily with Torture’ analyses the Indian political system likening it to a system of torture. His article challenges readers to stop being accomplices in this process,

Two authors analyse how democracy is being impacted and developed by various factors. **Mohan Mani**, noted labour union leader, writes about the backbone of the Indian economy – its

labour. In his article, he draws links to the changing structure of India's labour and reflects on how this will impact democracy. Similarly internationally-known scholar and educational administrator **Prof. Rajan Gurukkal** reflects on the education system writing about how the current knowledge economy, a product of modernity is redefining democracy.

The next section which focuses on *Re-visioning Paradigms* brings together a political scientist, an environmentalist, a theologian and a feminist activist scholar – all re-visioning our world from their lenses. **Dr. Corrine Kumar**, through a combination of poetry and prose, presents a myriad of stories from around the world. What do they all have in common? A yearning for justice. Internationally-renowned Environmental activist **Dr. Vandana Shiva** focuses her piece on improving food security and improving agricultural practices in India. She explains this through her work with the Anna Swaraj Campaign 2020.

Similarly, **Prof. Jeevan Kumar**, explores hypothesis of what our nation's most beloved figure – the Mahatma would think of current economy and ecology – putting into context well-known ideas such as sawadesh and swaraj. **Rev. Dr. Dexter Maben** writes about the organizations that work in the North of Karnataka. He believes that these organizations are a perfect example of what can be accomplished in inter-faith settings.

The final section on *Re-orienting Pedagogies* serves as the bridge between the present and the future we would like to see. These essays serve as examples of how to reorient perspectives and teaching styles. **Prof. Douglas Huff**, places the emphasis on the individual. In his article, 'The Art of Living', he shares the wisdom of philosophers on the subject of 'living' urging readers to fully live and participate in life. Legendary Indian theologian **Rev. Dr. Dhyanchand Carr** impresses readers the need to critically analyse literature sources to look for contemporary relevance. His uses the Bible as a case study to challenge ideas of patriarchy. Burgeoning American scholar Dr. **Chris K. Bacon** presents a twist on Augusto Boal's 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' when he

analyses his time in India as an American to suggest a new pedagogy of the oppressor. The final article is presented by **Dr. Victoria Rue**, who incorporates her passions of teaching, theology and theatre in her life. In her article, she discusses how she uses theatre as a pedagogical tool.

The Last Stage in Re-visioning

David epitomizes Re-visioning. After detailed inter-disciplinary assessment of the world, he dared to imagine another one and has dedicated his life to activism, training, teaching, theatre and other countless ways to trying to create that world. His life is the inspiration for this book which is a process of Re-visioning for the editors.

The contributors have done an exceptional job of encouraging a process of rethinking, re-visioning and re-orienting pedagogies towards justice and sustainability. However, there is one final step missing to make Re-visioning complete, one that can be answered only by the individual –The Response. How do we respond after participating in this process of critical analysis and idea sharing? Can we remain unaffected? How do we move forward from here? For us to make a prescription on how to re-visioning for each individual will would be futile. It can only be answered through a reflection on one's own passions and gifts. This publication is our humble offering, as a first step. What will be yours?

Notes

- ¹ Forbes Website, 'A Record 90 Indians on Forbes Billionaires List 2015', <http://www.forbes.com/sites/naazneenkarmali/2015/03/03/a-record-90-indians-on-forbes-billionaires-list-2015/>
- ² John Dayal (2015), '300 Days: Documenting Hate and Communal Violence Under the Modi Regime'.
- ³ Open Doors website 'World Watch List 2015', <http://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/wwl-downloads/>
- ⁴ Global Slavery Index Report 2014, Walk Free Foundation, p. 42.
- ⁵ Trust Women website, 'India worst G20 country for women- <http://www.trustwomenconf.com/about/news/india-worst-g20-country-for-women/>
- ⁶ National Crime Records Bureau, 'Farmer Suicides in India', pp. 266-271.



Celebrating David Selvaraj







The Journey of an Obsessive– Compulsive Dreamer

Mercy Kappen

Obsessive-Compulsive Dreamer (OCD) – a nickname I gave David a few years ago. If you follow Visthar’s journey and the varied involvement of David Selvaraj, you will realize how apt this nickname is. As Founder and Executive Trustee of Visthar, David’s ‘journey’ is so intertwined with that of the organization. It is difficult to speak about one without the other. Visthar’s journey from a small support service agency working out of a single room rented space to a lively rural campus with arteries in nearly every area and level of social activism bear witness to the contribution of David. A true visionary, David recognized the need for perpetual introspection and evolution in response to India’s varied social and political climate. The internal environment of Visthar was also of equal concern to him. This being the case, tracing David’s journey implies reflecting on the many crucial issues that Visthar has engaged in over the past 26 years.

In writing this article I have drawn on the documentary by Andrea Sorum and the unpublished poems of David - Mercy K.



Re-visioning Paradigms

For David life was a passion, a ceaseless discovery as reflected in his poems starting with the “The Journey” (1991):

Life is a passion
A ceaseless, seamless discovery
Together on a camel’s back
Traversing dreary desert sands
With the sun on your back
And love in your heart

...

The coarseness of the camel’s back
The scent of the desert sands
The mystery and wonder of life
A life of passion visibilised in flesh
And through the journey.

Thank God for camels
Who enable us discover
Life and the compulsion of journey

The Beginning

In 1987, Hilfswerk der Evangelischen Kirchen der Schweiz (HEKS), a relief and development agency of the Swiss Protestant Church, appointed David as a full-time coordinator to oversee the projects funded by HEKS. Replacing long-time delegate, Hanspeter Finger, he was the first Indian to act in this capacity for HEKS. After 30 years of Swiss representation, the organization planned to hand over its operations to locals. David while agreeing, emphasized the need for autonomy and creativity in its mission to serve the marginalized in South India as well as ensure the continuity of programs already underway. The idea was not to create a new organization. However, in 1989, after a partnership with an existing organization failed, Visthar was founded and registered as a Trust in 1989. Almost from inception, David invited me and C.F. John to join him in this mission. Though not officially a founder, I see myself as a co-creator.

While maintaining its role in capacity building for HEKS and others, Visthar stayed true to its name and spread its wings. We looked at the connections between the work and struggles of several small NGOs and recognized larger problems and power structures that impeded their work. We knew that the only answer to these challenges would have to be a broader, more far-stretching political and social transformation.

Challenges Facing Indian Democracy

The early nineties stood out as a monumental time to initiate a Civil Society Organization (CSO) in India. Internally, the rise of religious fundamentalism and development induced displacement, gave little voice and space to the poor and the marginalized. Externally, the fall of the Soviet Union, the Gulf War and the pressure of a cold-blooded global market made civil society in the Global South feel like an afterthought to the forces of globalization. This new world order brought a uni-dimensional vision of development and progress to India. The disenchantment with socialism also snuffed out much of the usual idealism found among young people. However, the dramatic changes brought about by globalization were noticed in a critical light by those in civil society. The stage seemed to be set.

Visthar saw the links between socio-political and economic forces and sought to address these complexities with holistic perspectives and practices. In a context where the relationship between art and social action was tenuous, Visthar opened up the space for artists and activists to explore the role of art in social change. We began a cultural critique of development led by our colleague and well known artist C.F. John. We vigorously explored questions such as- Is our concept of development just a follow-through of the Western model? and Is there an indigenous model that includes the people and their cultures? We felt that unless we looked at the connections between ecology, culture and spirituality, whatever development we talked of, would fall flat.

In the first two years, we had our feet in nearly every level and

type of engagement. It was apparent that our vision for a “humane, egalitarian, participatory and ecologically sustainable society” would take us through a complex web of related quests. What that journey would be like was still unimaginable for us.

It was also a time when dissenting voices were co-opted into the paradigm of the market as mass media sought to de-sensitize the public. **Resistance and Hope** became our catch phrase. Believing that unity of thought leads to unity of action, we brought activists and academics and intellectuals together for critical reflections. David was a master weaver. He never gave up the practice of connecting people, experiences and ideas. This became a key methodology for Visthar.

We were convinced about the need to bring together activists and academics for dialogue. As David would say

We had to challenge the economists in their citadels asking them to Come to the ground! To sit on the ground!’. Simultaneously, we had to tell activists that it wasn’t enough to shout slogans and picket, but they must look at the volume of knowledge, challenge the knowledge and ensure there is always new theory kept alive.

The Ambedkar Centenary in 1991 provided the appropriate opportunity to initiate discussions and debates on the caste-class debate and Dalit liberation. To remember Ambedkar’s contributions in this area and to develop perspectives on Dalit liberation, Visthar organized a 3-day national seminar with participants from all over the country. The deliberations urged us to recognize the inter-sectionality of caste, class and gender. From this seminar was born the Ambedkar Forum for Human Rights (AFHR) under the leadership of David. Ired by the identity politics that emerged in the forum which saw ‘non-Dalits’ only as a means to an end and not as allies, David left the forum. But casteism, social exclusion and issues and challenges faced by the Dalits remained his primary concern.

Future of Socialism and Socialism of the Future

For David, a student of Liberation Theology, socialism is the socio-political working out of the 'Reign of God'. Despite the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the dismantling of USSR we upheld socialism as our ideal. Most significantly this came at a time when the capitalist West celebrated what they termed as 'the death of socialism'. While rejecting soviet model of socialism and its autocratic character, we had to convince ourselves and civil society that socialism was not dead and was in fact all the more relevant. Visthar went through a process of critique enabled by the philosopher and scholar Sebastian Kappen.

The publication, *The Future of Socialism and Socialism of the Future* by Kappen, published by Visthar, was the outcome of this search. The book came at a time of disenchantment for Indian Marxists. The Communist catastrophe in the Soviet Union needed to be explained and honestly dealt with by committed intellectuals. Kappen described socialism as "the supreme realization of the individual" and a "utopia that can evoke unconditional loyalty and sacrifice without which a humane future cannot be created." The booklet was widely disseminated through alternative and mainstream distributors.

May Day evoked strong feelings in David. I remember participating in a May Day celebration in 1992. We marched in the scorching sun, shouting slogans with the thousands who had joined the celebration, organised by the Agricultural Workers Union in Chittoor district. Participation in events like this gave David much inspiration and energy. He had all the makings of a 'movement' leader; irrepressible energy and commitment. On another May Day, reflecting on the work of Visthar, David wrote "Toil Rooted in Love."

The passion of lovers , the commitment of workers
The fruit borne speaks volumes for the tree rooted in love
Who will count the scores, nay hundreds of fruits,
plucked tasted and savoured?

Re-visioning Paradigms

Love, solidarity
Joining hands
Believing only in the struggle
We gently, reverentially offer the fruits of our love and toil.

...
But will they last for eternity?
Guided by the unseen hand
the best we can do is offer our spirits
To be carried by the WIND
This we do with workers the world over,
today and each May Day

Challenging the *Ungod*

While recognizing the passion and vision which enabled David and the team to dream and carry forward their dreams, the journey has not been without its challenges. There were hurdles within and around. How will we live out our ideals of environmental and social justice in a decidedly unjust and top-heavy world order? This question still nags us.

The 1991 Gulf War and the image of George Bush Sr. receiving a blessing from Billy Graham angered David. He was appalled that the same book that talks about 'turning the sword to ploughshares' should be used to validate such a war. He wrote the poem "Ungod" drawing inspiration from Sebastian Kappen. In this he expresses his anguish at a religion and its priests who justify war and violence. He wrote:

Then God said:
Let us make man in our image after our likeness
and let them have dominion...
Grateful to the Creator, the creatures began in awe
of each other and of Eden.
They knew that they were a part of each other
and part of Eden
Even as Eden was a part of them.
The river flowed gently , the creatures danced to its rhythm.

The Journey of an Obsessive-Compulsive Dreamer

The river flowed through them joining in the dance.
Their union was the culmination of the dance.
The river changed its rhythm only to match their passion.
And God saw everything that he had made,
and behold it was very good.

And then, glowing in pride,
Dissatisfied with the pace, in search of freedom,
the creatures saw
And began to have dominion,
In His name, in the name of Eden the creatures embarked
on crusades massacring millions of Jews and Turks.
Unsatiated, UNGOD
In the garb of the Grand Inquisitor indulged
the brutalities of witch hunting and the burning of heretics.

With missionary Zeal the creatures; 'colonised'
and enslaved 'pagan' nations.
The UNGOD fashioned in the image of the creatures,
steadied the hands of those who dropped the atom bombs
over Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
This is a God that will not hesitate to avenge
the death of one North American Marine
With the death of ten times the number of Iraqis.

Aghast with this distorted, vulgar display of dominion,
God wept.
Denying death its victory.
Mingling with the elements, God stood.
Eyes red, nostrils flared, God scorched the earth with fire.
Dancing on the flames to the beat of his heart
THE CREATOR wept and rejoiced.
For in scorching the old, new life emerged from the ashes.
Purified
the ashes in anticipation awaited
the experience of being carried by the wind.

Visthar also joined anti-war campaigns in the city, produced posters with quotations from Gandhi and Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa and hosted discussions on the economy of war. We realized that the only people who would benefit from the war were those in the military industrial complex. Every dollar supporting such a violent extravagance was taking away from progress in the developing world. This angered us but we were helpless. As a tiny organization, what do you do to be relevant?

Communalism and Religious Fundamentalism

Yet another issue we have been responding to since our inception has been the increasing religious fundamentalism and communalism in India. On December 6, 1992, the Hindu fundamentalist movement reached dangerous proportions, with the demolition of the Babri Masjid, brick by brick. The oppressive character of the Hindutva movement had come to a visible proportion and people from the religious minorities, especially the Muslims, lived in fear. The news cast a gloom over us as we gathered in our office thousands of miles away in Bangalore. We anguished and out of this came our response. Visthar responded by organizing seminars and workshops and brought out publications that would help develop alternative perspectives. An outcome of the discussions was the publication titled *Understanding Communalism*. However, our immediate response was creating a poster and daring to stick it on public spaces in the city. The poster had lines from the poet, Kabir with a message “Let not religions separate us.”

It was during this phase that David felt a deep sense of despondency. He was desperately seeking inspiration to continue his journey. He turned to theatre and was part of the cast in *The Dragon* by the Soviet playwright Yevgeny Shvarts and later *Emil's Enemy* by Douglas Huff showcasing the life and killing of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He also found time to write:

Painting a picture, writing a poem, sculpting a nude
And many other lofty actions calls for inspiration.

The Journey of an Obsessive-Compulsive Dreamer

Washing stinky nappies, cooking innumerable meals,
And many other equally life-affirming actions
calls for inspiration
May be a special kind.

Tuning in to BBC, unable to control my bowels,
Living through Ayodhya, stunned by Bombay
Reminded afresh of the impotency staring me in my face
Maintaining a façade of sanity
I cling to my inspiration,
Her eyes.

Coping with illness, writhing in pain, challenged by guilt,
I experience my inspiration
Inspiration next to me, within me, encompassing me
And always subtly, nay even passionately, urging me
To be, to become more fully ME.

The New Economic Policy (NEP)

As India sank more and more in debt, it also adopted global capitalist monetary management programs. These policies streamlined social spending within India. In order to understand how the decisions made at world headquarters were affecting large sections of marginalized Indians, Visthar organized a meeting of prominent economists and activists. They talked about the impact of NEP and what they could do to sustain micro-enterprises and vulnerable livelihoods. Several groups were formed and educational campaigns on the NEP were planned.

The privatization of healthcare, education and other social services meant that those who could not afford to go to the private institutions were often denied these services. An export-oriented market also changed production habits. Where there had been bio-diversity and sustenance farming there was now development of cash crops. The massive injustice to the powerless was not part of the NEP's cost-benefit analysis. Visthar took the initiative to

sensitize the public, especially the rural poor, on the implications of these policies and strategies to collectively resist them.

It was David's genius to use a folk art form and infuse it with new message. Hence a training and application of 'Therukoothu' for the campaigns in the villages in Tamilnadu. While subscribing to and initiating community based action to resist policies which disadvantage masses, David was cynical about high profile seminars and conferences on the theme held in star hotels. Sitting in one such conference in Hotel Rama in Bangalore he wrote the poem "AIYAO RAMA"

With the background of elegant chocolate brown drapes,
the gentle purr of the air conditioner
and the concealed lighting,
the organisers welcomed participants in the name of the poor,
more particularly slum dwellers, dalits and the tribals.

Aiyao Rama:

In different sizes and shapes, organdie, starched cottons,
slacks and T-shirts, Kurta pajamas, colours, trendy and chic.

Rama, Rama:

Not to be outdone, the men trooped in
conscious of the environment,
competing to fit in.
Well groomed, beard and all
We psyched ourselves to appear informed.

Rama, Rama:

Forgetting the sweltering heat
we plunged into the acclimatization.
In fact, so rapidly and so efficiently that we scowled every time
one of the several 'mikes' howled.

Aiyao Rama:

On our way to the seminar, we drove past a stinky slum

The Journey of an Obsessive-Compulsive Dreamer

We turned away not wanting to see the long,
fighting queue for water
Or was it kerosene. It didn't matter
we were rushing to the seminar in RAMA
On INDIA'S NEW ECONOMIC POLICY
and its impact on the poor.

Rama, Rama:
Rama, Our Lord if you were here,
that is if you were lucky to get in, you would have heard words,
phrases, sayings, quotes –
Liberalisation, Globalisation , Safety Net and the Wizard of Oz
But 'safety' and 'whose world'.
Tell me Rama, O'Lord whose world and whose safety?

David dedicated the poem to 'All those who patiently and repeatedly forgive us for sins we knowingly and repeatedly commit. Forgive us – for we have taken your name in vain.' And he signed it as 'A perpetrator of the crime'. He was deeply conscious of the contradictions that he was part of and struggled to reduce ' the levels of hypocrisy' in his life and work.

Development, Not Destruction

The starting point for sensitizing the public on the development paradigms in India began with our association with Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save Narmada Movement). David encouraged the team to visit the Narmada valley, meet with the NBA leader, Medha Patkar and the people in the valley. Inspired, we started a campaign in support of the struggle to stop the dam and ensure people's right to life, livelihood and identity. This led to the formation of the Narmada Solidarity Forum in Bangalore. For Visthar and the Narmada Solidarity Forum, these issues were not just of Narmada, but of democracy and development in India as a whole. The goal was to build public opinion on issues of development and democracy.

In 1994, Visthar organized over 16,000 students from over 15 schools. We had long interactions with these student groups, screened documentaries that initiated discussion and helped them critically debate what development is, what the costs are and help them understand the struggles of the people of Narmada Valley from that point of view. This was a great moment in Visthar's history as the entire team got involved fired by a passion beyond words. This was also a campaign which brought into focus the story teller and the visionary leader in David.

The Narmada Campaign took the issues, questions, experiences and messages to the children who will lead it in the future, to save the future. Children showed great sensitivity to the feelings and struggles of the tribals, women and children against devastation. The so-called innocent new generation has expressed through unsuppressible, unco-optable freedom and frankness, their stance against the established, elitist development that damns and displaces. This gave us strength and hope for ultimate victory of the struggle is beyond Narmada.

Education for Democracy

The Save Narmada Movement was not just for the sake of Narmada Valley, but for a revival of democracy in the public consciousness. As we approached the golden jubilee of India's independence in 1997, the concern for the future of India's democracy absorbed our thoughts. Something needed to be done to ensure democratic processes would uphold the people's interests through the changes in development. It was David who again dreamt up a Students for Democracy campaign inspired by Citizen's For Democracy initiated by Kuldip Nayar.

In conversation with young people, the Visthar staff sought to reinvent the notion of 'development' so that students would be able to distinguish good development from destructive development. True Development while recognizing differences affirms each person and community to be equally important, and provides space for all to develop and develop differently. The

success of the Save Narmada Campaign and Education for Democracy among young people gave a lot of encouragement to our team. We maintained the same activities with schools and colleges in Bangalore under the new title: Students for Democracy. The goal was to help students internalize the systems of democracy and respond to the realities in their own schools and neighborhoods.

The campaign, Students for Democracy led to Manthana, a forum for college students. Manthana in Kannada means churning, and the wisdom that comes out of deep thinking, shaping and analyzing. The objective was to enable youth to ‘read their reality and shape their own destiny’. The underlying understanding was that the media and political structures had deprived students of the learning of actual social realities. Cha Basavaraj and the Visthar team worked tirelessly to sensitize the students on secularism, gender and caste discrimination and other social realities. They also discussed how the processes of liberalization, privatization and globalization were connected to their personal lives and helped them find alternatives. In addition to educating for political awareness, Manthana exposed students to art, theater, dance and music.

The Manthana program continued for about five years. Visthar was unable to continue the program because a program with long-term goals and no “instant coffee” results is hard to find funding for. We hoped the teachers would take over the program. This turned out to be an unrealistic expectation, but the students themselves started a weekly study circle called *Chinthana Manthana* that discussed current events and other concerns. It was obvious that the student’s interest in democratic processes and political justice had been aroused.

Towards Alternatives in Living and Learning

We have been groping analytically, but never stopped exploring new avenues to make ourselves relevant. In the mid-nineties Visthar bought a six-acre plot of land in the then outskirts of Bangalore. It was again David’s dream to set up a campus and a

training centre that would facilitate our programs. It became a collective dream as we started working on the land and designing the spaces maintaining a rustic aesthetics. The contribution of C.F. John in this regard was invaluable.



We wanted to keep our goal of empowering the marginalized in the forefront and hold ourselves responsible for our actions in both dialogue and lifestyle. In order to keep these priorities, we determined that the campus must be a manifestation of what the organization stood for ideologically. We worked hard to ensure that the issues of livelihood, gender discrimination, cultural domination and environmental degradation were not jeopardized for the sake of promoting Visthar as an institution. Those suffering silently were not to be treated as figures for a conquest. Our question of relevance in a constantly changing global environment hung in the air as a prayer for direction. 'Resistance and Hope' continued to be the theme of these years.

This was also a period when Visthar as an organization had to face not-so-pleasant experiences with our donors who questioned our integrity based on certain misgivings. David, as the chief functionary, experienced loneliness and extreme frustration. "I am a broken wall struggling with dignity to stay erect" he wrote. He continued:

In an attempt to heal myself I once again plunge into a ravine
It is dark but not strange. Lonely but I am hopeful
Other such ravines dark but always a light
A microscopic illumination which grows larger and bigger
Until you are finally engulfed by it.
This ravine of ours is fraught with memories
and we must let the dead find their own peace.

Beyond the Binaries: Gender and Diversity

We began our work in the field of gender and diversity in 1991 with an introductory workshop on *Understanding Feminism* facilitated by Kamla Bhasin and Vasanth Kannabiran. This



The Journey of an Obsessive-Compulsive Dreamer

enabled us to see things with new eyes. David too was inspired and convinced about the need to look at gender as a cross cutting issue in the work that he was coordinating in different sectors as HEKS coordinator. Visthar was extensively involved in the pre and post-Beijing efforts. By 1995, we were deeply convinced about and committed to evolving gender perspectives in development and has been offering regular gender workshops and trainings. Social activists, students and various professionals have all benefited from the gender training workshops over the years.

Visthar offered various fora for community leaders to delve further into the themes of gender and the economy, education, health and gender-based violence. David joined in facilitating several gender trainings in India and offered sustained perspective building programmes for Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) in south and south-east Asia. He was convinced that gender equality must be accompanied by changes in the other fronts of caste and class as they are all inter-connected. He felt that “without minimizing the intensity of Dalit issue, we need to see it in perspective by addressing the linkages between the struggles of women, Dalits and the working class. If you do not, then you ignore the disparities between men and women and the violence against women within the Dalit community.”

Social Justice, Peace and Development (SJPD)

Visthar has been running this study abroad programme for almost 20 years now.

Every fall, 15-20 students from two U.S. colleges come to Visthar for a four-month study-abroad course on Social Justice, Peace and Development. Gustavus Adolphus and Concordia are both private Lutheran liberal arts colleges in Minnesota. The students come from all over the country and bring with them a range of experiences and interests to explore while in India. The course is designed to provoke analytical thought about justice, peace and developmental issues in the U.S. and India. The course is facilitated by faculty leaders from one of

the colleges, social activists and Visthar staff. Over the four months they are in India they travel to five states visiting formal and non-formal centers of learning. They also have the opportunity to participate in projects run by non-profit organizations. Through field and classroom work and study, they encounter Indian culture and the global situation.

It was in 1997 that David was invited to take over this programme from Desmond D'Abreo, his mentor. In spite of initial resistance (from me), to spending so much time and energy for a bunch of American students, David managed to convince us and make it a Visthar programme. I fell for the 'globalisation of resistance' and 'global allies' argument though I still see the primary objective as fund raising for our work in India. 'Because globalization is an unstoppable certainty, campaigns must also be on a larger scale', David felt. There must be unity of like-minded people all over the world. This logic led Visthar to start other international academic programs as well.

A Faith-Inspired Involvement

In his poem "The Dance and the Dancer" David captures the compulsions and passions of his life using the metaphor of the dance and the dancer. The poem reflects a deep search for meaning, an absolute surrender to the dancer, a total realization of the oneness and unity of the dance and the dancer, the creator and the creation. Beyond binaries and boundaries, exploring and experiencing the depth dimension of one's existence. An unflinching belief that 'another world is possible'.

In his presentation to the Board of Trustees in July (2015) David spoke about how his very existence is set ablaze on a '*journey of discovery and engagement, a journey inspired by faith*'. But this did not prevent him from making a critique of his own religious tradition. He was deeply conscious of the contradictions within the church, which reproduced the same class-caste-gender hierarchies and exclusion.

David saw his ordination as a ‘strategic decision emerging from a commitment to mission, a passion for public witness’. However, having stood for a secular perspective in all our work, I still do not understand what this meant. I have been cynical about his decision to get ordained. It was difficult to comprehend why someone like David, who I believed belonged to a prophetic tradition, decided to become a priest following the norms and rituals and hierarchies of institutionalized religion. Was it a ‘political’ move, I often wondered and many a time engaged him on conversations around this.

In spite of having cynics and critics like me around, David claimed the freedom and space to sustain his faith journey, though for the most part outside of Visthar through his engagement with the Diaconal Ministry – Church of South India, Church of the American Ceylon Mission in Sri Lanka and seminaries within the country and in Myanmar. His all time thematic focus was *peace with justice*.

The Journey Continues

The journey was not without hurdles – internal and external. There were times when we, as an organization, were faced with a crisis of confidence. At times we felt we no longer had a grasp of issues and their ramifications. Everything seemed to be so complex and so contextual. Our responses had to be [space-time] specific, and we often wondered whether we had the depth, the competence and the commitment to respond relevantly and meaningfully to the challenges around. Anchoring ourselves in the struggles and hopes of the marginalised, we continued groping, searching for relevance. This search is reflected in David’s poem titled “The Journey is All Supreme”:

The Dream and the magic must continue
A mirage made real.
Paradise gained and regained
Life ebbing, nay, throbbing

Re-visioning Paradigms

Dreary and dry I trudged the desert sands
of alienation and ostracisation
Fearful of phantoms I hid in the darkness
of a soulless world.
Enveloped in anger, shrouded with suspicion
I subjected myself to a death by torture
Defying death I cried for life.

Observing the kite in the sky
blending its colours with the rainbow.
I reached out only to feel myself being grasped.
By the roots of my soul.

In wonder I yielded, for choice I had none
I yielded to a passion born of silence
I yielded to a compulsion conceived in love
I yielded to life which grasped me, reminding me
Of the Agony and the Ecstasy of the journey.

In Conclusion

I am happy to have introduced the poet in David through my article. I unearthed his poems and pieced them together here. Thank you David for being an OCD, for taking risks and inspiring others to do the same, for keeping hope alive always, for listening to the margins, for extending solidarity to all those striving to make another world possible. We must continue. For, the journey is all supreme.



French Beard and Faith-based Activism

S. Theodore Baskaran

The year was 2003. I was at the library in a university in the United States working on a book. Checking my email before starting work for the day, I saw a note titled ‘Exploring New Vistas for Ministry’, from Tamil Nadu Theological Seminary, Madurai which had been sent to me as I was on their Board. It was about the state of theological education in India. The names of the author were new to me. I started reading the note with the usual skepticism I had developed for such writing. But this one was refreshingly different, without any pontification or assumptions and with pragmatic suggestions. Of the two authors, one was signed David Selvaraj. The name stuck in my memory. Three years later, I was introduced to David Selvaraj at a lecture conducted by Visthar, a Bangalore-based NGO. I shook hands with that tall, burly man, sporting an endearing smile and a French beard. (It has also been called ‘theological beard’ in some quarters as many theologians seem to have a penchant for this type of goatee.) I remember telling him that his essay made a strong impact

on me. That introduction eleven years ago was “The beginning of a beautiful friendship” as the sergeant says in the film *Casablanca*.

I joined as a trustee of Visthar, a service organization working in the areas of poverty, gender discrimination, social exclusion and justice. The ideas and the manner in which people in Visthar went about their work towards this goal, the transparent nature and the professed secular stand of the outfit appealed to me. Justice and peace are the core concerns of this organization with gender equality is one dimension of justice. Visthar as a concept was developed by David Selvaraj and his concerns and ideas are experimented and given a practical shape here. He writes “Visthar has provided me the space to dream and explore alternatives.” For instance, one of its programmes is caring for a hundred girl children of Devadasis. He says, “even as I have attempted to breathe life into the institution, the latter has shaped me: an experience of symbiosis.”

Located at the periphery of the city, the seven-acre campus is full of trees and shrubs that attract a lot of birds and butterflies. During winter you see many Blue Mormon butterflies flitting around lighting up the ambience and the calls of spotted dove and barbets are constantly in the ear. Recently this estate has been declared an eco-sanctuary. Built with local material and in vernacular architectural style, the buildings merge with the landscape and seem to announce the philosophy of its founder. I live close to Visthar, in Doddagubbi village, and my association with it and David for the past six years has enriched my life in many ways.

Though the secular nature of Visthar is zealously guarded, David makes it clear that his own career of activism springs from his faith. In a reflective note recorded recently he says, “I have always defined myself as a person of faith, even if it was/is not very fashionable in social activist circles to do so. For me it has been

undoubtedly my faith journey which led me into the field of social action and has sustained me thus far. I am convinced that my journey, prior to, during and through Visthar is one of vocation, conscious of being called and inspired.”

When he founded Visthar in 1989, he was clear in his mind that this institution would play a role of being a support service for social action and not social work. And he believed that this emphasis on social action would and must lead to social change. This is the critical point of his ideology. It was evident from the beginning that social action has political dimensions even as Visthar expressed its solidarity with the poor and the marginalized. I recall joining David in a protest demonstration, two months after I had joined Visthar, near Gandhi statue on M.G. Road, Bangalore against the murder of an activist in Ramnagaram. He believes in bringing in religion in the agenda of social change. He says, “I would argue that we must go a step further and suggest that we must creatively (drawing on liberative praxis) and unapologetically bring religion into the socio-political discourse.” Faith and theology did not restrict the range of his operation. On the other hand, they provided new avenues of expression as he progressed in his career.

Born in an orthodox Christian family, David emphatically declares that he got his basic values from his parents. After schooling and graduation in Bangalore, he worked in a Swiss donor agency, HEKS, an experience that would come in handy for him in later years as he managed an NGO, and then his thoughts turned towards theology. His first idea was ministry in the Church and he sounded a senior friend, a clergyman, about his intention. The guffaw of laughter the senior provided as the answer hurt David and formed a scar. However, theology and the history of ideas continued to fascinate him. A few weeks of work as a volunteer in Andhra Pradesh after a catastrophic cyclone in 1976, pulling out rotting corpses, living with minimum facilities among people who had lost everything, confirmed this appeal even as it raised some basic questions in him on justice

and inequality. A theological seminary in Singapore offered him scope to pursue his passion systematically though, at that point in his life, he did not think of following his formal theological education with an entry into the church. In fact with formal training in theology, but operating outside the church, gave him a freedom to extend his map of theological enquiry as it was not restricted by the expectations of office. He could form and express his ideas independently, irrespective of the official position of the Church.

During this period his political ideas took a clearer shape. Paulo Freire and his ideology contained in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* influenced him strongly. The leftist orientation of his ideology can be traced to Freire. Later, his association with Sebastian Kappen, a Jesuit steeped in Marxist social analysis and Desmond D'Abreo, another leftist ideologue strengthened this foundation.

One of the best expressions of David's concern for justice is Bandhavi, a programme for girls at risk. The centuries-old practice of dedicating young girls to temples, particularly Ellamma temple in North Karnataka, had given rise to a community of temple courtesans under what came to be called the Devadasi system. Though this system has been legally abolished long ago, during the years of freedom struggle with leaders like Gandhiji vehemently opposing the practice, it still persists and, according to one press report, there are nearly a lakh of Devadasis in Karnataka.

To begin with about fifty girl children were taken in Visthar, with the consent of their parents and given education. All of them were from the Madiga community, a Dalit sub-caste. Started in 2005, Bandhavi children lived in Visthar campus and went to school. More than their engagement with the three R's, the girls were empowered to respect themselves and to nurture their self-esteem. When visitors interacted with the Bandhavi girls in Visthar, it was their self-confidence that struck them often. Introduction to painting, theatre and music enriched their young

lives. The hope is that these girls will act as a catalyst and bring about a change in the community. Visthar extends this concern to the women of Devadasi community. At Koppal where Visthar has opened another campus, a women's conference was held in 2008 in which over 300 women, mostly Devadasis, came together and celebrated. The significant point in this event was that local government officials, including the Chief Executive Officer from the Zilla Panchayat of Koppal participated. The highlight of this meet was the discussion on the struggles and concerns of the Devadasi community and the preparation of the charter of demands by children and their mothers.

Bonded labour, a pernicious practice widely prevalent in Karnataka, is seen as a contemporary form of slavery. In this area Visthar worked out a three-pronged strategy which included rescue, rehabilitation and advocacy of children who are bonded labourers. David associated himself with institutions and individuals who were involved with issues of caste and untouchability.

Different sexual orientation of people and the problems arising out of it is also one of his concerns. Workshops were organized in Visthar to understand the sexual minorities and their place in society better. Rev. Winnie Verghese and Rev. Victoria Rue, professed lesbians, have stayed in Visthar campus and conducted workshops and gave public lectures.

David keeps his antenna rotating in all directions as he picks up political and economics signs of change in the country and in the world outside. He could talk to you in an informed manner about the Rohingya Muslims of Myanmar or the environmental problems caused by Posco project in Orissa. Through Visthar he has been associated with Narmada Bachao Andolan and the National Alliance of Women's Organizations (NAWO). He has been involved in the work relating to the Bhopal Gas disaster and keeps up the memories of injustice through visits to the city, through play readings and writings. When the Pakistan-India

Peoples' Forum for Peace and Democracy (PIFFPD) was set up in Bangalore, Visthar associated itself with it as a founding member. Though the Intelligence agencies of the Government of India constantly kept a tab, the programme went on. A series of lectures was organized on subjects related to Indo-Pakistan affairs. His passionate opposition to communalism and fascism and his support for the Palestinian cause are all related to his faith-based activism. A letter of solidarity expressing sympathy with the struggle of Palestine evoked a reply from Bishop Riah, the Anglican Bishop of Jerusalem, himself a Palestinian. On receiving that letter David observed that a letter of this kind make us think about the nature of the world we live in and our forms of resisting dehumanizing forces.

His ideas on theological education for priests are very relevant and practical, in a pluralistic country like India. In the note on Tamilnadu Theological Seminary, to which I referred to at the beginning of this essay, he wrote: "TTS must discern the signs of the times and make bold to address themselves, the church in India and the Christian faith community to simultaneously denounce prevailing theologies that numb peoples sensibilities to an authentic encounter of God and the rest of Creation." He is very conscious of the problems posed by the fundamentalist, evangelistic Christian religious groups, particularly in the context of the rising right wing communalistic wave. Appreciative of the involvement of this seminary in social movements, he calls for similar engagement by the church. Though he believes in indigenization of the Church and the cause of Dalit Christians, he does not make it his main ideological plank. These concerns have a place in the larger role of the Church.

I recently learnt about another dimension of David when I watched him play the lead role in the drama, *Proof*, by David Auburn, which was directed by Siddharth, David's elder son. It was an intense portrayal of an ageing man with a fading memory. David was attracted to theatre through works of Augusto Boal, a Brazilian playwright and politician, who popularized the concept

of the 'Theatre of the Oppressed', a dramatic form originally used as an instrument of political propaganda by the Latin American radical movements. In Bangalore, David was associated with the Bangalore Little Theatre, the oldest theatre group in the city, and another theatre outfit called Rafiki (meaning a friend) .

Plays with social messages appealed to him. It was with good reason that he admired Athol Fugard, the South African playwright (Fugard played Gen. Smuts in the film *Gandhi*) who is known for his political plays opposing discrimination against Blacks. David began to see theatre as a tool for change. Later, Visthar became a venue for theatre experiments. In 2005 an area of wild chiku orchard in Visthar campus was transformed into a theatre space. Theatre persons like Hartman de Souza and N.K. Sanjeev worked in this spot which came to be called The Orchard Theatre. The first production here was *Custodians of the Orchard*, a play based on a poem by Bill Mollison. Theatre workshops, such as the one on Theatre in Therapy, are conducted to meet certain special needs. Recently a special space was built in Visthar for the purpose, the Black Box, in which some productions have already been performed. However, his enthusiasm for theatre has not led him closer to appreciating cinema. We have often talked about introducing cinema-related events in Visthar.

His skill in public speaking is as powerful as his writing and he uses it effectively to convince people of his stand. An element of theatre can be discerned in his orations. Understandably he is much sought after as a speaker and facilitator of workshops. His training as a counsellor comes in handy while dealing with groups where he never pulls his intellectual standing. After hearing him speak and explain many of his ideas, one thinks more and understands more. After his ordination a few years ago he is seen often in pulpits in and around Bangalore.

Decades after he got a derisive laughter as a response from a senior priest when he expressed his desire to enter the ministry,

Re-visioning Paradigms

David got ordained in a small church at Muthyalapadu in Nandyal Diocese in 2012. I stood at the gate and watched the procession with David and the Bishop in an open cart drawn by two bulls approach the church as the congregation of Dalit Christians led it, drumming even as the aroma of biriyani being cooked under a banyan tree wafted across. This milestone in his career has opened a new vista in the form of work in the war-torn Tamil area in Sri Lanka where he has been working for the last three years. Similarly he was given an opportunity to visit and work with the priests in Myanmar.

For David ordination has been a long cherished dream. Being a theologically trained person sans the clerical collar has endowed him with a freedom to extend his map of enquiry and action. As I watched the procession enter the church compound, I wondered whether the coveted collar will in any way restrict this independence. It has been four years since and so far it has not curbed his activities.



Rethinking Development







No Closure: Persisting Inequalities, Inhumanities and Injustices

Shobha Raghuram

I can't quite pin down what causes this but the extent to which the survivors who lost their family members or who lost their loved ones – the extent to which they still are unable to put closure to their grief and still are in a state of mourning, I think it's significant, because it's been 60 years. Perhaps it's living with the fear of radiation. Perhaps it's the increasing indifference to their plight. Perhaps it is the Hell on Earth that they witnessed – most of them as children. Whatever it is, many of Hiroshima's survivors aren't healing (Cox, Goren, 2006).

It was on the night of December 2, 1984, when Bhopal died a million deaths. The chemical, methyl isocyanate (MIC), that spilled out from Union Carbide India Ltd's (UCIL's) pesticide

I would like to thank Mercy Kappen for having urged me to write for this special volume in honour of David Selvaraj, respected colleague who was always there to lend a helping hand over the years when times were difficult. I will never forget his support. I would also like to thank my collaborator Marlin Rishika, Data Analyst who has been assisting me tirelessly in data surveys and research. – Shobha R.

factory turned the city into a vast gas chamber. People ran on the streets, vomiting and dying. The city ran out of cremation grounds. It was India's first (and so far, the only) major industrial disaster. Till then, governments had handled floods, cyclones and even earthquakes. They had no clue how to respond in this case. The US-based multinational company, Union Carbide Corporation (UCC), which owned the plant through its subsidiary UCIL, did little to help deal with the human tragedy. Thirty years later, there is no closure. Not because of what happened that fateful night, but because our response has been incompetent and callous" (Narain, Bhushan, Mahapatra, Yadav, Varshney, Gupta, Sharma, 2014).

Suicide rates among Indian farmers were a chilling 47 per cent higher than they were for the rest of the population in 2011. In some of the states worst hit by the agrarian crisis, they were well over 100 per cent higher. The Census 2011 data reveal a shrinking farmer population. And it is on this reduced base that the farm suicides now occur. ... At least 270,940 Indian farmers have taken their lives since 1995, NCRB records show. This occurred at an annual average of 14,462 in six years, from 1995 to 2000. And at a yearly average of 16,743 in 11 years between 2001 and 2011. That is around 46 farmers' suicides each day, on average. Or nearly one every half-hour since 2001 (Sainath, 2013).

Memory, History, Time, Continuing Realities

There is no closure to suffering.

August 6th, 2015 marked seventy years since the atomic bombs devastated Hiroshima and Nagasaki, killed hundreds of thousands of residents, and left an equal number of survivors, or hibakusha (those who were bombed), to struggle with their injuries and to mourn those who died. They have been unable to bring to closure the grief that the memory of this holocaust brings with it. In 2008, they declared, "Another August 6, and the horrors of 63 years ago

arise undiminished in the minds of our hibakusha, whose average age now exceeds 75. Water, please! On this day, we, too, etch in our hearts the voices, faces and forms that vanished in the hell no hibakusha can ever forget, renewing our determination that no one else should ever suffer as we did.”

How far are we from bringing to reality a nuclear-weapon-free world? World citizens and like-minded nations have achieved treaties banning anti-personnel landmines and cluster munitions. And yet, we are not able to abolish nuclear weapons. The ageing hibakusha, including those exposed in “black rain areas,” those elsewhere who have endured aerial bombing, who cultivate rice around craters of napalm shadows trade incessantly, because they want to expunge that unbearable history. This is the world where the search for freedom remains without realisation. The writing and the living of suffering goes on today reminding us of that which cannot be tolerated in any civilisation.

Recently, on 2nd December 2014, Bhopal’s survivors recollected that day in 1984 when the air turned deadly and, in an instant, they were condemned to live with the memories of the deaths of thousands of neighbours, friends, colleagues, and their families, and to survive then with crippling ill health.

There are few dates on which farmers, somewhere in India, have not committed suicide. Writers mention how those left behind speak of farmers borrowing money for that last fateful bottle of poison, which would kill them eventually (Sainath, 2011). As I write (in July 2015) two farmers, Ningappa Gudihal (22), of Tavargerri village of Kalghatagi, and Ramappa Lamani (55), of Chinnamulagund tanda Haveri, have consumed poison and passed away (Times of India, 20.7.2015). Sainath states that India is losing more than 2,000 farmers every day and that, since 1991, the number of farmers has dropped by 15 million. Part of this reduction in the number of farmers has to do with an epidemic of suicides by rural cultivators, who have been trapped in enormous amounts of debt.”We have been undergoing the largest

catastrophe of our independent history — the suicides of nearly a quarter of a million farmers since 1995" (Ghosh, 2013).

Coexisting Contradictions

The twenty-first century began in the midst of extraordinary advances in science, technology, medicine, wealth generation, and the knowledge industry. There were major structural transformations including globalization, the digital revolution, the rise of corporate power, the massive changes in security, and the increased global surveillance after 9/11. There has been advanced militarization all over the world, with the US continuing to be the world's largest defence spender at one trillion dollars in 2009 (Wikipedia, 2015).

However, many, almost-irresolvable problems continue to beleaguer the world. Sustaining value-driven policies, in times where dystopian solutions are disguised and offered as panaceas, is a challenge that never recedes. Hunger remains the primary cause of death in a world that has an increasing number of ultra-high-net-worth individuals: the world now has 1,826 billionaires, with an aggregate net worth of 7.05 trillion dollars, up from 6.4 trillion a year ago (Dolan, Kroll, 2015). A record number of 90 Indians, with a combined net worth of \$295 billion, has been reported by Forbes (Karmali, 2015). There are 820 million chronically hungry people in the world. India is home to the largest number (194.6 million) of such hungry people; it has surpassed China, where the number of the hungry is 133.8 million. At the global level, this figure has dropped to 795 million, in 2014-15, from 1 billion in 1990-92, with East Asia, led by China, accounting for most of the reductions (FAO, 2015).

The Deputy Governor of the Reserve Bank of India said, "The 70th round of the National Sample Survey says that an average farmer earns Rs 6,400 a month and if we take out his expenses and consumption needs, he is left with a surplus of a paltry Rs. 200 a month. So how is he going to service a loan which is an average of Rs. 4,700 per month?" (*Times of India*, 12.7.15).

No Closure: Persisting Inequalities, Inhumanities and Injustices

The Bretton-Woods structural-adjustment policies, adopted by many countries in the South, have undermined, to a large extent, the agriculture base in these countries. There has been a significant retreat of the state from its traditional welfare role of the protection and promotion of the interests of the poor. The growth of the economy has not been matched by the implementation of redistributive-justice reforms in the social services. The diversion of national interests from the welfare of citizens to growth-led progress, or export-led economic patterns, has increased the vulnerability of large masses of the rural poor. The absence of land reforms, during a large part of the post-independence period, and the withdrawal of state subsidies to small farmers has contributed to the poor livelihoods for large segments of rural populations. The exploitation of resources by private-corporate interests, most often with the agreement of the State, has led to further impoverishment of the rural poor and the loss of the commons, with debilitating consequences for women and children, who are often left behind in female-headed households, which are very common among the poor.

All of South Asia is witness to the distortion of traditional food securities, a decline in agricultural output, and an increase in rural unemployment and in indignities for the rural poor, whose interests are often neglected in the efforts of SAARC countries in achieving economic “progress”. Poor investments in agriculture and the consequent inadequate development in rural infrastructure, lack of non-farm employment opportunities, absence of compulsory education facilities, and the decline of primary-health-care centres have all contributed to a reduction in the farming population in rural India. It is said that over 2.5 million Indians die of hunger, despite an economic growth rate of 6-8 per cent: “Undernutrition remains a silent emergency in India – 51 per cent of women between the ages of 15 to 59 years are anaemic and 44 per cent of children under 5 are underweight and 1/6th of our population is undernourished” (Bhookh Relief Foundation, 2009). The exodus from the rural areas is massive; and a discussion

of this issue is often absent in public debates. Internal migrants in India form a massive floating population, almost 400 million in the 2011 Census; this figure, which underscores the declining rural-agricultural base in India, is over half the global figure of 740 million migrants and it is almost twice the number of migrants in China, which is estimated to be 221 million (*Times of India*, 18.10.2013). According to the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) 2007-08, women constitute 80 per cent of total internal migrants: “There isn’t enough data on women migrant labour because of the assumption that most women migrate because of marriage. This assumption blocks further analysis of the women migrants engaged in paid labour and an understanding of how their vulnerabilities are being compounded by contemporary economic practices ...” (*Times of India*, 18.10.2013). The Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011, reports that 41.64 per cent of women are single in rural areas; and 40.05 per cent are currently married. Further, women-headed households account for 12.83 per cent while 87.15 per cent are male-headed households.

The majority of women who migrate to cities and are absorbed as domestic labour, construction workers, and in other unregulated and unprotected work sectors. The exodus in search of livelihoods is a human crisis of massive proportions. The search for a non-existent “better life” brings the migrant to the anonymity of the urban pavement, the right-less world of informal-sector labour, the degrading conditions of construction employment; these migrants are robbed of their cultures, their knowledge systems, and the sense of community present in rural cultures.

Farmers’ suicides only underscore severe agrarian distress, excessive rural immiseration, and the persisting and deepening inequalities for millions in rural India. No political party has taken seriously the structures of misdirected economic policies that are responsible for this situation. How the other, deprived half of our citizens live a sub-human existence or die remains a dark space in the democratic culture of India.

India's rural poor need major democratic and transparently devolved responses, which determine economic policies that regenerate the commons and reinstate the dignity of livelihoods and relationships in agricultural communities. Governments need to determine policy in consultation with those who are affected directly by their policies. No political party seems to want to invest time and effort in such consultations. Leading economist, Professor Nagaraj, says, "Large numbers of farm suicides still occur, only that seems not to be recognised, officially and politically. Is the 'conspiracy of silence' back in action?" A disturbing trend has gained ground with Chhattisgarh's declaration of 'zero' farm suicides. (That's despite having had 4,700 in 36 months before the 'zero' declaration.) Puducherry has followed suit. Others will doubtless do the same. Punjab and Haryana have, in several years, claimed 'zero' women farmers' suicides (though media and study reports in the same years suggest otherwise). This trend must at some point fatally corrupt the data" (Sainath, 2013).

Poverty, Deprivations, the Burden and the Silences on Gender Injustices

About 1.5 billion people are living in poverty all over the world. Women and girls constitute 60-70 per cent of people living in poverty. In the case of South Asian countries where 43 per cent of world's poor live this has enormous existential consequences. The Population Census of India 2011 reported, "More than one in seven women, nearly 18 million, lived in poverty in 2013. About 43 per cent of these women (7.8 million) lived in extreme poverty, defined as income at or below 50 per cent of the federal poverty level. More than 1 in 16 women lived in extreme poverty in 2013. The poverty rate for women (14.5 per cent) was 3.5 percentage points higher than it was for men (11.0 per cent). The extreme poverty rate for women (6.3 per cent) was 1.5 percentage points higher than it was for men (4.8 per cent)" (Robbins, Morrison, 2013).

It is alarming to note that "99 per cent of the 1000 Adivasi households from 40 villages in the two states, who comprised the

total sample, experienced chronic hunger (unable to get two square meals, or at least one square meal and one poor/partial meal, on even one day in the week prior to the survey)” (Rai, 2005). Rai’s survey report on adivasis and hunger, written in 2005, remains, to this day, a model text on the excesses committed in democracies. Almost as many (24.1 per cent) had lived in conditions of semi-starvation; 30 per cent of neo-natal deaths in India are due to inadequate diets; 30.7 per cent children are underweight (Food Security Foundation, 2015). The Global Hunger Index 2014 ranks India at 55 out of 76 countries on the basis of the following three leading indicators: the prevalence of underweight children under 5 years, the under-5 child mortality, and the proportion of undernourished in the population (Food Security Foundation, 2015). Hunger illustrates amply the failure of a system, which should guarantee the operationalising of redistributive justice and insist on mechanisms in society that secure intergenerational justice in all entitlements.

Singularly alarming, of tragic proportions, and with serious consequences for India’s future, is the sharp decline in the number of girl children (*The Hindu*, 2012). In 2011, the female child population in the age-group of 0-6 years was 75.84 million and this showed a drop from 78.83 million in 2001. The child sex ratio has been a source of extreme concern for all enlightened and committed social movements in the country for a long time. The population of girl children was 15.88 per cent of the total female population of 496.5 million in 2001, which declined to 12.9 per cent of total number of 586.47 million women in 2011 (*The Hindu*, 9.10.2012).

“Though the child sex ratio in rural India is 919 which is 17 points higher than that of urban India, the decline in Child Sex Ratio (0-6 years) during 2001-2011 in rural areas is more than three times as compared to the drop in urban India which is a matter of great concern” (*The Hindu*, 2012). In the Population Census of 2011, it was revealed that the population ratio in India 2011 is 940 females per 1000 of males. The Sex Ratio 2011 shows an upward trend from the Census 2001 data: 940 females to 1000

males as compared to 933 females to that of 1000 males in the 2001 Census. The states in India with the highest child-sex ratio are Mizoram 971, Meghalaya 970, Chhattisgarh 964; and those with the lowest child-sex ratio are Haryana 830, Punjab 846, and Jammu & Kashmir 859 (Census of India, 2011).

Preference for sons, the perception of daughters as economic liabilities, the predominant undercurrent of not treating women as citizens of the country with full rights, and the accepted tradition of violence against women, an off-shoot of a larger environment of tolerated violence against the vulnerable, have all formed the formidable backdrop against which unborn female foetuses are killed and girl children are starved. They have little access to health care; this leads to their deaths or stunted growth, as is revealed by the Census data mentioned above.

The difference between male and female literacy is an alarming 16.68 per cent, with male literacy at 82.14 per cent (SECC Report, 2011); the overall literacy rate for India is 74.04 per cent. The lack of serious commitment to the eradication of child labour, as per universal norms, has led to the perpetuation of child labour (Raghuram and Jain, 2008). The number of child labourers (ages of 5 to 17 years) is approximately 168 million worldwide. South Asia accounts for their largest base. India has the largest number of working children: 11 per cent of the child population between 5 and 14 years, i.e., roughly 12.6 million children (ILO, 2009). Foetal-sex determination and sex-selective abortions, conducted by unethical medical professionals, account for a Rs. 1,000-crore industry. Mobile sex selection clinics, with equipment manufactured by leading multinational companies, have satisfied the demands of highly criminal citizens (Gupta, 2015).

India ranks 135 in the Human Development Index, 2013; Sri Lanka is at rank 73; and Afghanistan at 169 is ranked the lowest among the South Asian countries. In the Gender Development Index 2013, India ranks 132, Sri Lanka 66, Afghanistan 148, and Pakistan 145 (UNDP, 2013).

Can there be a Future? And for Whom?

Behind these figures lie swathes of distress, huge endeavours at improving incomes, health, educational standards, acts of liberating families from penury and securing decent livelihoods, accounts of overcoming setbacks, accepting modest standards of living, but not indebtedness, growing violence and shared concerns that little has changed for people living in poverty. If at all transformations take place, these are tilted towards heavy gains for the wealthy and unaccounted losses for the labouring poor. The data on migration, on lack of any serious improvement in standards of justice for women, the declining access to food, employment, schooling, and health for a majority of the population showcase an India that has been progressing at the cost of vulnerable sections of the population.

Even as they have pledged their resources to building an equal India, successive governments have performed, at best, in a patchy manner and, at worst, in ways that are highly biased towards corporate interests. The use of public goods for private interests has led to the siphoning of resources from many social-sector schemes. It is an understatement to say that development today is pro-rich. Had it been pro-poor, 68 years of independence should have been sufficient to build an equal and just society, free of caste biases. Instead, caste-based violence, especially against women, has been intense; and so has been the sexual violence against them. The National Bureau of Crime has recorded a series of crimes against women across states, but few of the politically elected leaders have taken clear, public stands on the elimination of such violence against women. Successive scams have drained much-needed public funds; and the cut backs in social-sector expenditures have proven that the goals of the Constitution matter little now.

The economic successes of India are real; so are her growing inequalities, which are fostered by governments that rarely exercise the principle of accountability towards citizens. If we are to achieve

redistributive justice, normative principles, governing all economic planning, cannot be set aside. Budgets that promise outcomes beneficial to the idea of an inclusive society, tax levies that do not show concessions to the corporate, social-development outlays that ensure inclusive secular development should follow from consultations with the publics and autonomous specialists. If the political framework of a government is distorted by priorities that are not egalitarian, and not based on secular and gender-sensitive democratic values and principles, then it results in the creation of deep fissures in the social framework, which lead in the long term to the loss of economic and social, intergenerational justice.

We need integrated planning that does not instrumentalise the labour of those who do not have much bargaining power in society. Unfortunately, the India that rules is so class- and caste-ridden and so gender-biased that it leads to strong social polarisations, which corrode our democracy, at one time a beacon to the democratic upsurge in the world. Indian media, once celebrated for being free, is now owned and directed by several political interests and some corporate houses. Is it any surprise then that news, which is shaped before it is presented to the publics, falls far short of the ideal of objective truthfulness?

Educational institutions and public policy centres derive their intellectual strengths from the integrity of their scholars, research, and scholarship, and the agency of thinking, teaching, and writing in freedom. Political interference destroys these strengths; and, coupled with the poor state of financial investments being made in education, it prevents India from competing globally in education and research. If the social sciences and science institutions are dragged into mundane political struggles between competing parties and ideologies, India cannot hope to produce work of enduring merit that can compete with international standards (Raghuram, 2011).

The Spirit of Volunteerism, the Critical Voice

By taking inspiration from the civil-disobedience movements of our independence struggle, a large number of civil-society organisations in India have built, over the years, a credible resource of alternative development practices. These demonstrate the wealth of India's cultures of coexistence, which respect differences but hold paramount the value of a common good. Every time there have been attempts to minimise democratic rights or those of free speech, the affected people, at the grassroots level, have not hesitated to speak, to write, and to mobilise against such attempts. This is part of India's democratic tradition. Tribals, dalits, fisherfolk, people living in deserts, the urban poor, women's political organisations, have all exercised their sovereign right to live, to articulate the agenda they want, and to defend the way of life they hold sacred. Many have worked with sympathetic state agencies, others alone. Voluntarism has safeguarded the people of India, by bringing in the critical voice when an easy acceptance of some policies could have led to destructive, anti-people projects. This democratic tradition has to be protected if India is to remain a richly diverse and equal society, guided by the values of equality and truth (Raghuram, 2009).

Conclusions – Narrowing the Distances, Materialising Democratic Rights

The suffering of the hibakusha, the struggles of the survivors of the Bhopal gas disaster, and the continuing suicides of farmers in India remind us every day of the challenges that lie ahead and which we must confront if we are to move beyond pessimistic no closures.

The illustrative data, which I have given above, show that the number of people afflicted by poverty and human deprivation is overwhelmingly large. Furthermore, there is widespread disillusionment in various sections of civil society about the responsiveness of governments to people's problems, the inability of the state to provide access to the benefits of progress to the

poor, and the involvement of the disadvantaged, in a democratic manner, in the design of development projects. Equitable development and the role of the state in the reduction of social vulnerability remain major, unresolved issues in India.

For development workers, it is important to choose strategies that are based on ground realities. The focus of development needs to be brought back to the social and economic environment. The issues of persistent poverty, the varying standards for equity, access to and control of resources, and the biased representations of interests that inhere in unequal societies must remain as primary agendas for all governments and for citizens.

After around sixty-eight years of independence, almost all the countries in the South-Asian region have recorded an alarming decline in the sex ratio and women face growing and overt forms of social violence, in both public and private domains. This is an issue that needs to be of central importance, not only for the development sector, but also for all work that tries to alter a socially crippling order, in which the subordination of women and the inequalities in the social fabric are accepted norms.

To go beyond our current economic dilemmas, we need to develop a political ethics that can combat effectively the logic of the present political economy, namely, “produce what you do not consume and consume what you do not produce.” The last decade of intense liberalization in India has accelerated the gross consumption demands of the rich and the middle classes and has all but eliminated any semblances of a decent and fair society. I recall what Chris Hedges states:

I looked at the array of mechanisms used to divert us from confronting the economic, political and moral collapse around us. We have shifted from a culture of production to a culture of consumption. We have been sold a system of casino capitalism, with its complicated and unregulated deals of turning debt into magical assets, to create fictional wealth for us and vast wealth for our elite. We have internalized the

awful ethic of corporatism — one built around the cult of the self and consumption as an inner compulsion — to believe that living is about our own advancement and our own happiness at the expense of others. Corporations, behind the smoke screen, have ruthlessly dismantled and destroyed our manufacturing base and impoverished our working class. The free market became our god and government was taken hostage by corporations, the same corporations that entice us daily with illusions through the mass media, the entertainment industry and popular culture (C. Hedges, 2009).

As public goods are transferred to private owners, with the connivance of the State and encouraged by international lenders and markets, private consumption has become a symbol of progress and poverty a persistent condition. Most often, policy makers disengage this transfer of public goods from state responsibility. However, to narrow the gaps between social classes, we must have inclusive growth, which requires state intervention and legitimization to forge a national strategy of economic growth that meets the needs of the poor, entirely from national and internal resources. Indicators, as they stand today, reveal a serious neglect of people's welfare. The public domain must constantly include essential services as a critical part of the quality of citizenship and the quality of state-performance. Development indicators reveal the growth of a callous society that has not forced governments to audit their performances in meeting the needs of people in poverty.

We will impose extraordinary hardships on millions if corrective steps are not taken to arrive at holistic solutions. This will entail a public renunciation of ill-begotten power by all those forces responsible for this dehumanising state of affairs.

Centres of power have learnt the art of reinventing not only themselves, but also their operations, thus ensuring self-sustenance and the perpetuation of inequalities. For a long time, capitalism's excesses have been critiqued from a human development worldview; but, during the last two decades, so powerful has been



No Closure: Persisting Inequalities, Inhumanities and Injustices

the runaway glamour of advanced capitalism that its myths have emerged as truths. We need to return to reliable data and use these data to determine policy, the extent of financial investments, and economic policies which ensure, with objectivity, that practice echoes precept, which is encoded in the Constitution of India. The rule of law provides the route for transparent public practice by all citizens, by government, and by the private and voluntary sectors.

We need closure for the long-standing, unresolved problems of India's citizens, who live in poverty, without rights, and without identity. At a civilisation level, we must ask: Does the moral imperative matter to us?

Epilogue

The worker does not necessarily gain when the capitalist gains, but he necessarily loses along with him." "Labour is life, and if life is not exchanged everyday for food it suffers and soon perishes. If human life is to be regarded as a commodity, we are forced to admit slavery (Marx, 1844).

These lines were written by Marx in 1844 in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, where Marx wrote of the beginnings of capitalism, of alienation, where human beings through the sale of labour in exploitative conditions and lose their essence and their humanity. This was written 171 years ago. Much has changed since then; and yet the fundamental contradictions of economic and social bondage remain to haunt millions in India, in South Asia, and elsewhere. Winning this freedom is crucial, if we believe in social justice.

Note

"According to SIPRI, total world spending on military expenses in 2009 was \$1.531 trillion US dollars. 46.5 per cent of this total, roughly \$712 billion US dollars, was spent by the United States. The military budget of the United States for the 2009 fiscal year was \$515.4 billion. Overall the United States government is spending about \$1 trillion annually on defence-related purposes. In a 2012 news story, Salon reported, "Despite a decline in global arms sales in 2010 due to



recessionary pressures, the U.S. increased its market share, accounting for a whopping 53 percent of the trade that year. Last year saw the U.S. on pace to deliver more than \$46 billion in foreign arms sales.” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military%E2%80%93industrial_complex)

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No Closure: Persisting Inequalities, Inhumanities and Injustices

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Reading Development as a Disaster

S.P. Udayakumar

The socio-economic-political system of our world revolves around the 'development' sun. This particular sun rises in the North and sets in the South. Therefore, the industrialized, Christian, white North becomes 'bright and beautiful' and the agricultural, mostly non-Christian, coloured South stays dark and dreary. The North is the home of "industrial civilization" and the South is the jungle of "traditional backwardness." In development terminology, the North is hailed as 'developed' and the South is belittled as 'developing', or 'under-developed'. Then there is another set of countries that are called 'least developed'. The connotations of these terms are too obvious to be explained. Suffice it to say that the South is considered to be not quite mature, not fully grown, incapable, and has not made it to the established standards of the North.

The 'Holy Trinity'

Our problem here is not with the concept of growth if it simply means progressive change with the passage of time, initiated and managed by a people with all due consideration to the internal

impacts and external costs. Every human society on the Earth has had its own understanding of and pathways to development. However, these non-Western developmental systems were denied full evolution by the invading forces of colonialism and imperialism that imposed their own 'Holy Trinity' on the violated peoples.

So development in today's world has come to mean the imposition of one particular interpretation and organization of economic growth on the whole wide world. The Northern concept of development is based on the 'Holy Trinity' of "oil, steel and cement." These symbols obviously represent three ideational elements of the so-called industrial civilization: "speed, super-size and strength."

We all know that the whole scheme is based on speed. The faster you are in colonizing, dominating, cheating or putting down the other, the greater you will be. So 'hit fast' is the first principle. The second principle is 'hit big'. The Northern civilization likes everything big: factories, corporations, markets, profits, cities, roadways and everything else. The logic is, of course, the bigger your endowments, the better you feel about yourself. Small may be beautiful for some misguided people such as E.F. Schumacher, but big is powerful. The third principle is 'hit hard'. The heavier the blow, the greater you are and the weaker your enemy gets. In order to avoid such a vulnerability befalling you, you build everything tough: the state, the bureaucracy, the army, the guns, the machines and the like.

If you are not excited about this divine development, there is something fundamentally wrong with you. You must be an outright procrastinator, or a West-hating revolutionary, or a lunatic Chavez-lover. You just cannot appreciate "the civilized way of life." If you are not interested in speed, super-size and strength, then you are "slow, small, and soft." In other words, you are feminine, senile, childish, traditional, unpromising, retarded tribal. Put simply, you are *under-developed*. You are not a quick moving, big time, prime life, risk-taking, strong and stout masculine entrepreneur. You

deserve your fate of poverty and misery. If you claim that the “slow-small-soft” combination indeed means to you to be careful, sustainable and equitable, yours is an anti-civilizational thinking. You are our enemy.

Suppose you do believe in “industrial civilization” and work hard at developing your country as the national elites of Singapore have been doing, will you become developed? Not necessarily! The rich Southeast Asian country expected to be announced as a ‘developed’ nation on January 1, 1996. Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong even warned his 2.9 million compatriots in his New Year message not to get carried away with their new and prestigious status of being ‘developed’.

The Singaporean government had planned to use their new status as a tool to ‘develop’ themselves even further. Alas, the Paris-based Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), known otherwise as the rich men’s club, simply removed Singapore from the list of ‘developing’ countries and dumped them in the list of “more advanced developing countries.” The Singaporeans, to say the least, were embarrassed.

No matter how hard they try, the little Asians, Africans and Latin Americans cannot become ‘developed’ and seek entry into the closed club of ‘civilization’. Nonetheless, the hopelessly colonized national elites of these continents are going for full-fledged ‘development’. After all, it is part of their survival package.

Nature-Development Dualism

Nature is the repository of all human needs and even greed. We, humans, tend to see Nature, in its pristine form, as an untamed monster or an unregulated entity. We assume complete ownership and appropriate it totally without giving any due consideration to the other living species and their needs. This arrogant “Masters of the Universe” mentality and selfish proprietorship lead us to exploit Nature for our own exclusive use and profiteer rather than utilize it for our needs and sustenance. So ‘development’ becomes

an instrument of taming the Nature, domesticating it and appropriating it for our exclusive use, abuse and over-use.

This Nature–Development dualism inevitability leads to disasters. We can discern two types of disasters, viz. manifest and latent. The manifest disasters are rather rapid, visible and remarkable focusing events. The latent disasters, on the other hand, are slow, invisible, inconspicuous and non-focusing events.

MANIFEST DISASTERS

Human-Caused		Natural	
Error	Terror	Mitigable	Unmitigable
Unintended	Deliberate	Carelessness	Helplessness
Bhopal	Nuclearism	Hurricane	Asteroids,
Chernobyl	Subjugation	Tsunami	Heavenly Bodies

Manifest disasters can be both human-caused and natural. The human-caused disasters could be due to error or terror. The errors are unintended disasters such as the ones that happened in Bhopal or Chernobyl. Most of these disasters are directly related to the contemporary “development” scheme.

The terror-type human-caused disasters are deliberate as in various domination, subjugation and intimidation schemes in the form of imperialism, colonialism, nuclearism, racism, sexism, fundamentalism and so forth. However, these root causes are overlooked and only the symptoms of the diseases, viz., bombings, hijackings and kidnappings are heeded upon. Terrorism is also directly related to “development” as most acts of wanton violence occur because of historical injustices (such as slavery, occupation); colonial exploitation; imperialistic expansion; nuclear and weapons of mass destruction (WMD) threat; social exclusion; exploiting others to entrench “our (Western) way of life” and so forth. This is not to endorse terrorism in any way but to reiterate that most of it does have a larger context.

The natural disasters can be both mitigable and unmitigable. Mitigable disasters such as hurricane, earthquake and volcanic eruption are all quite natural just as rain, wind, autumn and spring etc. These relatively temporary phenomena may be sudden, infrequent, more powerful and do not follow any particular pattern. But they are quite natural and part and parcel of the natural scheme of things.

They become disastrous due mainly to our own recklessness. We pay a heavy toll both in terms of human lives and material damages as we are not careful or selective about where we live, how we live and so forth. For example, Bangladesh and the Indian states of West Bengal and Orissa are hurricane-prone and it is our deliberate choice to live in these places. We have no one to blame but ourselves for putting ourselves in harm's way. If Mount Etna is an active volcano, we could keep clear of its surroundings. If certain sections of the various faultlines are shaky, we could keep away from those areas and avoid the disasters.

We rarely hear that hundreds of thousands of buffaloes or zebras have died in an earthquake or hurricane. It is our "more powerful than Nature" attitude and arrogance that render humans vulnerable to disasters. One could argue that we are civilized and the animals are not. As part of "civilization," we have to build houses, auditoriums, movie theatres, factories and industries, roads and airports and "develop." When what we "develop" collapse in an earthquake or hurricane, we face disasters. This is quite pathetic. The very basis of any civilization should be preservation and nurturance of life; if that is not the case, what good is that so-called civilization or its so-called development? In the 2004 tsunami, tribal peoples of Andaman and Nicobar islands and the animals of Yola national park in Sri Lanka were all unaffected. But "civilized" humans died like flies in large numbers.

If we are truly "civilized," "rational," "scientific" and "objective," we could have devised ways and means of nature-friendly cohabitation techniques. In an earthquake-prone area, we could

Reading Development as a Disaster

have built light-weight flexible structures and avoided building collapses and heavy casualties. If Bangladesh and Florida would get hit by hurricanes often, we could avoid building permanent houses there in these corners and utilize the land for agricultural purposes or other productive activities. Or we could build seasonal houses and keep out during the hurricane season thereby avoiding heavy human casualty and material damages.

Mainstream scientists and technocrats could come up with a counter-argument that our modern scientific-technological prowess and equipment (that are the direct achievements of our modern development) help us understand many hidden truths of life, handle many situations and so forth. But none of this can be of any use or help whatsoever in the event of an asteroid or meteoric collision. If and when an unmitigable disaster strikes, we will be done with. We will suffer the fate of dinosaurs.

Let us now turn to latent disasters. As pointed out earlier, they tend to be slow, invisible, inconspicuous and non-focusing events. Just like manifest disasters, latent disasters can also be both human-caused and natural. The human-caused disasters could be due to error or terror.

LATENT DISASTERS

Human-Caused		Natural	
Error	Terror	Mitigable	Unmitigable
Unintended	Deliberate	Carelessness	Helplessness
Unquestioning	Megaprojects	Depletion of resources	Abrupt ending
Acceptance of Northern values, Interest	Militarism		

The errors are catastrophes such as conquering of Nature, industrialization, globalization and other such unquestioning acceptance of Northern “development” values and interests. The

result is pollution of air, water, land, and sky; absence of health and presence of psychosomatic illnesses; undercut and unsafe futures; fear, anger, hatred and anxiety; weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and perpetual preparation for war; spending most of the resources for life-killing purposes rather than life-enhancing goals etc. We do many of these unknowingly or sometimes unwillingly and fail to see the long-term effects of our own commissions and omissions.

Even after we have realized that these are avoidable mistakes, we persist with the modern “development” precepts and practices. The countries in the North do not want to acknowledge their mistakes and admit that “our way of life” cannot be sustained for too long. The elites of the South think that the ‘Northern’ model is the only way to “develop” their countries and try desperately to beat the former in their own game. Consequently, we are facing an assortment of crises that gives rise to a creeping disaster.

The terror-type human-caused disasters include mega-projects such as nuclear power complexes, mines, industries, huge dams like the Three Gorges Dam in China or the Narmada Dam in India and so on. They all have disastrous consequences. Nuclear power stations leave huge amounts of dangerous nuclear waste to be dealt with and radioactive decommissioned plants to be taken care of. The Three Gorges Dam is the world’s largest hydropower project with a generating capacity of 18,000 MW. The world’s largest dam will create a reservoir 600 kilometres in length and permit ocean-going ships to navigate more than 2,000 kilometres from the East China Sea to the inland city of Chongqing. One can imagine the impacts of such a humongous project on the Earth and the local environment. Besides such concrete projects, there are abstract concepts and ideas such as militarism, Nazism, Fascism that cause havoc on human communities also.

The latent natural disasters can also be divided into mitigable and unmitigable ones. Depletion of resources because of our indiscriminate use and reckless attitude towards Nature causes

latent disasters. Deforestation causes rain failure; sea-sand mining causes sea erosion and tsunami vulnerability etc. If an unmitigable disaster strikes, our fate will be sealed forever.

In the Nature-human interactions that aim for development, most of what humans do is not in the best interests of either Nature or humans. Similarly, humans take Nature for granted, refuse to see the possible unmitigable disasters and pay no attention to their own helplessness and vulnerability. An acknowledgement of this 'smallness' could result in better treatment of Nature; however, we fail to do that out of fear or vanity. The 'God complex' of modern man as much as the intellectual arrogance and the scientific and technological prowess make things more complicated for humans. Clearly, we ought to reassess our understanding of Nature, our attitude towards it and our relationship with it. We should also see development in terms of Nature's sustainability and our own survivability. So any developmental effort has to develop both the giver and the taker, and not just the taker.

Development-Disaster Connection

Nature is an entity of finite resources. And we, humans, can utilize it with an appropriate development model to achieve normal growth, or exploit it with an inappropriate development model to achieve abnormal growth. Growth too has desirable and undesirable aspects. While we celebrate normal growth of cells in human bodies, we abhor abnormal growth of cells as it is cancerous and disastrous.

Nothing can keep growing. Every growth has to stop at a point, mature differently, and complete the cycle of progress. Human bodies stop growing at a particular point, mature, begin to age and die. Similarly, a fruit ripens at some point, withers, falls to the ground and completes the circle of life. One can never keep building a tower but has to stop at a point on the basis of its foundational strength and capabilities. So normal growth is good and that too changes its nature and scope at some point. But the contemporary development paradigm marked by recklessness and

indiscriminate use of Nature gives rise to abnormal growth leading to disasters.

After all, development (of the powerful) is often defined by the powerful for the powerful. How would we explain the execution of mega-projects and hurting, harming and even killing human beings and their interests? The vested interests such as the moneylenders, developers, policymakers, bureaucrats and middlemen are all interested in *their* own “development,” making quick and easy money under the pretext of developing the society. The mega-projects absorb huge amounts of money over a long period of time with so much room for corruption and wastefulness. They are so huge and complex that no meaningful transparency, accountability and popular participation are possible. These highly centralized, authoritatively managed and arrogantly executed projects put the vested interests in full command and control. The enormity and complexity of these mega-projects allow them to take care of their interests amply well. The costs and consequences of their takes and mistakes can be conveniently hidden or written off. The serious unforeseen complications, environmental impacts, social costs, future-bearings, and all other externalities will become public liability and the vested interests take their loot with little or no responsibility whatsoever.

In the name of development, the ruling elites bring about disasters. After a disaster, they rebuild the same backwardness. This ‘disaster to fix a disaster’ approach has come to stay with the current understanding of development, disaster management, governance and so on. This self-centered and calculated violation of public resources and trust revolves around the following precepts:

- Super-man No humility; full of arrogance
- Super-speed Go-getter; never mind the consequences
- Super-size Bigger the better
- Super-science Science, more science, and more and more science

Reading Development as a Disaster

Super-market Sell and sell and sell everything
Super-money More and more and more
Super-power My way or Highway Arrogance
Soullessness No reverence for life, no mindfulness

Never-ending growth precepts wound Nature and the wounded Nature bounces back on its own time, by its own terms and at its own place of choosing. For instance, all the nuclear explosions around the Earth must have their consequences if Newton's Third Law of Motion (For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction) is true. What goes around comes around. "Our (wasteful) way of life" has resulted in increased CO₂ emission, ozone depletion, global warming, climate change, melting of ice, sea-level rise, sea erosion, displacement, IDPs/refugees, disputes, disharmony, violence, fear, hatred, wars, weapons of mass destruction, militarization, etc., the vicious cycle rolls on. In fact, the Geneva-based International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) has warned that our reckless handling of our environment herald a need for the world to get ready for new kinds of climatic disasters.

When this "civilized" way of life is inflicted upon a traditional society such as the Native Americans, or a tribal people, 'progress' leads to desperate suffering and total destruction of the whole group. The report *Progress Can Kill* put out by Survival International attest to this fact. According to the report, tribal peoples are sometimes forcefully removed from their traditional land in order to make way for "development" projects such as large-scale mining, dams, logging, oil and gas exploration, or road-building for the greater good of the national society. At other times, progress is imposed upon these people for their own good. For instance, the Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert in Botswana were evicted from their ancestral lands and herded into resettlement camps in order to enable them to access schools, clinics, and lead more "developed" lives. But what actually happened was just the opposite. The Bushmen were exposed to

more diseases such as HIV/AIDS and problems like prostitution and alcoholism. This is a bad example of how outsiders' notions of development can destroy tribal peoples, their self-sufficiency, pride, livelihoods and health.¹

I have heard how a well-meaning project of a Northern developmental organization messed up the traditional life of a community in Western Samoa. When the workers of a particular European organization found out that the young women from this community had to walk several miles and spent so much time to fetch water, the development workers thought the village women would appreciate having a water source right in their midst. The organization dug a bore-well in the middle of the village that would save a lot of time and effort for the young women. But unfortunately, this development project resulted in several of these young women losing their family peace and even committing suicide. When the young women did not have to go a distance to fetch water, their mothers-in-law had a firmer grip on the young women and harassed them even more. The long walk and privacy the young women once enjoyed, in fact, had provided an occasion for sharing, mutual support and some kind of an informal group therapy. When this was denied, the young women had to suffer at the hands of their family elders. As the above example instructs, 'underdevelopment' is not completely unsuitable for some communities or societies; in other words, development that is measured in terms of wasteful Northern comforts and luxuries is not entirely desirable.

Underdevelopment is often confused with poverty. Poverty is disastrous as it denies the basic necessities of life and causes misery. As poverty proves to be disastrous, so do disasters cause or worsen poverty often. The loss of loved ones, homes, possessions, jobs, educational prospects and health and well-being often trap people in poverty and misery. The developmental efforts that are carried out to mitigate the disaster and to eliminate poverty should not recreate the same old poverty and misery. For instance, the post-tsunami reconstruction in most coastal villages in India rebuilt

the same old backwardness that had existed before the tsunami.

Ironically, when Nature acts up and we are confronted with a disaster, all our development can hardly help us. Hurricane Katrina is a case in point. All the “development” of the United States with its advanced technology, high-tech communication, intelligence network, round-the-clock media coverage, highways, cars, military, and the modern paraphernalia could not help the people of New Orleans. On the contrary, the traditional people tend to withstand the impact of a disaster a lot better than modern “developed” people. As mentioned earlier, all the indigenous tribes in the Andaman and Nicobar islands who had moved deeper into the forest when the tsunami struck in December 2004 were found to be safe after the disaster.²

The Way Out

Pondering over the way out of this “development” quandary, we can think of a few possible options. The easiest one would be persisting with the concept of development/growth/progress as we know it today. There are many deliberate and reckless mistakes we commit in the name of “development/growth/progress” but do not show any courage or integrity to admit our own mistakes or the willingness to rectify them. Never mind the lopsided nature of development, the costs of the externalities, other inherent problems, the people who have been left behind, and the disgruntled voices. This disastrous development/growth/progress, what we can call “development of mass destruction,” leads to developmental disasters. In this scheme of things, one man’s development is and has to be another man’s disaster, and his disaster can be fixed by another developmental effort. Even as the capitalistic disaster is undermining our global society, its human relationships, our living environment, our politics, and our future, we relish the fact that even disasters can be turned into money-making and profiteering capitalistic opportunities. And we have disaster capitalism. After a disastrous war, companies secure reconstruction contracts, and calculate the net profit before

counting the number of dead bodies. The disastrous climate change issue is exploited to promote anachronistic nuclear power business. So even if development begets disasters, we do not care as disasters can bring more money and more growth. The road to disastrous hell is paved with developmental intentions.

The “developed” countries see development as higher standard of living and transform it into series of aggregates such as “raising the Gross National Product, assuring a certain rate of growth, and in turn fulfilling a series of production functions, consumption functions, utility functions and other ‘principal components’.” Viewing development in terms of GNP, the so-called “modernization” approach emphasizes providing market for manufacturers in international competition, warranting large investments in industrial growth and infrastructure, providing the basis for diversification, and creating a critical mass in technical personnel and investment resources. The aim of this kind of economic development is ‘never-ending-growth’ and the strategy is ‘never-mind-the-path’. Take more and more and care less and less, and the end justifies the means. In this day and age of bubble economies when economies burst like bubbles and send millions of people into financial loss and misery, Warren Buffett rightly calls this “financial weapons of mass destruction.”

Another option would be adopting a ‘no growth’ or ‘zero growth’ approach. As George Monbiot wrote in one of his columns, “Governments love growth because it excuses them from dealing with inequality. Growth is a political sedative, snuffing out protest, permitting governments to avoid confrontation with the rich, preventing the construction of a just and sustainable economy.” So the ‘no growth’ approach would not be easy for the government, the ruling class, the downtrodden or for anyone for that matter. Moreover, as discussed above, vegetating is not a viable option for a dynamic human community. A living organism must have a sign of life and that means movement of some sort.

Even more fanatical approach would be aspiring for regress. Regress generally means ‘sliding backward’ to the previous worse

or less developed state. 'Regress' can be better understood in relation to 'progress' because both words contain a sense of movement and a "discoverable sequence" in them. The contemporary meaning of 'progress' retains the 'improvement' sense with a twinge of 'change,' "the working out of some tendency, in evident stages." Depending on the chosen criteria, 'progress' may be approved or disapproved. Progress being a dynamic process that keeps on developing with the changing times, surroundings, and the overall environment, a society cannot be considered to have 'stuck' in its developmental efforts. If it is not pressing ahead with the continual process, it is actually falling behind and hence going backwards. 'Regress' in such a case is not an innocent opposite or reverse of 'progress' but a deliberate opposition to and willing reversal of the forward movement. Though the sequentiality and discoverability are commonly shared by both the movements (in forward and backward directions), the tendencies at play in regress are destructive, the processes undesirable, and the developments debilitating. To use the developmentalist lexicon, regress is neither lop-sided development nor underdevelopment nor lack of development but a complete departure from the very developmental path toward a degrading downturn. Swirling with social disintegration, civil war, and violence, an already demoralized poor and underdeveloped society spirals down to state collapse and chaos.³

Yet another option would be "the road less taken" approach of conservationist sustainable development. When the European settlers or colonizers violated the indigenous peoples, the first thing they invariably did was sapping their victims' strength: usurping the land, pillaging the resources, and breaking in on the traditional customs and beliefs. Having succeeded in making the natives feel weak and worthless, the intruders imposed their own values and ways of life on their victims. The indigenous models and methods were interrupted and an alien system imposed in their place. So the agricultural societies had better go back to the land and their traditional development models.

Shunning nation-states, mindless industrialization, heartless commercialization and careless consumerist culture, and hugging a communitarian world society with green model economy, appropriate technology, and participatory democracy, the biological definition of peace must characterize our struggle. Resisting the State's relentless pursuits of 'development,' and demanding concerted efforts at eliminating poverty by redirecting resources from military and mismanagement to education, health and agriculture, the village communities should remove the misery of their poor by reviving the traditional customs of caring and sharing.⁴

It is high time we restored harmony with Nature, enhanced local governance, improved health and educational status of all. In fact, we have already started talking about "green growth" strategies such as getting onto a low carbon growth pathway, carbon emission reductions, Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), developing environment- and resource-friendly technologies and so forth.⁵

Using Johan Galtung's conflict theory we can see a disaster as a combination of bad attitude, bad behavior and bad contradiction. Our "Masters of the Universe" attitude combined with negligence and indifference and misappropriating Nature without ascertaining sustainability and safety gives rise to the current imbroglio. The answer would be empathy, accepting our smallness and feeling and being part of the larger scheme. Nonviolent approach to Nature that emphasizes utilization and not exploitation. Creativity that underscores devising new interdependent ways of life. We need green growth and clean growth and benign growth. Not "'development' terrorism"⁶ that is inherently disastrous.

Notes

¹ Jo Woodman, "Progress can kill," *The Hindu*, January 13, 2008.

² Suresh Nambath, "All primitive tribes safe," *The Hindu*, December 31, 2004.

³ For more discussion on regress, see S. P. Udayakumar, "The Deadly Slide: Understanding Regress," *Gandhi Marg* (July-September, 1999).

⁴ For more discussion, see S. P. Udayakumar, "Landing Peace Theory on Solid Grounds," *Peace Review* 10/1 (March 1998).

⁵ Sigmar Gabriel, "Strategies for green growth," *The Hindu*, November 17, 2008.

⁶ "'Development' Terrorism," *The Movement of India* 2/2 (March-April 2007).



From Bhopal to the Bakken: A Transnational Tale of Two Aquifers

Caitlyn Schuchhardt

Potato fields to the east, oil fields to the west. From my vantage point in Fargo-Moorhead, a twin city nestled on the border of North Dakota and Minnesota, I chose to turn towards the potatoes. There was a time when I had not seen a problem in either direction, when I had accepted industrial agriculture as a necessity to provide the food I ate, and oil and natural gas drilling as a necessity to fuel my car and turn on my lights. Growing up in the Dakotas, I saw these industries equated with “jobs” and, for a good twenty-one years of my life, they seemed innocuous - even invisible, happening just out of my range of sight. But these industries remain key players in a rapidly transforming region, though it was not until I returned home after spending a semester in India that I began to recognize this region’s changes for what they were.

My new perspective on the Midwestern landscape surrounding me had been catalyzed by months of exploring the complexities of social and environmental justice in India through a programme called “Social Justice, Peace and Development,” hosted by Visthar, a non-governmental organization based in Bangalore. I had



countless experiences that shaped this new perspective, including meeting with women farmers that had achieved food and seed sovereignty, with young Dalit women in rural Tamil Nadu that had worked in horrendous factory conditions, and with indigenous tribes in Wayanad that were slowly being forced out of the forests that they had called home for generations. But the most powerful and transformative experience I had was in Bhopal, India, at the site of the world's worst industrial disaster - a disaster that has been ongoing for over three decades.

In December 1984, a gas leak occurred at a Union Carbide pesticide factory in Bhopal that killed thousands of people in a matter of days, with estimates ranging from 7,000 to 15,000 deaths.¹ But that industrial accident and the negligence that caused it was only the beginning. What remains less known about Bhopal - what runs deep below its surface - is the groundwater contamination resulting from Union Carbide's improper disposal of industrial waste. This slow leaching of toxic materials into the groundwater is an overlooked factor of Bhopal's ongoing story, because the problems it causes are not as immediate or visible as the gas disaster. In American media, Bhopal is often highlighted as a "past" disaster, reappearing in public conversations only on significant anniversaries. We need to recognize Bhopal for the "double disaster" that it truly encompasses; its ongoing aftermath results not only from the intergenerational effects of the gas exposure, but from the contaminated groundwater that residents have had no choice but to rely on. Now, generations later, Bhopal's death toll is still rising: over 25,000 people have succumbed to illnesses related to gas-exposure and contaminated water, yet there is still no justice in sight.

In the months following my return from Bhopal, I was searching for ways to draw a local connection to Bhopal's tragedy, to make the ongoing struggle of the survivors I met in Bhopal relevant and meaningful to those around me. When I met with survivor groups and local organizations like Sambhavna Clinic and Chingari Trust, the phrase that I heard again and again was that "We All Live in

From Bhopal to the Bakken: A Transnational Tale of Two Aquifers

Bhopal.”² They knew that their story was not unique, that there were communities worldwide that may face similar threats – both above and below ground. So when I returned home, I began to unearth the ongoing environmental injustices in my own backyard. I found potato fields to the east and oil fields to the west.

Because Union Carbide’s abandoned pesticide factory was still fresh in my mind when I returned to Fargo-Moorhead, I turned in what seemed to be the most logical direction: east, toward the vast fields of potatoes aerially sprayed with chlorpyrifos, chlorothalonil and 2,4-D (Wells, 2014). I am not at all implying that this was the *wrong* direction to look - because it is definitely not. The sprawling fields of potatoes that you find in north central Minnesota belong to Ronald Offutt, North America’s richest potato farmer and supplier of spuds for McDonalds, but they surround the land of the White Earth reservation. Anishinaabe and other communities living near the fields suffer from exposure to pesticide drift, which chooses not to follow property lines but instead patterns of the wind. After I graduated college, I moved to the nearby Bemidji in Minnesota, where I continued to learn about the consequences of Offutt’s pesticide use from native and non-native groups organizing for collective action against Offutt - like the aptly named Toxic Taters Coalition.³ I learned that through irrigation, the pesticides and fertilizers applied to these potato fields have leached through the region’s sandy soil to the groundwater below, creating nitrate levels so high that the groundwater beneath Park Rapids, Minnesota, is undrinkable (Gunderson, 2014).

But what lingered in the back of my mind was what lay in the other direction: the oil and natural gas drilling in western North Dakota. The industries drilling the Bakken shale for oil and natural gas may initially seem distant from Bhopal, but the risks and consequences of hydraulic fracking are not. Bhopal’s groundwater contamination – unaddressed for over thirty years - deserves a place in emerging conversations about hydraulic fracking’s risk to groundwater. While the EPA has noted in their

recent draft on hydraulic fracking that there is not (or at least, not yet) a widespread risk to drinking water in the US, they do acknowledge several mechanisms that allow groundwater to be contaminated, and point out the shortcomings of their own five-year study (U.S. EPA, 2015). I believe the risk to the Bakken is real, and we need to start talking about what we can do prevent further damage. This is where Bhopal comes in, for Bhopal is in the unique position of having something to offer the Bakken - a lesson in consequences, in aftermaths, in how to resist corporate evasion of responsibility. Bhopal's situation can and should serve as a warning sign to a region that is quickly becoming an ecological sacrifice zone.

By looking from Bhopal to the Bakken, I hope to uncover what lessons Bhopal has to teach us about the long-term impact of contaminated groundwater, but I want to note that this transnational flow - from one groundwater system to another - goes both ways. By looking from the Bakken back to Bhopal, I will also address how our increased awareness about fracking's risk to groundwater can bring Bhopal's "double disaster" back into public memory and aid in an ongoing struggle for justice and corporate accountability.

To do this requires highlighting the transnational flows of injustice that connect Bhopal and the Bakken both imaginatively and politically. While the shared injustices in these regions are numerous, I am going to focus on three in particular: **secrecy**, or not knowing being told just what (or how much) contamination is present; **regulatory "cracks,"** or the unfortunate loopholes that allow corporations to continue polluting in insidious ways; and finally, the **unintended consequences** of these industries - the permeation of their waste products into the everyday experiences of communities.

To follow these flows we can do two things. First, it can impact how we perceive and respond to not only Bhopal and the Bakken, but other emerging environmental injustices worldwide. And

From Bhopal to the Bakken: A Transnational Tale of Two Aquifers

second, it can also draw our attention to a material flowing through each of these injustices: industrial waste. The “waste” that has been “disposed of” in Bhopal and the Bakken region has had profound impacts on local communities - impacts that make it hard to dismiss industrial waste as a material that is inactive or inert, despite corporate claims otherwise. I believe that to truly understand the impact of Bhopal’s ongoing disaster and the Bakken’s emerging one, we need to consider redefining, or altering, our understanding of “industrial waste” and its capabilities. The final portion of my essay will explore an alternative way of approaching industrial waste, drawn on both Jane Bennett’s concept of vital materiality and Rob Nixon’s concept of slow violence.

But before we get to that point, I want to return to the connections that flow between Bhopal and the Bakken. While the composition of toxic wastewater is different in each case, it shares an unfortunate ingredient: **secrecy**. In the immediate aftermath of Bhopal’s disaster, Union Carbide refused to reveal the composition of the deadly gas that leaked out of the city, or share the studies that had been done on the gas’s health risks, as such information was deemed a “trade secret” (Hanna, Morehouse, and Sarangi, 2005: 125). And today, the factory’s abandoned waste - both lying on the surface of the factory grounds and buried below - is equally a mystery. While some chemicals have been identified as carbaryl, naphthol, and naphthalene, there are still a number of unknowns at play (Hanna, Morehouse, and Sarangi, 2005: 151). Treating the effects of a chemical cocktail, whose precise balance of toxins may differ between people exposed, is more akin to a guessing game than actual medical treatment.

Those living in the Bakken and other prominent hydrofracking regions are beginning to understand the deeply disturbing reality of not knowing what you are exposed to. As journalist Alex Prud’homme notes in *The Ripple Effect: The Fate of Freshwater in the 21st Century*, “Understanding the full extent of the problem [of fracking] has been made difficult by the secretive nature of

the gas industry” (2011: 285). “Drilling companies,” Prud’homme explains, “claim the makeup of their fracking fluid is proprietary and refuse to divulge their contents” (2011: 287). Prud’homme notes that groundwater contamination studies on fracking and water contamination have shown that “at least half of the chemicals in fracking fluids are toxic, such as benzene, toluene, boric acid, formaldehyde, and xylene,” but remarks that “many other chemicals used in fracking remain secret” (2011: 287). And to “secret,” I would add “likely untested.” As Nena Baker notes in *The Body Toxic*, the EPA’s testing of chemicals cannot keep up with the chemical industry, meaning that the EPA “instead relies on the chemical industry to act voluntarily when concerns arise” (2008: 16) - a strategy that arguably gives way too much freedom to corporate interests.

Despite the lack of chemical testing, one may wonder how exactly a corporation can get away with putting groundwater aquifers at risk of chemical contamination. While we can list off an impressive list of protective legislations such as the the Clean Water Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act, and the Clean Air Act, the reality is that the insidious Energy Policy Act of 2005 - also known as the “Halliburton Loophole,” “exempts drilling companies from having to disclose what chemicals are added to the frack water, millions of gallons of which can be pumped into the ground near aquifers during drilling” (Prud’homme 2011: 286). I agree with Prud’homme’s claim that such irresponsible exemptions from major environmental laws “court environmental disaster” and illustrate what amounts to “pure hubris” in allowing “the injection of toxic chemicals into the ground, at explosive pressure, with no real idea of the effects” (2011: 350). Oil and gas companies can use this to evade responsibility and continue their environmentally damaging practices without a second thought to the slow violence their industrial waste is inflicting. Such structural injustices in how our government and corporations operate is not unlike the evasive measures taken by Union Carbide - and now, Dow Chemical, who acquired Union Carbide in 2001.

From Bhopal to the Bakken: A Transnational Tale of Two Aquifers

Bridget Hanna, Ward Morehouse, and Satinath Sarangi outline the absurd reality of this evasion in their collection *The Bhopal Reader*, when they question:

How has this particular tragedy managed to slip through the cracks of the systems of responsibility designed for abuses of any of these categories – legal, environmental, medical, corporate, and human? These categories of personal injury, environmental contamination and negligence, culpable homicide, and human rights become inadequate in the face of the Bhopal disaster. Abandoned in a gray area of national and international law that applies (or doesn't) to multinational corporate actors, Bhopal and its aftermath continue to demand a radical revision of international justice and corporate accountability (2005: 297).

Bhopal's legal "grey area" is taken advantage of by both Dow Chemical and the Indian Government – players that want to avoid taking on what would be a massive and expensive clean-up project. They use the murky realm of international law to their advantage – just like drilling companies relying on the Halliburton Loophole – to continue their evasion of responsibility and allow the slow violence of their industrial waste products to continue. It has been happening in Bhopal for decades – and who knows how long it will happen in the Bakken. What we do know is that looking to Bhopal and understanding the reality of what the survivor groups have been experiencing over these past three decades is not only a way to peek into the Bakken's future, but a necessary move that humanizes and brings to light the suffering of three generations of Bhopalis.

It is at this point that I want to turn to the unintended consequences of these industries – the permeation of their waste products into the everyday experiences of communities. I mentioned before that Bhopal can be thought of as a "double-disaster," with the gas exposure and water contamination as two parts of their ongoing tragedy. But in reality, it is much more complex than that. In *The Bhopal Reader*, Hanna, Morehouse,

and Sarangi outline the multi-layered disaster of Bhopal, providing a much fuller picture that:

encompasses the conspiracies of law and government that led to the settlement with Union Carbide; the failure to bring to trial any of the negligent company's officials; the bureaucratic nightmare of the compensation courts; the systematic suppression of medical research and treatment of exposure even as the health crisis worsens; the knowing contamination of local drinking water from chemicals abandoned at the factory site; and the unending denial of truth and justice from corporate and government officials, both in India and the United States (2005: xx).

On the ground, this mess of injustices results in job loss of those who suffer debilitating illnesses, increasing poverty from that job loss, increasing health issues from poor living conditions, and -most disturbingly – human rights abuses by pharmaceutical companies using Bhopal's survivors as test subjects. The factory's contamination has not only found its way into the bodies of people, but it has become a part of their everyday existence - shaping their lives, jobs, families, the legal system around them, their (lack of) access to healthcare, and more. It has permeated the city, creating an environment that is "toxic" in several senses of the word.

The Bakken faces a similar network of unintended consequences that permeate into the surrounding area. Skyrocketing prices of everything from apartments to food to even just water for showers are gouging communities and leaving workers homeless and living out of their cars.⁴ Crime rates rise; the standard of living plummets. The landscape changes as illegal dumping "[wipes] out aquatic life in streams and wetlands and [sterilizes] farmland" (Kusnetz 2012). Cattle die mysterious deaths, and families are unfortunately learn to recognize the smell of dangerous, headache-inducing gasses in the air and their homes. But packing up their lives and families is not always a viable

option for people who have built the foundation of their lives in western North Dakota.⁵⁵ Instead, local residents become “collateral damage” and are forced, like the people of Bhopal, to live in an ecological sacrifice zone (Gibson 2012).

Disturbing as this permeation may be, I want to suggest that this growing spread of toxicity can - like our increased awareness of groundwater contamination - be used to our advantage. This network of growing social inequities, of health issues, of drastic landscape change, of poverty, can help create a network of support, connecting communities that are experiencing similar issues across the world. Bhopal and the Bakken are both examples of what happens - and what potentially can happen - when industry runs wild and unchecked, but they are only a few examples amidst a world saturated with dangerous industries. To combat the deep-running and long-lasting impact of the injustices such industries create, we need to use this growing network of permeable cracks and crevices to our advantage - particularly when such connections can bridge transnational boundaries.

But in addition to utilizing this network, I also argue that we need to alter, or re-envision, our understanding of industrial waste. In Jane Bennett’s *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, she questions how “political responses to public problems [would] change were we able to take seriously the vitality of (nonhuman) bodies,” so that instead of seeing “trash,” we saw an “accumulating pile of lively and potentially dangerous matter” (2011: viii). But what happens when we amplify Bennett’s *trash* to talk about *industrial waste*, something already considered dangerous yet rarely taken seriously by political or corporate forces? We need to alter our understanding of the agency of industrial waste - to view it not as an inert material, but an actant capable of inflicting a slow violence upon those it encounters. Bennett believes that we should take seriously the “vitality” of nonhuman actants, defining vitality as “the capacity of things - edibles, commodities, storms, metals - not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also act as quasi agents or

forces with trajectories, propensities, and tendencies of their own” (2011: viii). I place the nonhuman matter that constitutes industrial waste amongst Bennett’s list of potential “things” that possess vitality - in this case, a violent and dangerous vitality.

When it comes to industrial wastewater and the toxic mixture of chemicals it contains, the type of “action” that it participates in is harmful, violent, and deadly in the havoc that it can wreak on our bodies. But from our limited perspective, this damage is rarely immediate or noticeable until it is often too late. In Rob Nixon’s book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, he defines slow violence as “a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (2011: 2). What exposure to industrial waste or wastewater physically does to our bodies and environments falls into this category of slow violence. It inflicts a type of violence that is, to borrow Nixon’s terms, “neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales” (2011: 3).

Bennett’s political project calls for us to recognize the vitality of nonhuman things in order to alter our responses to our most urgent public problems, but Nixon’s slow violence adds another layer of complexity to this scenario. He explains that “public policy is shaped primarily around perceived immediate need” and slow violence complicates this because of how, particularly in the case of chemical violence like that of industrial waste exposure, the violent effects are “driven inward, somatized into cellular dramas of mutation that - particularly in the bodies of the poor - remain largely unobserved, undiagnosed, and untreated” (2011: 6). How can public policy and our responses to public problems - like groundwater contamination - take into account a violence that we often cannot see and do not realize the scale of? When “industrial particulates and effluents live on in the environmental elements we inhabit and in our very bodies,” as Nixon writes,

From Bhopal to the Bakken: A Transnational Tale of Two Aquifers

they become perpetrators of an intergenerational violence, one that can pass from parent to child to grandchild (2011: 8). The three generations of families living in Bhopal, whose children are still being born with mental and physical birth defects resulting from the intergenerational exposure to toxic gas and contaminated water, speak to this reality.

This is why I believe that such a re-envisioning of the agency of industrial waste is necessary for our understanding of the realities of both Bhopal's ongoing disaster and the Bakken's emerging one. It allows us to recognize that - despite the differences in industries, in operations, and in geographic distance - the agential force inherent in contaminated groundwater operates with a similar, dangerous vitality. And with this new understanding of industrial wastewater as an actant with the capacity to inflict slow violence, we can consider what Bhopal's ongoing and three-decade-long disaster can teach regions like the Bakken about the long-lasting and deep-running impact of slow violence. Such awareness can keep Bhopal's struggle in our collective memory, furthering its call for justice and a world where there are "No More Bhopals."

It may seem odd - when industry in the Bakken region is turning western North Dakota into an ecological sacrifice zone - to think of what "good" can come of this rapid environmental degradation, of what potential it holds for illuminating an ongoing disaster on the far side of the world. But I take seriously the call put forth in *The Bhopal Reader*, that:

To 'remember Bhopal' today means not just collecting and understanding information about the disaster and its aftermath, but also acting on it and using it in creative ways. The way that we remember Bhopal *should* be different. Through this work of memory and advocacy, we, in solidarity with those struggling for health, survival, and justice in Bhopal, are working for a future memory of Bhopal that is not a part of a continuing tragedy (Hanna, Morehouse, and Sarangi 2005: 298).

We need “creative” approaches to Bhopal - ones that may require a transnational journey from one aquifer to another, however distant. Bhopal’s struggle for health, survival, and justice has tangible and necessary lessons for those living in the Bakken, as well as for governmental, corporate, and legal policy makers; while the Bakken’s current media coverage has the ability to be co-opted and used to illuminate ongoing industrial disasters like those in Bhopal.

When groundwater contamination becomes a legitimate concern for American citizens and enters our public dialogue about environmental justice, it opens a door – or rather, a crack or crevice – into which Bhopal’s story can flow. And as Bhopal’s story, the Bakken’s story, and the story of communities with contaminated groundwater across the world flow together, creating transnational (and metaphorical) currents, the more opportunity we have to foster change in our fractured, broken, and leaky system, where justice is evasive and difficult to grasp. By delving deep into the fractured world below, we can reflect on our broken system above - on a world which is not meeting the needs of people and the environment. Keeping Bhopal in our collective memory – linking it intrinsically to more current and controversial cases of environmental injustice like that of the Bakken – is a crucial step forward toward changing that broken system.

Notes

- ¹ Hanna, Morehouse, and Sarangi note in *The Bhopal Reader* that Union Carbide’s and the Indian government’s official death toll is 3,828, but that this figure is highly suspect and goes against the reports of those in Bhopal who were required to dispose of bodies in mass graves in the days following the disaster (2005: xxv). Currently, the survivor groups in Bhopal are petitioning the Indian government to revise the death figures so that when Union Carbide (now a fully owned subsidiary of The Dow Chemical Company) reappears in court, they will be held responsible for all deaths that have been classified as a result of Union Carbide’s gas leak and ongoing water contamination.
- ² Sambhavna Clinic is a free clinic that incorporates both Western and Ayurvedic medicine to treat those who suffer illnesses from exposure to contaminated water or intergenerational effects of gas exposure, and Chingari Trust Rehabilitation Center is a treatment facility for children born with mental

From Bhopal to the Bakken: A Transnational Tale of Two Aquifers

- and physical birth defects resulting from chemical exposure. These organizations are a crucial part of Bhopal's community, but I'd also like to acknowledge the work of the International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal (ICJB), a solidarity coalition comprised of five survivor groups in Bhopal that work closely with international allies—including students, activists, and other communities facing environmental injustices. You can learn more about Sambhavna Clinic and Chingari Trust at www.bhopal.org, and more about ICJB at www.bhopal.net.
- ³ For more information about the Toxic Taters Coalition, visit their website at www.toxictaters.org.
- ⁴ For a visualization of what oil field workers experience as they try to maintain their basic needs—like food and shelter—see the 2013 short film, “Sweet Crude Man Camp,” directed by Isaac Gale.
- ⁵ For a more detailed report of the impact that the Bakken's oil and gas drilling industry has had on families, see *The Guardian's* “How The North Dakota Fracking Boom Shook a Family,” which outlines how local residents have become “collateral damage” (Gibson)

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Re-visioning Paradigms

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How to Live Happily with Torture

Ashis Nandy

It is said we live in modern times
In the civilized year of seventy-nine
But when I look around, all I see
Is modern torture, pain and hypocrisy. ...
As the bureaucrats, speculators and presidents alike
Pin on their dirty, stinking, happy smiles tonight
The lonely prisoner will cry out from within his tomb
And tomorrow's wretch will leave its mother's womb.

– *Bobby Sands in 'Modern Times'*

Human body is the site where power has been negotiated since time immemorial. From attempts to establish dominance through physical strength in a collective combat to self-inflicted suffering to acquire spiritual or temporal power through divine intervention, from spectator sports to rape, the use of the body has been an inalienable part of power play in both everyday reality and fantasy life. However, this power is negotiated power and frequently a contested one.

This paper has grown out of a presentation made at a meeting of Amnesty International at New Delhi in 2009. A shorter version of the paper was published in *The Telegraph*, 25 June 2014 on the eve of the United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture. A version of this this paper will be also published in a forthcoming, still untitled book.

Re-visioning Paradigms

These negotiations shape not merely the nature of the power but also the persons negotiating, willingly or unwillingly, and the outcome or aftermath of the negotiations. These can be life-altering, though not often in predictable ways. The unpredictability increases when one of the parties is an unwilling participant. In both rape and torture, the dominant ones often begin as defeated participants. For they know their persuasive powers have failed and they have to get what they want through naked force. This knowledge makes them doubly determined, cruel and ruthless. But the story does not end there either.

More than twenty-five years ago, in 1988, an agitated Turkish scholar in the United States brought to me a handbook on torture. It was a handbook meant not for the victims, physicians or human rights activists but for torturers. The one who showed the book to me was outraged by it; she thought it to be a weird instance of America's cultural decadence induced by its global dominance. Shoddily printed, published from a small town in southern United States, and sprinkled with ghoulish humour and some line drawings to help its readers and prospective users, it was a mail-order book reportedly circulating widely and quite openly. When reading the text, one could not miss the writer's sadomasochistic glee in detailing the actual process and technology of torture.

For all I know, the entire enterprise might have been a tongue-in-cheek effort to tap the secret fantasies of readers the way pornographic books or movies try to do, and to make some quick money. Esoteric business ventures and professions are not unknown in the United States. Yet, strangely enough, despite all attempts of the author or authors to banish all thought, ethics and compassion from the text, the book also made it obvious that torture was a form of human relationship. It was a dark, pathological, extreme form of relationship, but it was relationship nonetheless. The unintended message of the book was that no torture was possible outside human relationship.

How to Live Happily with Torture

This relationship is always triangular. It involves the victim, the torturer, and the onlookers or – it comes to the same thing – the ones who come to know of organized torture in their society and either order and condone it or remain silent. Let us call them, following novelist Bernhard Shlink, ‘accommodators’ or ‘accepters.’ They usually justify their passive complicity or the silence of their conscience in the name of ‘higher values’ that may range from public order and nation’s territorial integrity to abolition of terrorism and defence of constitution. Paradoxically, democratic constitutions usually do not sanction torture and the practice of torture in democratic societies becomes, invariably, a game of fighting one attack on constitution with another. The only difference is that, while the secessionists or terrorists are usually from parties or movements outside the ken of ‘normal’ politics, torture by state agencies quickly becomes part of the institutional fabric of the state and, over time, a durable part of the culture of politics.

There is a fourth possible participant in the politics of torture, the citizens or the organizations that reject torture and seek to eliminate it from society. They are frequently weak or invisible in a polity and their focus is naturally on the victim. This is as it should be. But, if one’s aim is to prevent society from being sucked into a culture of torture, one must never forget the torturers and the audience that sees or comes to know of instances of torture and, then, continue to live, comfortably or otherwise, with that memory and knowledge. Because there has emerged in many societies an over-concern with what happens in the high streets of politics and cultivated forgetfulness about the happenings in the alleys or backstreets of power, I shall highlight here the second part of the story.

In my youth, I read Franz Fanon’s remarks on torture during the Algerian freedom struggle. At the time Fanon was not a popular figure in India’s knowledge industry. Brainwashed by bloodthirsty, ultra-positivist versions of Marxism, the Indian Left ignored him as an esoteric, Francophone psychiatrist who had nothing to say

to them. But my disciplinary interests at the time, psychoanalytic sociology, brought me close to him. This paid me handsome dividends. Fanon was the first to tear through my innocence and describe vividly the psychosocial consequences of torture. His theory of colonialism included a sharp awareness of what happened to the torturer outside his 'work'. The torturer carried the violence with him into his family and personal life and - this was tacit, given that Fanon's theory of oppression neatly separated the oppressor from the oppressed and did talk of violence as a legitimate means of breaking with the past - could not protect his personality from the ravages of his profession. As in the case of the soldier, the torturer, too, is vulnerable to various forms of psychogenic and psychosomatic ailments and the consequences of trauma. He, too, carries the scars of his noble duty.

It is probable that a small proportion of the torturers have clear-cut sadistic streaks in them. This minority - even when they come to torture inadvertently through posting, transfer or promotion - may come to enjoy their occupation. It may click with something deep within them of which they themselves have not been aware till then. They are like ordinary, law-abiding citizens who come across accounts of torture and cruelty in newspapers, television and official reports and develop a taste for them and begin to justify them as a political or strategic necessity.

It is also possible that when there are, in a team of torturers, some who have eroticized their violent predispositions, the cultural psychology of the team begins to change and what was previously ethically reprehensible, illegal, instrumental violence becomes a passionate, pleasurable, psychopathic or pornographic venture, serving similar needs of the invisible power-wielders who hold the torturers in leash and for a section of the onlookers or acceptors. Torture then begins to become an end in itself. We all know of powerful rulers, sophisticated and cultivated in other ways, who opened unintended, transient affairs with torture and found themselves driven by these affairs deeper and deeper into the world of sadomasochism.

How to Live Happily with Torture

As in the case of a soldier, it is not easy to produce a torturer. At the end of World War II, it was found that only 15 per cent of the soldiers actually fired their guns in the battlefield to kill. These soldiers were well-trained and courageous; they did not run away or flinch from battle. But it was easier to be brave than to master the art of killing. Of course, the army establishments, when they saw the data, were not amused. They did not consider bravery as an end in itself; they wanted soldiers to be efficient killing machines. They recognized that it would take more intense training, including symbolic rituals of rebirth and rites of passage, to make killing a more impersonal act and to acquire the required levels of 'soldierly conduct'. The American Marine Corps is now well known for taking its recruits through a process that turns them into hardened combatants and killers. Becoming a marine is now a matter of psychological rebirth too. The Foreign Legion of France has a similar tradition.

All modern armies now have to have a system that can produce killers and some armies also make sure that they have a steady supply of torturers to meet exigencies. To train efficient torturers, a regime must also set up institutions which, officially or unofficially, would share a culture that condones torture and accepts it as necessary and legitimate. Those who have read Dave Grossman's revealing and often-disturbing book, *On Killing*, will know what I mean. Grossman, who has taught in military academies for years and knows his job, shows that killing is a difficult art to master. For resistance to killing is part of our biological inheritance, virtually a species characteristic. To train a person to torture in a face-to-face situation, the trainer faces even tougher hurdles.

However, that resistance can be weakened. Following political psychologist Herbert Kelman, Zygmunt Bauman has specified three conditions under which inner resistance to killing and, by implication, torture weakens or breaks down: when torture can be inflicted as part of a role; when legitimate authorities, such as political leaders and trained scientists, sanction it; and when, through propaganda or education, target groups are successfully

demonized. The first two of these conditions are, of course, derived from Stanley Milgram's well known, though controversial studies, which show that role-playing and obedience to authority do help transform ordinary law-abiding citizens into killers and torturers.

Once torture is 'normalized' and torture is made to look like an unavoidable part of statecraft, governance and day-to-day policing and a necessary adjunct of a national security apparatus, the culture of torture survives the goal or the task for which it might have been used in the first place - to inculcate fear or an extreme sense of humiliation, to extract information to ensure security, or to intimidate dissenters or prospective rebels. Once torture is introduced into a polity, the culture of torture does not die when the original reasons for torture end or the victim dies or the torturer disappears from the scene. The culture of torture has the capacity to become autonomous of its victims and their political causes, for it links up with the institutional frame of a polity and the dominant culture of politics. And it can sometimes do so as easily in a democratic polity as under an authoritarian regime.

Without the benefit of expert knowledge and access to the right kind of books, we all know this in India but pretend that we do not. We know that when militancy in Punjab ended in the 1990s, it did not mean that the culture of torture, secret killings and disappearances ended. In fighting the secessionists through extrajudicial killings and use of torture, Punjab police acquired many of the features of the enemy they were fighting. So when the insurgency ended, the corruption and the criminalization of the Punjab police turned them virtually into the state's largest terrorist group. They were available for settling property disputes, abducting unwanted bridegrooms on behalf of choosy or conservative parents, and arbitrating between quarrelling businessmen, all for a fee of course. In Kashmir too, the police and the army have come to resemble the terrorists in many respects, with the ordinary citizens sometimes caught between two sets of terrorists and torturers. Likewise, there is no reason to believe that the killing of delinquent street children in

How to Live Happily with Torture

metropolitan Brazil was unrelated to the earlier record of Brazilian army and police under earlier authoritarian regimes military juntas and that the easy acceptance of violence in everyday life in Cambodia today bears no relationship with the cruelties of Khmer Rouge in the 1970s.

Torture chambers, once built, do not collapse on their own, nor are they easily dismantled. Once the torturers die or retire from 'public service', new recruits take their place. Like hangmen, they come from the margins of society or from low-status communities or families with limited life chances. I have heard earnest feminists shrilly demanding death sentence for all rapists and molesters; aggrieved family members seeking death sentence for all murderers; and flamboyant nationalists asking for death penalty for all terrorists and spies. If one accepts all such pleas, the number of hangings in India will surely be in tens of thousands a year and will require a large contingent of hangmen. Yet, none of the lobbyists have ever offered to train themselves or their children as full-time executioners. Nor have they pleaded for job reservations for specific castes and communities or for a corps of women executioners to ensure gender equity when executioners are selected. Such delightful, high-status jobs are left permanently reserved for other people's children. Usually, in the whole of South Asia, executions are usually the prerogative of Dalits and other low-castes. This is so even in officially caste-less, Islamic republic of Pakistan.

After all the brutalization and de-civilizing effects of institutionalized torture, does a regime get what it seeks to get through torture? According to all available data, the answer, alas, is 'no'. Philip N.S. Rumney in a recent assessment summarizes the picture on the basis of a number of cases, amongst them the French use of torture in Algeria in the 1950s, the long flirtation with torture when dealing with IRA terrorism, and the more recent experiment with institutionalized torture of United States in the wake of 9/11. The Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Report, though not officially released, has reportedly concluded

that torture or enhanced interrogation techniques by the CIA 'did not produce significant intelligence disclosures and that the CIA misled the Congress and the White House on a number of matters, including the effectiveness of these techniques. The report took three years to complete and involved six million pages of internal CIA memos and other record. The controversy has continued with the chairwoman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, Dianne Feinstein, accusing the CIA of spying on the committee's work and intimidating the investigators.

As for the Algerian case, Rumney quotes a review of several books in the following words: "Torture failed not only to repress the yearning for independence among Algerians, it increased popular support for the FLN (the targeted terrorist group), contributing to the transformation of a small vanguard into a revolutionary party with mass support ... Indeed, France's tactics helped FLN to win over Algerian moderates."

The long-term victims of torture are the general citizenry. Public awareness of the very existence of torture chambers within a country's law-enforcement or defence establishment, outside the reach of the country's judiciary, brutalizes a population, a section of which begins to even derive some unhealthy pleasure from the stories of what happens, say, at the torture chamber at the Red Fort or at the headquarters of the Research and Analysis Wing in Delhi. Public opinion polls should soon be able to tell us proudly, as they have already done in the United States, that a majority of the country favour the use of torture if it yields information about the future plans of terrorists.

There are also the professionals and specialists who think themselves to be passive onlookers but are fully complicit with torture. Torture is not possible in rule-bound, law-governed, democratic societies unless official doctors give false medical reports that whitewash torture injuries or dishonest death certificates when the tortured die. Higher rungs of the police and the bureaucracy and their political handlers, too, have to be a part of the torture system. That is why in countries like India,

How to Live Happily with Torture

there is such reluctance to make an international commitment to abolish torture as part of normal police work or as an instrument of the state's security agencies. India's convoluted strategies to avoid signing the international convention on torture have been a direct product of the awareness of the implications of that convention for our political leaders, higher echelons of the bureaucracy and the law-and-order machinery. They are signs of the deep inroads the practice of torture had made into India's state apparatus. Actually, the Indian state has never dismantled the glorious Imperial tradition in this area. Occasional lip service is paid to the memories of freedom fighters who were the victims of torture in colonial times and the memories of notorious torture sites such as the Cellular Jail at Port Blair in the Andamans have become popular themes of public speeches on national holidays, but few have spoken about the need to question the system that broke the body and the spirit of the freedom fighters, sometimes driving them to lunacy or suicide.

At the end, we are forced to conclude that torture in the long run does what no militancy or terrorism can ever hope to do. It changes the people of a country to accept cruelty as way of life and a normal means of settling political differences, ideological debates and even personal scores. At that point, a country can as well give up fighting its dedicated enemies outside its borders, for it has become, psychologically and ethically, a mirror image of its enemies. There is nothing left to fight for or protect.



The Changing Structure of Indian Labour and Impact on Democracy

Mohan Mani

Introduction – A Peek at the Commercial Capital of India

In 1980, as a youngster during my first job in Delhi I travelled to Mumbai on work with an older colleague, a reputed economic historian. We spent one evening at the home of a journalist couple where intense discussions postponed all thought of dinner till late into the night. At well-past midnight we had taken a train into town for a late street-side meal. I subsequently got an extremely valuable insight into why an industrial city like Mumbai was safe for people including women to travel late at night using public transport for work or recreation, a privilege that women in Delhi certainly did not enjoy. The industrial city with its three-shift work ensured that people were out on roads, and life went on nearly 24 hours a day. The needs of the industrial city also ensured good public transport. Further, a high proportion of tenured and settled workers with a comparatively decent wage ensured respect for the rights of other working people and their families. This was also the case in other industrial cities like Chennai, Ahmedabad and Kolkata.

100



Today of course, the situation in Mumbai is very different. In the past three decades, the city has been witness to the crushing of the textile strike; the Datta Samant era in trade unionism that brought in productivity linked wages and contract employment replacing tenured jobs; the real estate boom leading to flight of manufacturing from the city; the communal riots and politics of religious and linguistic exclusion.¹

Mumbai is not representative of the rest of India. However, as the leading edge of Indian economic development, the city can be seen in some sense as the forerunner of urban development in the country. From being the cradle of Indian bourgeois development, where the Bombay Plan was formulated as blueprint to Indian industrialization, to playing geographical and political host to the early Indian working class movement, to setting the rules for later industrial development and employment relations, to transforming itself to the economic (and entertainment) capital of the country Mumbai had seen it all. There are lessons to be learnt from the economic and political transformations in the city and their impact on society.

Structure of the Indian Working Class

There are two factors of the structure of the Indian working class that are critical to its analysis. The following briefly analyses the impact of these structural features on the working class.

The first is the division within the working class according to type of employment (formal or informal) and sector of employment (organized or unorganized). Table 1 is from the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector (NCEUS) report, and figures are for the year 2005.

In 2005, the unorganized sector supported 87 per cent of the total workforce (393 million of a total 455.7 workers), while contributing around 50 per cent of the national GDP. The organized sector with 13 per cent workers also contributed 50 per cent of the GDP. A rough calculation shows the per capita GDP

Table 1: Sectoral composition of Indian labour

Sector	Workers (in millions)		
	Informal	Formal	Total
Unorganized	391.8 (99.6%)	1.4(0.4%)	393.2(100%)
Organized	28.9 (46.2%)	33.7(53.8%)	62.6(100%)
Total	420.7(92.3%)	35.0(7.7%)	455.7(100%)

Source: NCEUS. Figures for year 2005²

for a worker in the organized sector as nearly seven times that for a worker in the unorganized sector. Understandably collective bargaining was easier in the organized sector, with much higher per capita worker contribution.

However, even in the organized sector there is growing informalization of workers. According to a study reported in the CII publication “Economy Matters” of October 2014, based on National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) statistics, informal employment in the organized sector increased from 48 per cent in 2004-05 to 54.6 per cent in 2011-12. Therefore, while organized sector employment in the period increased by around 20 million, 75 per cent of this increase was accounted for by increase in informal employment.³ The majority of employment in the organized sector today is therefore informal and insecure. Most new factory based employment and employment in the service sector is contractual in nature. This in turn has resulted in weakening legislative and regulatory protection for workmen, and organization of workers.

The second factor is the division between rural and urban employment. Table 2 details the falling share of employment and GDP of the agricultural and allied sector. While share of rural employment in the country declined over the past two decades, the fall in the share of GDP of the rural sector has been much more precipitous. If we take the ratio of GDP share to employment

share as a crude indicator of the economic well-being of the sector, the ratio declined by nearly a third, from 0.39 for 1999-2000 to 0.28 for the year 2011-12. The statistics explain the impoverishment and falling employment opportunity in rural India, and therefore high rate of migration in the country, mainly from rural to urban regions.

The statistics of migration from NSS data for 2007-08 draw an interesting picture. First, migration of households is low. Only 1

**Table2: Agriculture and allied sector:
Share of total GDP and employment**

Year	Share of GDP	Share of employment
1999-2000	23.20%	59.90%
2011-2012	13.90%	48.90%

Source: Economic Survey 2013-14

per cent of rural and 3 per cent of urban households were migrants. However, the proportion of individual migrants within both rural and urban populations was high. Around 29 per cent of the population of the country could be classified as migrants. What we see therefore is that migration in the country is still largely of single persons. Also, proportion of migrants to urban areas was significantly higher than to rural areas. Twenty-six per cent of the men and 46 per cent of women within cities were migrants. Nearly 60 per cent of these migrants had migrated from rural areas. While the large majority among migrant women in cities (61 per cent) had migrated because of marriage, among men the majority (56 per cent) had migrated for employment.⁴ We should consider that while the census data categorized the majority of women migrating because of marriage, among the poor, women also have to contribute economically to the sustenance of the family. As such the migrating women would very often also be

migrant workers in their new places of residence. They would face the same vulnerability as other migrant workers.

However, here again there is a catch. According to ILO statistics, despite rapid economic growth, labour force participation among women declined from 37 per cent in 2004-05 to 29 per cent in 2009-10. The country ranked eleventh from the bottom globally in labour force participation for women.⁵ A possible reason could be that women's employment is progressively becoming more invisible, with growing informal, part-time and home-based work that resist regulation as well as statistical enumeration.

The picture that becomes evident is of a population in flux, particularly in urban India. A significant proportion of the migrant population, especially among men had migrated in search of employment, with many of them migrating as individuals without their families accompanying them.

Migration is not only from rural to urban centres in the country. While the country witnessed rapid GDP growth for much of the last decade, the growth had not been even. Various states witnessed differential growth rates. More significantly, there had been increase in disparities between states, and within the population in the states. A study by P.K. Nayak, et.al. of the Reserve Bank of India showed the per capita Net State Development Product or NSDP (average for 2004-05 to 2008-09) varied from a low of Rs. 8,155 in Bihar, Rs. 11,367 in UP and Rs. 12,695 in MP to a high of Rs. 53,462 in Goa, Rs. 36,339 in Haryana, Rs. 30,428 in Maharashtra and Rs. 30,281 in Kerala.⁶ Further, disparities within the population in each state in terms of per capita NSDP increased, with the Gini coefficient⁷ increasing from 0.164 in 1980-81 to 0.245 in 2007-08. There is consequently a direction of migration, from states with lower per capita incomes to states with higher per capita incomes. The "Bihari" migrant worker in Maharashtra, and the political conflicts fomented within the state around this issue by chauvinistic groups are a consequence of this income disparity.

However, this is not a straightforward relationship. We have to take into consideration other factors. First, there had been increase in real wages in the rural economy from 2007-08, with nominal wages for both agricultural and unskilled rural workers rising for the first time at a higher rate than food prices in the last decade. The year 2007 corresponded to the introduction of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), an Act that guaranteed rural employment to each rural family at a determined Minimum Wage. Studies estimate that the NREGA increased real daily agricultural wage rates by 5.3 per cent.⁸ In fact, there is the anomalous situation today of the statutory minimum wage for organized, factory based urban employment in a sector like garment work in Tamil Nadu being significantly lower than the rural minimum wage. Second, while urban share of GDP growth was high over the last decade, this was a period of falling labour share in the economy, and rising inequalities. This was also a period of increasing insecurity in employment relations, accompanied by very high levels of inflation. Therefore conditions for employment and livelihood for most workers, in particular migrants in the cities has also been extremely precarious. We see a growing population of precarious workers, being pushed into cities because of lack of livelihood opportunities in rural India, but faced with extremely precarious conditions of employment and existence in the cities.

Impact of Low Wage and Insecure Employment on Work

One major impact of low wage work is that the worker is forced to work long hours and agree to increasing productivity norms. In the ready-made garment industry in south India that employs predominantly women workers, many factory workers claimed that working half to one hour extra daily to meet production norms was common, and this was often unpaid overtime work. Labour turnover of 8-10 per cent monthly (more than 100 per cent annually) is a norm in the sector. The industry also seeks to employ

piece rate work in order to push up productivity with contract employment. Low wage employment also means that workers have to work beyond the 8-hour day in employment. Many women workers in the garment sector in Bangalore and Chennai reported being forced to take up employment in the evenings as domestic workers after coming back from the factory, and to take in piece-rated stitching work at home on weekends to make ends meet. This meant that in addition to a work-day of 10-12 hours, the women had to further take care of domestic chores, or push adolescent daughters into helping with house work.

This is the situation of workers in waged employment in the organized sector, with at least some recourse to regulation of employment and social security. The situation in the informal sector is even worse. A domestic worker for instance has no recourse to any form of regulation of employment. In some states domestic work is categorized under the Minimum Wages schedule. However, for all practical purposes there is no regulation of wage rates or hours of work. There is then the large and omnibus category of “self-employed” worker. Many of them are women. This category has no form of legislative protection or standards for their work. Home-based workers, typically on piece rated tasks that fetch them very low rates, are forced to push up productivity through pulling in family members including children and aged dependents into employment. The system is dependent on layers of sub-contracting arrangements, with members from the same community forced into roles of petty-employers, supervisors and sweated workers.

The Indian government at the centre and in states in their magnanimity have talked of universal social security legislation for informal sector workers. But these pronouncements have largely remained on paper, with no efforts at implementation or enforcement of provisions of such legislation. An ideology that seeks to privatize and roll back the state role of regulation and welfare will only further weaken even existing provisions for regulation of wages and social security. The pronouncements of

the NDA government in the case of the NREGA have all pointed at the government objective to weaken a provision that has led to real wage increase in the rural sector – and that consequently is opposed by the neo-liberal economists as distorting the market and hindering investment and employment growth!

How do Insecure Work and Low Wages Impact Democracy?

We have discussed how unequal development and the crisis in the rural economy leads to large scale migration. This migration is also largely of single persons, and not of families. Among men in particular, migration is largely for employment. What this leads to is, on the one hand, wage-seeking workers in precarious condition with poor bargaining power, and ready to take on employment on any terms; and on the other hand, the backlash of xenophobia from the local population that see these job seekers as their competitors, who drive down wages and employment conditions. This creates divisions within society, and weakens secular dissent. It reinforces differences along chauvinist lines, which interested political groups are quick to exploit for their own narrow interests. Further, migration also perpetuates and intensifies existing class and caste based divides, with the lower caste and caste migration in more instances being forced by distress.

In the case of women in employment, for instance women in the garment sector, low wages leads to increased work intensity and extension of the working day. Many of these women are first generation entrants into the job market, and from socially and economically disadvantaged sections of society. What this leads to is increased vulnerability of the workers and their marginalization from all forms of democratic discussion and dissent. Poor working conditions bind women further to their homes, and serve to reinforce patriarchy. They make the labour of women invisible, and deny them both economic and social freedom.

The foregoing factors stand in the way of development of a working class identity among the working poor. The trade union

movement, already forced into a defensive struggle in the face of increasing attack on labour rights is further marginalized in its ability to reach out to new sections of the working class. The role of the trade union as an organization to represent the collective strength of workers and express their collective voice of dissent in the context becomes progressively more narrowly defined.

Within society the absence of a collective voice of dissent means that the strength to systematically and relentlessly oppose the neo-liberal agenda of the government and its complicity with capital become compromised. What this means in terms of the lived reality for workers is the absence of public goods and services at reasonable cost – be they for provision of essential commodities, public transport, health or education. What this means is that basic labour legislations like the Minimum Wages Act are allowed to become ineffectual and real wages decline. What this means further is that more sections of new employment are outside the ambit of protective regulation, and workers are left to the arbitrary mercy of a “market,” increasingly bereft of values of social justice.

We see in such situation the difficulty in development of any form of secular politics, with dissent clearly directed against forces of economic and social oppression. Instead, identities based on caste, language and religion get strengthened, and form the basis of social support network for the poor. This in turn becomes fertile ground for the growth of politics of intolerance and sectarianism.

To return to the example of Mumbai, we see today the effects of three decades of neo-liberal economics clearly impacting the economic and social fabric of the city. Provisions of public services, including the famed local train system, have declined in terms of their quality and the convenience they provide. Rampant inequality and privatization means that any commodity of use or service is available at a certain price, which is well outside the budget of the common person. This breeds anger and resentment, which remains inside the population and manifests in terms of xenophobia, hate of the other, and violence against women.

Violence in the city, directed against common people is certainly on the increase, as evident from media reports. The city that once welcomed residents from across the country is home to the politics of hate – hate for the non-Maharashtrian, or the non-Hindu. Meanwhile the pressure to survive pushes out more and more people into margins of society, in unregulated occupations, and with invisible presence except within urban eyesores of slums fleetingly glimpsed while travelling the metro-ways.⁹ More than thirty years ago, the peace in Mumbai was attributed to the presence of the working class and an inclusive working class identity. Today Mumbai is still a city of the working poor – however the character of employment has radically changed, leading to the withering away of the working class identity and all the spirit of inclusiveness that it engendered.

Notes

- ¹ In various discussions with the prominent trade unionist D. Thankappan, President of the Kamani Employees Union and a central figure during the textile strikes, he explained how the strike was a high point in the trade union movement in the city. It brought together wide trade union solidarity cutting across political and occupational differences for a struggle of workers for the right to be represented by a trade union of their choice; it received solidarity from the rural hinterland of Mumbai; it was able to sustain itself for more than a year in the face of repression from the politically and economically powerful mill-owners. However the collapse of the struggle also resulted in a dramatic weakening of the trade union movement in the city. This in turn led to the rise of a different form of trade unionism of the Shiv Sena type, that emphasized community and religious differences among workers; that replaced worker militancy and industrial democracy with the rule of muscle power and political patronage in settling industrial disputes. This also led to conversion of large tracts of land formerly devoted to industry in the inner city, with the simultaneous rise of a real estate mafia and growth of a lumpen class dependent on crime as a way of life.
- ² The Challenges of Employment in India: An Informal Economy Perspective, Vol.1, Main Report, National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (NCEUS), April, 2009 (www.nceus.gov.in)
- ³ A. Srijia et al (2014), “An Analysis of the Informal Labour Market in India”, www.ies.gov.in/pdfs/CII-EM-october-2014.pdf
- ⁴ NSS Report No. 533: Migration in India: July, 2007-June, 2008, www.mospi.nic.in/Mospi_New/upload/533_final.pdf
- ⁵ ILO (2013), “India: Why is women’s labour force participation dropping?”, www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/comment.../lang-en/

Re-visioning Paradigms

- ⁶ P.K. Nayak, et al (2010), “Inclusive growth and its regional dimensions”, Reserve Bank of India, https://www.rbi.org.in/scripts/bs_viewcontent.aspx?Id=2359.
- ⁷ The Gini coefficient is a measure of income distribution, and is a common measure for income inequality. The higher the value of the coefficient, the greater is the income disparity.
- ⁸ `Atulan Ghosh, Ashutosh Kr Tripathi (2014), Vol XLIX Nos. 26 &27, *Economic and Political Weekly*.
- ⁹ Katherine Boo (2014), *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*, Random House gives an evocative description of life in the margins of Mumbai.



The Fate of Indian Democracy under a Knowledge Economy

Rajan Gurukkal

The modern world has a form of knowledge, namely science/technology, which has hegemony over other forms. Democratization of the dominant form of knowledge through education began as a feature of modernity which was the cultural manifestation of science, technology, rationality, renaissance versatility and capitalism. Open and transparent in epistemological terms, science had made itself amenable to critical intervention and improvement during its early years. After the age of Enlightenment, science gradually began to be the unquestionable knowledge of authority, authenticity, and credibility. In various ways science became logo-centric and authoritarian precluding transparency and universal accessibility. This knowledge is analytically accessed, experimentally produced and substantiated with proof, though flexible. We distinguish it from information that is primary in nature and not the output of critical analysis. Generally, information is factual in nature whereas knowledge is conceptual, procedural, meta-cognitive and distinct for its intellectual depth.¹ It is inherently critical.



But who decides what knowledge is and what understanding means? Although quite important for any critical thinker, this interrogation seldom occurs to the general public. Such critical thinking is largely not part of one's habit, even though they form one of the major democratic populace of the world. We owe this to our education. In fact, critical consciousness is almost alien to our pedagogy at all levels. One is supposed to be acquiring critical consciousness in the process of higher education; but it hardly happens. Even the critical attitude of a liberal pragmatic kind, which spontaneously comes up in any educated citizen of democratic values, passions and ethical postulates, is uncommon today. Actually, a person of higher learning is normally inspired by the radical critical stance based on the fire of moral truth. In the process of higher learning we experience the subversive dynamic of deeper knowledge, which is inherent to it.

Of all critical stances, critical theory-based criticism ranks foremost, for it is raised right against the dominant socio-economic and politico-cultural power that the state embodies. According to critical theory-based criticism of knowledge, even science, the universally accepted highest genre of knowledge is not unbiased, open, neutral or transparent. It is a fact that science is transparent and helps the educated become accomplished citizens of critical consciousness in its ideal epistemological state. However, it is not the practical experience of humanity. Critical theory-driven insights enable us to realize that the authority, authenticity, credibility and universality of science is more a consequence of conformity-driven education devoid of critical inquiry, than the result of its epistemological transparency.

We often fail to realize that it is the principal actors in the dominant economic system who decide what knowledge is and how we should acquire it. In capitalist economy, science and technology constitute the knowledge of critical function, forming the foundation of capitalist forces of production and the principal source of accumulation. Capitalism recognises science and technology and its knowledge, for it is amenable to profitable

application. Other forms of knowledge are being co-opted, incorporated, subordinated, subjected, marginalised or destroyed depending upon their levels of amenability to profitable application.

Dominant Economy

We barely need to point out that today's dominant economy is capitalism which is a capital intensive, technology intensive, energy intensive, chemical intensive, profit maximising global system of industrial production and exchange based on a system of unequal relations of human transactions. It presupposes an all-encompassing macro-system of relations of production, distribution and exchange, subsuming micro-economies, strikingly uneven and structured by the dominance of capital. Capitalism has been expanding and transforming significantly over the past century through the process of co-option, incorporation, subordination, subjection, marginalization and even total destruction of other economies, depending upon the usability or non-usability of their features, functions, processes and dynamic for the facilitation of accumulation. Passing through and inevitably overcoming a series of recessions, Capitalism has arrived at its most aggressive phase of expansion today under the phenomenon called globalization. In today's Capitalist economy, science and technology constitute the knowledge of decisive function, the foundation of capitalist forces of production and the principal source of accumulation. It helps generation and regeneration of capital. Other forms of knowledge are being co-opted, incorporated, subordinated, marginalised or even destroyed, depending upon the levels of their amenability to profitable application.

Before we examine the features and dynamic of knowledge economy, it is important to briefly outline the meaning, socio-political implications and environmental impact of economy, which we include under what is called political economy. Intellectuals the world over, inspired by the politics of deeper knowledge is strongly positioned against the capitalist ways of unbridled

economic growth without any care for social equity and ecological sustainability. Reviewing growth trends in world population, industrialization, pollution, food production, and resource depletion continuing unchanged, the Club of Rome intellectuals brought to the world's attention a few decades ago 'the limits to growth' on this planet, which will be reached within the next century.² This alarming truth cannot be ignored anymore. The ever intensifying decay of the natural supportive and regenerative capacity along with the social and techno-economic absorptive capacity will soon lead to a sudden, unmanageable and traumatic decline of population and its industrial capacity.

Capitalist growth's effect on ecology and environment is disastrous. Pollution of the air, water and soil is beyond control. Increase of carbon in the atmosphere and emission of poisonous gases has reached a frightening proportion. Alarming is the problem of ozone layer depletion due to the reckless release of CFC, now widely discussed all over the world. Destruction and irreversible reconstitution of the landscape eco-systems are inevitable to spatialization under capitalist industrial growth.³ Special economic zones and smart cities represent the state-sponsored spatialization of capitalist industries. Capitalist spatialization inevitably involves relocation of poor people, destruction of their habitat, and disruption of their cultural continuity, which has been an ever widening process triggering popular movements of dissent and protest in the Third World. India is no exception to this.

An in-depth understanding of environmental issues and their related social and financial aspects, by intellectuals across sciences complimented by awareness of the politics of profound scholarship, demands every nation to navigate through its business with a thorough environmental cost-accounting and show readiness to discharge socio-legal obligations.⁴ Environmental capital includes components such as environmental quality and restoration costs, 'externalities' or social costs, future liabilities, and perceived environmental risks. Pollution cost is inestimable for it affects

human health and general quality of life across generations. Knowledge in critical political economy urges us to strongly react to the fact that no rationalised cost-accounting exists in any industry today and even after the tragic incidents of Chernobyl or Bhopal. Public auditing of industries has to become universally feasible.

Some of the best minds are moved by critical political economy that unveils the undeniable link between deeper knowledge and social and ecological justice. They have been contributing immensely to developing the critical consciousness of the public and empowering the common people to intervene in national policy debates. Scientists aware of critical political economy discuss science policy publicly to facilitate public awareness, the most vital aspect of democracy. Committed social scientists analyse the undercurrents of the present global political economy. Their awareness of the politics of specialized knowledge delves deep into the relationship between advanced knowledge and society. They seek to caution people about the social disasters and environmental hazards ensuing from the hidden agenda of the capitalist world order. We have a commendable line of such intellectuals ever since the enunciation of Marx's critique of political economy and thesis on capitalism, such as Andre Gunther Frank, Walter Rodney, Samir Amin, Immanuel Waller Stein, Hopkins, to mention only a few. They have shown that the accumulation drive of capitalism will continue exhausting all ways and means, even the least imaginable.

It is a fact that the capitalist pattern of technology-intensive, energy-intensive, and chemical-intensive resource use for profit-maximising production and exchange cannot ecologically sustain itself and cannot socially let itself to continue. There is terrible imbalance in the domain of natural resource sharing, which shows the alarming ratio of developed countries that contain only 20 per cent of the global population exploit 80 per cent of the earth's resources. Most of us are ignorant of the fact that the developed northern hemisphere has used up the fossil fuel share of the three

generations to be born in the in the southern hemisphere. Population, food production, and consumption of non-renewable natural resources are increasing in the rate that mathematicians identify as exponential growth.

Globalization

Globalization is another vital phenomenon linked to the discussion of knowledge economy. Globalization means globalization of the capitalist economy. Virtually, it is the process of financial globalization. Like 'development' the word 'globalization' is deceptive; letting people attribute all their hopes to it. Just like 'development' that cleverly and successfully kept its real meaning of capitalist growth implying 'colonialism' and 'imperialism' concealed, the word 'globalization' also kept its meaning of 'financial globalization' implying 'neo-colonialism' and 'neo-imperialism' hidden.

Financial globalization that facilitated the flight of American and European capital to developing countries through liberalization of capital market has been leading to a series of factors like privatization, free trade, foreign investment growth, hegemony of global organizations, mounting debt, intensifying competition, strengthening of new market pressures, heightening of political, cultural, social and economic insecurity etc. Anytime, anywhere, the sudden and arbitrary withdrawal of foreign capital investment happens in the name of one excuse or the other pushing the host nation in trouble as experienced recently by Malaysia and Indonesia. Decline of the public sphere is another disaster. In the Third World, TNC/MNC capital makes unbridled influx into areas of natural resources and eco-systems of bio-diversity causing dispossession of local people's age old subsistence strategies, disruption of culture, destruction of local wisdom, and devastation of habitat.⁵

Globalization is the sophisticated expression of aggressive capitalist expansion seeking to resist all anticipated threats of recessions. Scholars of critical political economy inform us that

The Fate of Indian Democracy under a Knowledge Economy

within a decade of globalization and WTO reign, economic nationalism has become impossible with the sovereign power seriously impaired in the Third World. Inequality has become unprecedentedly glaring and the number of the poor people has increased phenomenally. Income difference has been growing phenomenally.⁶

Many are deprived of access even to drinking water that is ironically, a commodity of MNC/TNC industries. Globalization has caused the loss of aids to food and fuel, making the life of the poor incredibly miserable and pushing them into popular revolts for survival as exemplified by the upsurges in Indonesia in 1998 for food and fuel, and Bolivia today for drinking water. Commercialization of health, education, drinking water, agriculture, media, information system and what not, has made the life of the middle class miserabe.

Underdeveloped and developing nations are in debt traps causing people to commit suicide under myriad of pressures that the market-friendly culture exerts. There is a peremptory halt to welfare measures in all developing countries. With the State growing indifferent to problems of drinking water, food, education, welfare schemes, public distribution and so on enhancing market dependence, localities decline. In the light of the new drafts on Intellectual Property rights all life forms are being patented. Having made agricultural seeds a patented commodity, the peasants are unable to exchange them anymore. Fertilizers have become all the more expensive making agriculture costly but with a lot of uncertainty about the market for their goods.

There is widespread social unrest across the Third World where the governments are advised to suppress the people's movements ruthlessly. Critical political economy warns us that irrespective whether recession recurs or not, speculative capital flights continue. More heinous strategies of accumulation will get unfolded intensifying the dehumanising means and relations of capitalism further. Obviously, the process of capital growth at the

cost of equity is heading for the *cul-de-sac*. What turns out to be undeniable beyond the epiphenomenon of the rise and fall of accumulation is the ultimate point of exhaustion – the dead-end unveiling limits to capital growth, its ecological non-sustainability and the inevitable collapse.

Crony Capitalism

Ever since the open withdrawal of the State from most sectors of people's welfare, there has been a steady intensification of the privatization of public assets. This process has been pushing developing nations like India into a solvency crisis, where public sector disinvestment is forging ahead under the pretext of a reform; transferring national resources into the hands of the minority. Integrated to the process of decentralization, most of the local public assets are being privatized in alignment with the national policy. In the wake of this, all kinds of anti-social concepts such as 'out-sourcing', 'down-sizing the public sector', 'multiple stakeholders approach', 'non-governmental organizations', 'voluntary agencies', etc., have become sophisticated expressions exciting no repulsion in the minds of the general public. Thanks to the most misleading term, 'development', we have reached a stage of accepting any anti-people scheme as natural and hence it has become unnecessary for the state to hide its instrumental role in the conversion of people's common property into the asset of a capitalist minority. Today, the state is openly an agency determined to subsidize capitalism by all means and facilitate its expansion even at the loss of even poor people's livelihoods. Naturally, there is gross economic decay and the entailing consequences such as starvation, survival struggle, prostitution and suicide.⁷

In the process, the State power itself is getting privatized in the form of sale of public credits or bidding for the job of recovering government loans or the task of crime investigation with consequences such as mafia rule, drug abuse, and terrorism. Major excuses for the State measures for privatization of its functions

are the lack of concern of the beneficiary public, irresponsibility of the public servants, incapability of the public sector institutions, bureaucratic inefficiency in government, bribery and other forms of corruption. All this allows the capitalist minority to loot public revenue with the connivance of the State under the pretext of one development reform or the other. This phase is called crony capitalism, for which there are many instances in India.

Establishment of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) is the most widespread instance of this; hidden behind the veil of national economic development measures. It is a major institutional type of subsidizing capitalism, which involves heavy loss of national revenue to the tune of about Rs. two lakh crore per year. In addition to the heavy revenue loss, one disastrous thing about it is that many people have not understood the creation of a private space of sovereign control. Various other illegal ways of parting with huge shares of public wealth in favour of monopoly capitalists add on to the process. It is crony capitalism of the worst type.

Outsourcing of bank-loan recovery is an outstanding instance. In late December 2010 Indian Bank sold its Rs. 8,000 million worth loans for half the amount without informing even its senior executives. State Bank of India has signed in February 2014, with retrospective effect from October 2013, a business correspondence contract with Reliance, which virtually involves outsourcing of almost entire banking functions and services! All SBI branches in the country have been brought under the optical fibre cable network of Reliance and the switching over of the entire on-line banking services from BSNL to Reliance is just at a click away. Many transactions of crony capitalism are negotiated at the top levels with extreme secrecy and whatever matter thereof made public is invariably couched in expressions apparently catchy and innocuous conditions. A ponderous paradox about the surreptitious operation of siphoning the national revenue is that it all happens in a big democratic State!

Knowledge Economy

When Peter F. Drucker coined the usage 'knowledge economy,' he meant an economy depended on knowledgeable workers. Many of us in India and the Third World understand knowledge economy as the economy based on Information Technology (IT). This expression is widely in use currently, to mean the economy of high tech industries, information technology and sophisticated electronic modes of communication. Most people in the IT sector and policy-makers think switching over to e-literacy, IT-based communication, e-governance, and online transactions is sufficient to constitute knowledge society and knowledge economy. Of course, IT is important in the economy only in relation to communication, but as an economy it is not just computer automated information technology alone. It is, therefore, quite essential here to define knowledge economy in the perspective outlined at the beginning. Knowledge economy is a popular name given on the basis of the current principal object of production, namely new knowledge distinct for its amazing power to generate profit in an unbelievably enormous size. To be precise, knowledge economy may be defined as an economy based on production and transaction of knowledge both as commodity and capital. Some of its fundamental features have to be briefly discussed as to show what it means and how it works. That is what I have tried to do under the following sub-sections:

a) Knowledge as Commodity

Knowledge economy turns knowledge into a commodity that acquires multiple forms, each of which is differently priced on the basis of its market demand. Let the beneficiary pay for acquiring knowledge is the neoliberal approach to education. Ever since the signing of GATT agreement by the nation, education has become legally a profiteering private enterprise. According to the provisions provided for in the agreement, an educational institution charging a fee, even if it is a meagre sum, shall be treated under the category of trade. As a result, knowledge is regarded as a

commercial item licensed for exchange across the world. Education has ceased to be a public good of socio-cultural use-value once knowledge began to be produced and transmitted as an object of exchange for accumulating profit. Commercialization of education is a worldwide phenomenon today. In developing countries its consequences are more intense. It has created serious access disparity with respect to opportunities of knowledge acquisition in India.

Knowledge, as the philosophic means to a better life, is contrasted with knowledge as a commodity under capitalism. Commoditization of knowledge is a process of transformation of knowledge into an explicit, standardized, codified, and priced object of exchange value. Commoditization is conversion of results of human labour into commodities to be transacted by the market. It has been a process integral to the growth of Capitalist economy. In a strategic process it could facilitate the conversion of social products of use-value into objects of exchange value, namely commodities in the market, and make it uncritically accepted by all with a sense of obsessive devotion. It is this phenomenon that Karl Marx called as 'commodity fetishism' – an ideological veil of Capitalism within which we have today, a whole discipline called economics.

b) Commodity Fetishism

'Commodity fetishism' conceived by Marx relates to the postulation of a commodity as an object with an economic 'life of its own', independent of the volition and initiative of the worker who produced it. According to Marx, it is a clever misrepresentation of the social relationships involved in production (the relation between who makes what, who works for whom, the production-time for a commodity), the relationships among people, as economic relationships in trade and market – the relationships between the seller and buyer, between the cost and price, and between money and capital. In short, 'commodity fetishism' masks (obscures) the true economic character of the human relations of

production, between the worker and the capitalist. Actually, in the economics of markets, there is no relation between the social products – the products of labour – and the commodities appearing as priced objects for exchange involving a series of material relations. It is a strategic concealing of truth about goods as products by people through relations among them and its dehumanised presentation as commodities as if self-born in the markets with an altogether different set of consumer relations. Marx calls this “the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.”

Karl Marx criticized the economists’ concept of the ‘natural equilibria’ of markets, for its assumption as if the price (value) of a commodity were independent of the volition and initiative of the capitalist producers, buyers, and sellers of commodities. Economists conceive the market as an independent, sentient entity, and market exchange as part of a series of self-driven material processes at work, without any human influence. What becomes interesting is the uncritical acceptance of this inversion by the people as something quite natural. It goes too deep into everyone to recognise the contradiction. Georgy Lukács said: “Just as the capitalist system continuously produces and reproduces itself economically on higher levels, the structure of reification progressively sinks more deeply, more fatefully, and more definitively into the consciousness of Man.”⁸ As capitalism advanced, it began to be too natural to be seen analytically and critically. Further, the entire corpus of theoretical knowledge produced in the domain of neo-classical development economics, which made the commodity and market more real than society itself. Such a situation of dehumanised knowledge enjoying intellectual hegemony precluded the possibility of retrieving truth about human relations and social processes out of the ideological veil.

c) Commoditization of Technology and Science

Today's capitalism which depends heavily on commoditization of technology and science for accumulation is a new type. Andrew Feenberg calls it a new version of capitalism.⁹ Feenberg's description of its features and processes encourage us to believe that he had identified the new version as techno-capitalism, although he never named it accordingly. Techno-capitalism involves a very advanced phase of commodity fetishism, marking the shift of commodity from the tangible to the intangible. What tangible raw materials, factory labour and capital were to industrial capitalism is what the 'intangibles' are to techno-capitalism. Intangibles include 'New Knowledge', 'Creativity', and 'Innovativeness', which constitute the core resource of techno-capitalism. The 'intangible' resources already account for as much as four-fifths of the value of most products and services in existence.

Conversely, the tangible resources that were most valuable for industrial capitalism are losing value relative to those intangibles in every product or service. Technological creativity is turned into both commodity and capital under techno-capitalism. Software-based electronic communication is a site that exemplifies generation and transaction of amazingly huge sums of capital at the instance of one package or the other. Recently we heard that Mark Zuckerberg, the Founder of Facebook,, purchased WhatsApp, an instant communication software package for \$19 billion. The giants like Google have billions and billions worth knowledge and data pack at their disposal. There are numerous instances of sale and purchase of patents and intellectual property worth millions and millions of dollars.

Techno-capitalist industrial enterprises the world over are run by corporate establishments depending extensively on research and intellectual appropriation. They have given rise to new experimentalist organizations deeply grounded in technological research, as opposed to manufacturing and services production of

the past system. All developed countries have corporate establishments investing heavily in the sector of knowledge production. They are rich in Knowledge-Based Capital (KBC) or Intangible Assets turned Capital. Investment and growth in OECD economies is increasingly driven by intangible or knowledge-based capital. In many OECD countries, firms now invest as much or more in KBC as they do in physical capital such as machinery, equipment and buildings. This shift reflects a variety of long-term implications of economic and institutional transformations in OECD economies, as well as in the Third World.

d) Techno-capitalist Globalization

Under techno-capitalism, new knowledge and creativity become the most valuable resources, as much as raw materials and factory labour used to be under industrial capitalism. Louis Suarez-Villa, an eminent political economist relates the emergence of Techno-capitalism to the process of Globalization and the growth of Techno-capitalist corporations.¹⁰ He argues that it is a new version of capitalism that generates new forms of organization designed to exploit 'intangibles' such as 'new knowledge' and 'creativity'.¹¹ These new organizations, which he refers to as experimentalist organizations, are deeply grounded in technological research, as opposed to manufacturing and services production of the phase of industrial capitalism. They are heavily dependent on the corporate appropriation of research outcomes as intellectual property.

Techno-capitalism is a very advanced phase of commodity fetishism, which is rooted in technological innovation and corporate power. Intangibles, most of all knowledge and creativity, are the core of techno-capitalism, equal to what tangible raw materials, factory labour and capital were to industrial capitalism. Intangibles already account for as much as four-fifths of the value of most products and services in existence. Conversely, the tangible resources that were most valuable for industrial capitalism are losing value relative to those intangibles

in every product or service. Technological creativity is turned into both commodity and capital under new techno-capitalist corporate regimes that are primarily oriented toward research and intellectual appropriation.

e) Corporate Confiscation of Creativity

Progress of commoditization of knowledge, detaching it from the user and making it an independent economic entity, has given rise to the phenomenon called capital fetishism from which, arose the practice of owning and controlling knowledge as intellectual property. Economist Michael Perelman has critically examined how capital fetishism suddenly turned the concept of Intellectual Property Rights, a nineteenth century concept quite dormant for a long time, into a major field of law in the late twentieth century.¹² Easily distributed via global communication networks, knowledge with authorial ownership began to become an important source of personalised profit, necessitating special legal protection. This accounted for the global recognition of patents and intellectual property rights under international laws.

Perelman, offering a political economy perspective, shows how corporations have erected a system of intellectual property rights to confiscate creativity, with profound impacts on economy, science, technology and culture. Corporate houses compete with one another in buying patents and intellectual property rights, which increase their market power, and to be first to come up with new products and services. Perelman says that this competition is leading to substantial theft of patented knowledge and infringement of intellectual property rights. Corporate establishments resort to various clever ways and means for the appropriation of research outcomes through new relations of power. Often it becomes a reckless confiscation of the intangibles – new knowledge', creativity and innovation of the researchers. Naturally, one of the outcomes of this is increase in the litigations relating to IPR theft and infringement.

Just to cite one example, the huge experimentalist establishment of DuPont consists of over 10,000 scientists and engineers addressing human needs projected to 2050. It is said that in 2013, the DuPont establishment introduced nearly 1,800 new products that secured about 1,050 new U.S. patents. Another lot of products have 1,800 U.S. patents in the pipeline. The DuPont innovation delivery system has already generated \$10 billion out of these new products. Looking ahead the value DuPont establishment seeks to fund the pursuit of new discoveries in this line. In corporate research highly specialized employees from all over the world work in multiple capital intensive projects on technological breakthroughs such as in software development, robotics, engine management, etc. Thousands of young scientists of instrumentation culture often qualified as the innovators of tomorrow are working like robots in corporate research establishments at various locations around the world.

f) Corporatocracy

According to Suarez-Villa, the emergence of corporatocracy based on the vast and growing power of corporations over public governance around the world, is fundamental to techno-capitalist globalization. It is a new type of governance that enmeshes and destroys democracy, in order to virtually surrender State power at the feet of corporations. A group of transnational elites tied to corporate power constitute the principal actors in the system. They penetrate into the democratic system and reconstitute it as the government of, for and by corporations, rather than of, for and by the people. In actual practice it quells democracy from within and substitutes it with a new form of imperialism based on the global corporate power, imbued with an array of highly sophisticated and intrusive technologies.

It has globally established a powerful techno-military complex for the corporate appropriation of creativity and new knowledge in all forms. This set up of neo-imperialism is certainly heading for a series of major social, economic, and political

consequences in the Third World in general and in India in particular, because it enables corporatism to be ever more intrusive and rapacious through its militant control over technology and innovation.

India and the Knowledge Economy

This phenomenon is likely to have major social, economic, and political consequences in the Third World in general and in India in particular, as the new corporatism becomes ever more intrusive and rapacious through its control over technology and innovation. The World Bank says that India has many of the key ingredients such as: A mass of skilled, English-speaking knowledge-workers, especially in sciences. It has a well-functioning democracy. Its domestic market is one of the largest in the world.¹³ It has a large and impressive diaspora, creating valuable knowledge linkages and networks. The list goes on by adding other features like macroeconomic stability, a dynamic private sector, institutions of a free market economy, a well-developed financial sector, and a broad and diversified science and technology infrastructure, a developed ICT sector, prospering IT, status of a global provider of software services, etc. World Bank informs that building on these strengths, India can harness the benefits of the knowledge revolution to improve its economic performance and boost the welfare of its people. All this is about certain misleading surface features with which the neoliberal economic policy fabricates its rhetoric. But truth below the surface is extremely alarming.

India, a multilingual country with English as the official medium of instruction at the tertiary level, has a poor GER of 14.4 per cent, about 70 per cent of the rural undergraduate students unable to understand English, about 40 per cent of the postgraduate students unable to use English for higher cognition, about 60 per cent of the youth between 22 and 35 with innovative faculty and creativity belong to the villages where education is imparted in the Indian language. Knowledge base of the Indian languages with respect to advanced sciences and areas of emerging

importance is abysmally poor. About 80 per cent of the total population do not have any participation in the production of knowledge because of historically and culturally contingent limitations such as class, gender and caste discrimination. On top of all, the higher education system in the country is far away from the track toward quality and excellence, with all the state universities enmeshed by party-political intrigues and central universities nowhere near the world standard.

Politicians and bureaucrats in India think higher education, a sector of expenditure rather than investment. The nation is not able to set apart for higher education even 3 per cent of the GDP for want of money. At the same time several actors in the Government go recklessly extravagant and there is no financial discipline in the working of the government. Naturally, production of new knowledge, which is highly sophisticated and enormously expensive, is extremely rare in any of the fields of modern sciences. Even traditional Indian knowledge systems are new meadows only for foreigners who take patents in them. Indians, uninitiated in traditional knowledge language of their country, draw blank about its scientific dimensions. Corporate houses are seeking to enhance monopolistic control through patents and IPR over the country's traditional knowledge as a major source of production of new knowledge.

India is long way off from the emerging sciences and technologies of the twenty-first century. Advanced software and molecular processors in computing and communications are among various new technologies that are going to be symbolic of the twenty-first century, in much the same way as aviation and mass production were of the twentieth century. Suarez-Villa points out nanotechnology, biotechnology and its various related fields such as synthetic bioengineering, bioinformatics, biopharmacology, biomedicine, genetic engineering, agro-biotechnology, and branches of biomimetics like robotics are emerging areas of importance.¹⁴ India, far behind in the discovery and invention sciences concerned, can only subsidise techno-capitalism through

the purchase of high-tech electronic goods, hard and soft, rather than gaining profit by selling new knowledge, creativity and innovativeness .

Now transnational exploitation of intellectual assets under techno-capitalism is far more extensive than what it had been about raw materials under industrial capitalism. Governments in the poor nations are mere agencies for diverting national revenue for supporting the aggressive expansion of techno-capitalism under the guise of development. The ultimate political consequence shall be re-appearance of an imperial state but masked by democracy. It is not anything new to theory that advanced capitalism and democracy are mutually incompatible.

Long ago Marx's theory of capitalism as applied by V.I. Lenin to State power had brought about the thesis of imperialism as the highest stage of capitalist development. Rosa Luxemburg found imperialism inevitable as capitalism acquires higher dimensions. Unlike what people generally presume, the form of government is not what the character of the individual rulers determines. It is the structured outcome of the political economy that decides the nature of the state power. Keeping in view of the fast growth of corporate capitalism and its techno-military imperialism in India, it appears that the country's democracy is on the wane.

Notes

- ¹ In taxonomy knowledge is divided into four categories – factual, conceptual, procedural and meta-cognitive – wherein it implies a progressive, sequential stages of cognition further conceived in terms of six levels of learning – recall, grasp, apply, analyse, synthesise and judge. See B.S. Bloom et.al. *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals*. Handbook I: Cognitive domain, David McKay Company, New York, 1956.
- ² Donella H. Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows, Jorgen Randers, and William W. Behrens III, *The Limits to Growth*, Universe Books, New York, 1972. Also see the revised version, *Beyond the Limits*, Universe Books, New York, 1992. It is relevant here to cite Jared M. Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Survive*, Dr. Robert C.A. Goff, MCSD, MCSE, MCDDBA, London, 2005.
- ³ See *Henri Lefebvre*, *The Survival of Capitalism: Reproduction of the Relations of Production*, *Allison & Busby Ltd., London, 1973*. Also see, *David Harvey*, *The Enigma of Capital and the Crises of Capitalism*, *Oxford University Press, London, 2010*.

- ⁴ For details see, Graff R.G., Reiskin E.D., White A.L., Bidwell K., *Snapshots of Environmental Cost Accounting: A Report*. US EPA Environmental Accounting Project, New York, 1998, pp.10-28. Also see, Gale, R.J.P., Stokoe P.K., *Environmental Cost Accounting and Business Strategy*, in Madu C., *Handbook of Environmentally Conscious Manufacturing*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Boston, 2001, pp.119-135.
- ⁵ See Eric Hobsbawm, *Globalisation, Democracy and Terrorism*, Little Brown, London, 2007. David S. Ruccio, *Development and Globalisation, A Marxian Analysis*, Routledge, New York, 2010.
- ⁶ See the latest assessment in T. Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-first Century*, Belknap Press, Cambridge M.A, 2014.
- ⁷ See discussion in R. Gurukkal, 'Resistance and Hope: Freedom Struggles in India Today,' Kappen Memorial Lecture, Visthar, Bangalore, 2012.
- ⁸ See George Lukács, 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat,' *History and Class Consciousness*, Merlin Press, London, 1967, pp. 167-91.
- ⁹ See A. Feenberg, *Critical Theory of Technology*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1991.
- ¹⁰ See Louis Suarez-Villa, *Globalization and Techno-capitalism: The Political Economy of Corporate Power and Technological Domination*, Ashgate, 2009, pp.46-47.
- ¹¹ See Luis Suarez-Villa, *Techno-capitalism: A Critical Perspective on Technological Innovation and Corporatism*, Temple University Press, 2012, pp. 67-71.
- ¹² See Michael Perelman, *Steal this Idea: Intellectual Property Rights and the Corporate Confiscation of Creativity*, Palgrave, Macmillan, 2004.
- ¹³ See, 'India and the Knowledge Economy,' World Bank Report, Washington DC, 2001.
- ¹⁴ See Louis Suarez-Villa, *Techno-capitalism: A Critical Perspective on Technological Innovation and Corporatism*, Temple University Press, 2012, pp. 220-23.

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Re-visioning Paradigms







Reimagining Justice

Corinne Kumar

We have entered the night to tell our tale
to listen to those who have not spoken
we who have seen our children die in the
morning deserve to be listened to:
we have looked on blankly as they have opened their wounds.

Nothing really matters except, the grief of the children
their tears must be revered
their inner silence speaks louder than the spoken word
and all being and all life shouts out in outrage
we must not be rushed to our truths.

Whatever we failed to say is stored secretly in our minds
and all those processions of embittered crowds
have seen us lead them a thousand times
we can hear the story over and over and over again
our minds are muted beyond the sadness
there is nothing more we can fear.¹

Introduction

The story began a long time ago:

with our grandmothers, then their grandmothers,
and their grand grandmothers
stories that have been told over the ages
over and over and over again!
her-stories, vibrant, verbal herstories
of pain and suffering, of survival and hope
of tears and laughter.
And yet, always there was time for celebration
the song, the dance, the image, the poem, the dream
and always, always, the story.

I would have liked to have told you the story
of a nightingale who died
I would have liked to tell you the story
had they not slit my lips*

Fragments of the story are beginning to be told
through the slit lips, through the silences.
Women are finding their voices in their anguish, their anger
making what has been understood as private sorrows into public
crimes.
Violence against women has been seen as personal violence,
domestic problems, and therefore, individualized and privatized.
But these are crimes against half of humanity,
these are violations of the right to be human.
In relegating the crimes against women to the personal realm,
these crimes are refused their public face,
denied their political significance
disappeared from the political domain and discourse.

The frames that have defined the institutions and instruments
of justice have been drawn blinded to and mindless of gender;
and have been based on the legitimated discrimination

Reimagining Justice

and degradation of women.
Women have been denied, dispossessed, devalued.
Women have been made invisible, excluded, erased.
It is to this invisibility, to this disappearing that we speak,
of female infanticide, dowry killings in India, rape all over the
world,
female genital mutilation in Africa, honour crimes in the Arab
world,
trafficking and sexual violence in Asia,
inviting the women to tell their stories.
But there are no pages to write down our stories
we must find the pages, even create the pages
We must ourselves write new pages in history,
to break new ground
to cross patriarchal lines that have forbidden us to speak our
truths:
to break the silence that enshrouds the violence
we must interrupt all that has invisibilised us
to re-tell history, to re-claim the power of memory,
to re-find the power of voice,
For we must remember:
the ways we have survived
the seeds we have kept
the medicinal herbs we have grown
the threads we have woven
the knowledges written on our skins
as we explore knowings deep in our consciousness
truths that we know and must be known
stories that must be told
we are the storytellers of our times.
We must begin to speak truth to power,
speaking to those who use, misuse, abuse power, yet also,
speaking truth to those who are powerless – the indigenous,
the tribals, dalits, the women, marginalized and oppressed
peoples

people with no power
the nameless, the faceless, the rightless.
Ours is a journey of the peripheries of power,
where power itself is being re-woven from the fabric of
powerlessness.

We must speak too of *another notion of justice*; of a jurisprudence, which by bringing individual and collective justice and reparation will also be transformatory for all. A jurisprudence that is able to *contextualize* and *historicize* the crimes, moving away from a justice with punishment, a justice of revenge, a *retributive justice*, to a justice seeking redress, even reparation; a justice with truth and reconciliation, a *restorative justice*, a *justice with healing*, healing individuals and communities. Can the tears and narratives of the women, these *sites of pain*, and these sites of devastation and destitution lead us to re-thinking and *re-imagining another way to justice*? What ideas and sensibilities do we need to explore and to expand the imagination of justice? Refusing to separate the affective from the rational (juridical) creates a space in which emotive demands are allowed to be voiced and collective trauma is understood. This can be a step towards re-imagining this jurisprudence from within civil society in which we are able to creatively connect and deepen our collective insights and understanding of the *context* in which the *text* of our everyday realities is being written.

We need to imagine justice, differently.

Towards A New Political Imaginary

We live in violent times:

times in which our community and collective memories are dying;
times in which the many dreams are turning into never-ending nightmares, and the future is increasingly fragmenting;
times that are collapsing the many life visions into a *single cosmology* that has created its own *universal truths*- equality, development, peace;

Reimagining Justice

truths that are inherently discriminatory, even violent.
times that have created a development model that dispossesses
the majority, desacralizes nature, destroys cultures and
civilizations, denigrates the women; devalues the women;
times in which the war on terrorism brings
a time of violent uncertainty, brutal wars:
wars for resources- oil, land, diamonds, minerals : wars of
occupation,
with terrorism, going global
and franchised to all, the world over;
times that are giving us new words;
pre-emptive strike, collateral damage, embedded journalism,
enemy combatants, military tribunals, rendition;
new words:
words soaked in blood.
times in which the dominant political thinking, institutions
and instruments of justice are hardly able to redress the *violence*
that is escalating and intensifying,
times in which *progress* presupposes the *genocide* of the many;
the *gendercide* of women;
the violence taking newer and more contemporary forms,
times in which human rights have come to mean the rights of
the privileged, the rights of the powerful and for the masses to
have their freedoms, their human rights, they must surrender
the most fundamental human right of all,
the right to be human
times in which the *political spaces* for the other is diminishing,
even *closing*.
times that are destroying diversity as the world moves towards
one science, one notion of progress, one development model,
the one single story, the one central mountain,
the world, it would seem, is at the end of its imagination.
who will deny that we need another imaginary?
Perhaps it is in this moment when existing systems of meaning
fragment, that we may search for new meanings.

Re-visioning Paradigms

Only the imagination stands between us and fear : fear makes us behave like sheep when we should be dreaming like poets.

So let me gather some stars and make a fire for you, and tell you a story:

It is a story of horror and hope; a story of the missing, the disappeared; a story so real, yet magical: a story from Lawrence Thornton in *Imagining Argentina*.

It is a story about Argentina under the dictators. The hero is a gentle person Carlos Rueda, an intense man who directs a children's theatre and is at home in the world of children. During the time of the dictators, Carlos discovers that he has an extraordinary gift. He realizes that he is the site, the locus, *the vessel for a dream*. He can narrate the fate of the missing. From all over Argentina, men and women come to his home and sitting in his garden, Carlos tells them stories: tales of torture, courage, death, stories about the missing, about the *disappeared*.

One day the regime arrests his wife Celia, for a courageous act of reporting. The world of Carlos collapses till he realizes that he must keep her alive in his imagination.

Only the imagination, says Carlos, stands between us and fear; fear makes us behave like sheep when we must dream like poets.

As the regime becomes more violent, it is the women who object. It is the women as wives, as mothers, as daughters who congregate in silence at the *Plaza de Mayo*. Silently, each carries a placard announcing or asking about the *missing*. The women walk quietly, sometimes holding hands.

It is not just an act of protest; it is *a drama of caring*; each listening to the other's story, each assuring the other through touch, weaving a sense of community.

The community grows as the men join them.

All the while, through the window, the Generals watch them.

Reimagining Justice

People realize that they cannot be indifferent observers, spectators, bystanders, even experts. The indifference of the watchers to the regime is not enough.

One must be a witness.

A witness is not a mere spectator.

s/he *looks* but s/he also *listens*.

s/he *remembers*.

Everything must be remembered. Nothing must be forgotten.

We must retrieve history from memory.



We must explore the new imaginary not as experts but as witnesses.

Our imaginaries must be different:

The new imaginary cannot have its moorings in the dominant discourse but must seek to locate itself in a *discourse of dissent* that comes from a deep critique of the different forms of domination and violence in our times : any new imaginary cannot be tied to the dominant discourse and systems of violence and exclusion :

The Mothers of the Plaza Mayo ,in Argentina express this new imaginary and it is here that we must seek the beginnings of an *alternate discourse*.

This new imaginary will move away from the eurocentric and androcentric methodologies which only observe and describe; methodologies which quantify, percentify, classify, completely indifferent to phenomena which cannot be obtained or explained through its frames. We need to deconstruct the dominant mythology, disallowing the invasion of the dominant discourse; refusing the integration of the *South* into the agenda of globalization and the war on terrorism, during wars, communal wars in the name of religion, wars for resources. The new imaginary invites us to create a new spectrum of methods which depart from the linear mode of thought and perception to one that is



Re-visioning Paradigms

more *holistic, holographic*. It urges us to search more qualitative methodologies in oral history, experiential analysis, using fluid categories, *listening for the nuances, searching for the shadow*, in poetry, in myth, in metaphor. It invites us to a way of knowing that refuses to control and exploit Nature, but one that finds our *connectedness to Nature* : to place together these fragments, to discern the essence, to move into another space, another time, recapturing hidden knowledges, regenerating forgotten spaces.

Perhaps, it is in the expressions of *resistance* seeking legitimacy not by the dominant standards, not from a dominant paradigm of jurisprudence, not by the rule of law, that begin to draw the contours of a new political imaginary: the Truth Commissions, the Public Hearings, the Peoples' Tribunals, the Courts of Women are expressions of a new imaginary refusing that human rights be defined and confined by the dominant hegemonic paradigm.

It is not difficult to see that we are at the end of an era, when every old category begins to have a hollow sound, and when we are groping in the dark to discover the new. Can we find new words, search for new ways, create out of the material of the human spirit *possibilities* to transform the existing exploitative social order, to discern a greater human potential? We need to imagine alternate perspectives for change : to craft visions that will evolve out of conversations across cultures and other traditions; conversations between cultures that challenge and transcend the totalitarianism of the patriarchal logos ; conversations that are not mediated by the hegemony of the universal discourse.

It is a way of seeing; it is a way of not seeing.

And we cannot see women through the existing universal, patriarchal paradigms. In the existing construction of knowledge, concepts and categories to define women's place is shadow, women's work, shadow work, women's lives, shadow. But we must see what is there: We must lift the enormous weight of patriarchal thought, valuation and the thousands of years of institutional disadvantaging of women. We must challenge the mind set that

has pushed the objectification of the other to the extreme. The dominant mindset polarizes the subjective and objective, separating them, falsifying reality. Objectivity and subjectivity are two modes of knowing and understanding. They are not separate; but inter-connected, holistic and complex. This separation, this dualistic either/or mode of perception defines social reality through a system of polarities – black or white, male or female, mind or matter. Dichotomy, duality, linearity, fixity - these are not the properties of Nature but are properties of a learned mode of thought, a way of seeing, that casts reality into rigid, oppositional and hierarchical categories. ‘This patriarchal concept of dualism, of opposites, of either/or, reinforces a linear hierarchical order and thought; it states its preferences of the opposites. One is good and the other bad. In patriarchal cultures and dualistic modes define ‘those areas of knowledge and the world attached to the mind and spirit as being male identified, while the realm of the body and matter as female identified.’ The dominant mindset ascribes higher value to the masculine characteristics resulting in the subjugation of male over female at every level-psychological, social, economic, political.

But the rational and the intuitive are two modes of perception, two ways of knowing, two points of the holograph. They are not interdependent of each other. They are two modes of *consciousness* which have been recognized as special properties of the human mind. In the *other* world view these two seeming opposites do not belong to different opposing categories but are rather *two points of a single whole*.

Nothing is only yin or only yang.

What is needed is to re-discover both the subjective and the objective modes of knowing, creating newer, deeper and richer perceptions and structures of knowledge.

While the global project of colonization has created the *universal Other*, culturally specific power hierarchies too have created the *Other* within different contexts – be it the Dalits/

Untouchables in India, the Buraku in Japan, the Gypsies - the Roma, the Sinti in Europe, the Amazeeq, the Tuareg in the Magreb, minorities, the women. The privileging and consolidation of these cultural hierarchies under the regime of colonization is one reality we live with, while the deepening of violence against them in the era of globalization is another. *Organized violence* by the dominant castes against the dalits in India, *pogroms* against ethnic groups as in Bosnia, *systemic silencing* of women by fundamental organizations like the Taliban, products also of the nation state, are disturbing evidence of the growing intolerance in highly aggressive, competitive, *masculinized*, militarized and racist societies.

For finally it is the *colonization of the mind and more, the colonization of our imaginaries* that has proved to be the legacy that has been most enduring and devastating.

Ivan Illich tells us that *scarcely twenty years were enough to make two billion people define themselves as under-developed*, vis-à-vis the post war growth model, the market economy and the international economic order conceived of at Bretton Woods. It minisculed all social totalities into one single model, all systems of science to one mega science, all indigenous medicine to one imperial medicine, all knowledge to one established regime of thought, all development to gross national product, to patterns of consumption, to industrialization, to the western self image of *homo-economicus* with all needs commodity defined, and *homo economicus* has never been gender neutral.

The new imaginary invites us to another human rights discourse; one that will not be trapped either in the *universalisms* of the dominant thinking tied as it is to a market economy, a monoculturalism, a materialistic ethic and the politics and polity of the nation state; neither must it be caught in the discourse of the *culture specific* but one that will proffer universalisms that have been born out of a *dialogue of civilizations*, of cultures. And this will mean another *ethic of dialogue*. We need to find new

perspectives on the universality of human rights, *in dialogue with other cultural perspectives of reality*, other notions of development, democracy, even dissent; other concepts of power (not power to control, power to hegemonize, but power to facilitate, to enhance) and governance; other notions of equality - equality makes us flat and faceless citizens of the nation state, perhaps the notion of *dignity* which comes from depth, from *roots*, could change the discourse. Through its very diverse voices, the *Courts of Women* speak of equality not in terms of *sameness*, but in terms of *difference*, a difference that is rooted in dignity, from the roots of peoples, of women who have been excluded, erased; other concepts of justice - *justice without revenge* that proffers many horizons of discourse and because our eyes do not as yet behold those horizons, it does not mean that those horizons do not exist.³

Take the universal discourse on *democracy*: the new magical word to *reform* the world; the dominant understanding of democracy is tied to the notion of individual rights, private property, patriarchy, profit, the market economy; we are all equal we are told but the market works as the *guarantor of inequality*, of unequal distribution, of how only a few will have and how the many must not have. What shall we do with the rhetoric of political equality on which this democracy is built, while the majority are increasingly dispossessed, living below poverty lines? We must seek new understandings of democracy that will include a concept of freedom that is different from that which is enshrined in the Enlightenment and its Market. There is an urgent need to reinvent the political; to *infuse the political with the ethical*.

Re-Imagining Justice

The new political imaginary speaks to an ethic of care:

The *Courts of Women* are an articulation of this new imaginary:
The *Courts of Women* invite us to write another history,
to *re-tell* history, to re-claim the power of memory:
a *counter hegemonic history*, a history of the margins. the
Courts of Women are a journey of the margins, a journey

rather than an imagined destination; a journey in which the dailiness of our lives proffer possibilities for our imaginary, for survival and sustenance, for connectedness and community. For the idea of imaginary is inextricably linked to the personal, political and historical dimensions of community and identity. It is the dislocation expressed by particular social groups that makes possible the articulation of new imaginaries. These social groups, the margins, the homeless, the social movements, the occupy movements, the Arab spring, the indigenous, the dalits, the women, are beginning to articulate these new imaginaries.

Women are writing another history, giving private, individual memory its *public face*, its political significance; transforming memory and experience into political discourse.

The Courts of Women are communities of the suffering, communities of the violated but they are also communities of survivors, of knowers, of healers, of seed keepers, of story tellers, of people telling history as a way of reclaiming memory and voice. It is an attempt to define a new space for women, and to infuse this space with a new vision, a *new politics*. It is a gathering of voices and visions of the *global south*. The Courts of Women reclaim the subjective and objective modes of knowing, creating richer and deeper structures of knowledge in which the observer is not distanced from the observed, the researcher from the research, poverty from the poor. The *Courts of Women* seek to weave together the *objective* reality with the *subjective* testimonies of the women; the rational with the intuitive; the logical with the lyrical, the personal with the political. The Courts of Women celebrate the subversive voices that disobey and disrupt the master narrative.

The peasants in Chiapas, Mexico, describing their *new imaginary* explain their core vision in their struggle for their livelihoods and for retaining their life worlds. And in their profound and careful organization, in their political imagining and vision do not offer clear, rigid, universal truths; knowing that the journey

is in itself precious, sum up their vision in three little words:

asking, we walk.

The asking in itself challenges master narratives, masters'houses, houses of reason; universal truths, of power, of politics, of privilege, of profit, of patriarchy.

The Zapatistas in offering another logic, draw the possible contours of this new imaginary.

The new political imaginary invites *us to dismantle the master's house*, and as the poet, Audre Lorde said the *master's tools will never dismantle the master's house*.

Upendra Baxis essay on *Writing about Impunity: the Bhopal Catastrophe*⁴ tells of what is seen as the most inclusive era of human rights, is made possible only by an exclusion of both insight and vision, as we grasp the cascading orders of human rightlessness and social suffering of the Bhopal violated. On December 3, 1984 a massive, release of forty seven tonnes of the toxic gas *methyl isocyanate* (mil) from the factory of Union Carbide Corporation in Bhopal, killed more than ten thousand people and brought disability and suffering to thousands more. This was the first Bhopal Catastrophe.

Bhopal was not one event; but, a series of catastrophic events.

The first Bhopal catastrophe, which was conformed in the Bhopal litigation before Judge Keenan in the US was that the Union Carbide Corporation had failed to follow industrial practice and safety standards, from the manufacture and the storage of large quantities of the methyl isocyanate for the production of two brand insecticides/pesticides in a factory located in a densely populated area in Bhopal and more callously, in the first weeks of the event, the multinational media operations moved, shifting to minimize the risk exposure, denying that what was released was not methyl isocyanate, insisting that it was merely harmless phosgene! The multinational also provided misinformation

concerning remedial measures further escalating the suffering of the people.

The people of Bhopal, were, after all, expendable.

The second Bhopal catastrophe, is the betrayal of the Government of India in persuading the Indian Supreme Court towards the settlement of the dispute (UCC and the Bhopal-violated) for a meagre amount of US 470 million dollars. The brief juridical settlement order animated by a rhetorical concern to urgently respond to the sufferings of the Bhopal victims constituted a gross juridical scandal.

It did more than that:

It conferred a *blanket immunity* on all the criminal actions against the UCC in India.

India's callous governance response to the Bhopal-violated is what is called the third Bhopal catastrophe. The Supreme Court's (of India) chaotic *nomos* justifying the unjustifiable settlement orders constitutes a story in which the victims are re-victimized all over again and forever!

The author writes of the second and third Bhopal catastrophes, each one consigning to irrelevance the catastrophic sufferings of the people and the devastation of the environment. Massive denials of the *right to be human* and to continue to remain human occupy an obscene space in this narrative genre: what matters is not so much that there are inherent and inevitable production risks in the name of development but rather the uneven distribution of risk exposure and embodied lived experiences.

The contemporary Bhopal movement reiterates India's original pleading that no regime of multinational capital impunity should erase the unimaginable and unforgettable catastrophe of pain, suffering and emotional distress resulting in the Bhopal-violated constantly interrogates the assassins of collective memory, retrieving memory, connecting in human and social solidarity, finding new courage, finding new hope.

The legal narrative that took Bhopal to the legal courts in India and to the USA and the juridicalization of the disaster which Upendra writes signifies ways in which the communities of the suffering and people in resistance re-invent responsive law and jurisprudence. Bhopal was a marker for the new social movements (in India) vis-a-vis the powerful trade union movements which were challenged to place industrial safety struggles over employment creation and sustenance and the recognition that the Bhopal-violated humanity articulates some *new histories of militant subjectivity* disanchored from trade union militancy, which is leading towards an extraordinary congregation of global subaltern movement affinities and social solidarities across borders, comprising social networks of biomedical, juridical and ethical social action communities.

There is an urgent need to challenge the centralizing logic of the master narrative implicit in the dominant discourse of justice. This dominant logic is a logic of violence and exclusion, a logic of superior and inferior, a logic of civilized and uncivilized.

This centralizing logic must be decentred, must be interrupted, even disrupted.

The *Courts of Women* interrupt; they speak to this disruption; to this trespass. The *Courts of Women* are finding new paradigms of knowledge and new paradigms of politics; a politics with an ethic of care, concern, community, connectedness: a *politics with ethics*; a political vision that can bring change for all.

The Courts of Women return through testimony, the voices of the dispossessed to political discourse. In its search towards a new political imaginary, the Courts of Women work towards a politics with an *ethic of care*; for any theory of poverty (poverty lines, the World Bank one-dollar-a day, millennium development goals, poverty reduction strategies etc) that is disconnected from a theory of care will not listen to the voice of the other and simply leave the poor out: the new political imaginary speaks to an ethic of care, affirming one's responsibility to the other, an ethic that

will include compassion, connectedness, community, *conviviality* (that wonderful phrase of Ivan Illich). The discourse and praxis of rights cannot mean only economic and political emancipation, but must challenge the current paradigms of thought and politics.

In our experience the Courts of Women have brought together diverse women and organizations from a range of cultural and political realities reflecting an intense diversity of ideologies and perspectives. And yet they have been transformed into collective spaces of healing and resistance, articulating, in justice and peace that transcend the divisive and violent nature of contemporary politics. And that is also because the Courts have evolved another ethic of working together in which *differences enrich and not fragment the dialogue*.

In its expression of a new imaginary the Courts are finding different ways of speaking *truth to power*; of challenging power, recognizing that the concepts and categories enshrined in the ideas and institutions of our times are unable to grasp the violence; the Courts of Women are more than speaking truth to power, more than being a critic of power; it is about *creating another authority*. The Courts of Women also speak *truth to the powerless*, seeking the conscience of the world, creating reference points other than that of the rule of law, returning *ethics to politics*. It invites us to the *decolonization* of our structures, our minds and our imaginations; moving away from the master imaginary, finding worlds, as the Zapatista say, that *embrace many worlds*. The Courts of Women are about subsumed cultures, subjugated peoples, silenced women *reclaiming their political voice* and in breaking the silence refusing the conditions by which power maintains its patriarchal control.

The *Courts of Women is a tribute to the human spirit*: in which testimonies are not only heard but also legitimized. It invites the subjugated and the silenced, to articulate the crimes against them; it is a taking away of the legitimizing dominant ideologies and returning their *life-worlds* into their own hands. The Courts of

Reimagining Justice

Women celebrate the subversive voices, voices that disobey and disrupt the master narrative of war and occupation, of violence, of patriarchy, of poverty.

These are voices of imagination in our times: And who will deny that *we need to find new spaces for our imaginations?*

*Thinking from the Ban: Rebellious Third Worlds and Theory*⁵ writes Jayan Nayar must mean an acknowledgement that the Banned exist: they are indeed communities of hope and imagination in these times.

They are the nameless, the faceless.

They are the Rightless.

They are communities of struggle in the relation of the Ban with the Sovereigns, old and new. Sovereign tales of encountering the Other/Banned are but one account; those are, the author writes, the civilizational development tales of History, of Politics, of Justice and of Law;

The Banned, the Subaltern, the *Other* also have tales to tell and need telling of their encounters with the sovereigns; these might be regarded as generational tales of rebellion and struggle, of memory, of judgement, of illegality. Beginning with the Banned is to re-assert their right to think, dream and act, from other beginnings: quoting Walter Dignolo the author writes, and the canonical thinkers of the Western canon can no longer provide a starting point for the epistemology that the colonial difference requires. Upendra Baxi places it in the context of new *birthings* of human rights; and the author writes of *Rightlessness*, still defining the age of human rights; who are the rightless, the banned, the other to White Man's theory of Humanity, now the dominant global project of and for *sovereignty, democracy, development?* Is this the only way the *Other* may speak? Through the accepted categories of thought and the only way that the struggle for land, freedom, dignity, hope may be told? And can these rebellions, resistance and imaginations only be known through the prescribed

frames of the Enlightenment? and Jayan asks or *are any other tellings possible?*

The Banned, constitutes the new Third Worlds, configured by global totalitarianism, that presents us with a new political geography.

The First Worlds are worlds of global citizenship of citizen-sovereigns, communities of the transnational capitalist classes (human and corporates), and of global intellectual and cultural elites, for whom mobility with liquid modernity' is an experienced reality.

Theirs is the world of markets.

Rights, rather than duties, define their citizenship; and for the politics of risk means unimpeded opportunity for profit and the protection of rescue, bail out, and legalized flight for loss. The First Worlds for global totalitarianism cannot be captured within territories. Theirs is the right and the power to define the law, to define the Ban.

The Second Worlds, the author continues, are the worlds of national citizenship of subject-citizens, of communities of national workers, of the employed or at least the recorded employed. National citizens are defined in territorial geographies.

Theirs is the world of jobs.

The second worlds are crucial to the project of totalitarianism in the democratic polity; they may only elect their representative players, that may not play the game which is the reserve of the first worlds. There is also a need to cultivate fear against the third worlds of the Banned. The second worlds are the dispersed, located, branded, regulated worlds where hegemony for the global project and its Bans, are maintained.

The third worlds are the worlds of the Ban, of communities of the nameless, disposable masses, unregulated, unemployed, for whom mobility is either prohibited or enforced by laws through

checkpoints or mass evictions. The Banned, Jayan writes, are those defined by their inclusive exclusion, by non-documentation and illegality. Their names possess no individual value save in police records. They are the *collateral damage* of the project of Humanity.

Theirs is the world of invisibility.

They lay claim to no specific located dwelling; they are in the streets, in the shanty towns and slums, and internment camps and prisons, in refugee holding centres everywhere and nowhere.

Law for the Banned is the legality of violence because *Third Worlds are Rightless Worlds*.

What do we do then, when the Banned of the Third Worlds stand dispossessed of all of modernity's categories of subjectivities and agency, when they are in possession of their bare life? Because Jayan tells us that to think from his Ban would be to claim and name new political imaginaries, acting rebellions, re-affirming dignity. Sovereignties may abandon and even destroy, but they can never be sure that they successfully colonise the Banned.

Thinking from the Ban, a different memory is recalled;

it is a return to remembering of a past, to third worlds who remember and imagine, naming the normalities of oppression, naming new worlds of hope.

The Courts of Women, invite us to a new world of hope,
It is a new political geography:
The Courts of Women offer another lyric, another logic,
lifting the human spirit, creating a new imaginary,
offering another dream

I remember a story, from another time, another place
another logic:
let me tell you the story:
a story of timeless care,
a story of another imaginary;

Re-visioning Paradigms

it is a story from Tagore on the *Riches of the Poor*;

Once upon a long ago and of yesterday,
it was a *time of darkness*;
it was also a time of famine that was devastating the land of
Shravasti
people gathered; poor people, hungry people

Lord Buddha looking at everybody asked his disciples:
who will feed these people? who will care for them?
who will feed these hungry people?
He looked at Ratnakar the banker, waiting for an answer:
Ratnakar, looked down and said: *My Lord*
but much more than all the wealth I have would be needed
to feed these hungry people;
Buddha then turned to Jaysen, who was the Chief of the
King's army
Jaysen said very quickly *Of course my Lord I would give you*
my life
but there is not enough food in my house;
then, it was the turn of Dharampal who possessed large
pastures; he sighed and said the *God of the wind has dried*
out our fields
and I do not know how I shall even pay the king's taxes.

The people listened, and were so hungry:
Supriya, the beggar's daughter was in the gathering,
listening too
as she raised her hand, she stood up and said:
I will take care of these people

how would she they thought, do this?
how will she, a beggar's daughter with no material wealth,
how would she accomplish her wish?
but how will you do this? They chorused

Reimagining Justice

Supriya gentle and strong looked at the gathering and said:
It is true that I am the poorest among you, but therein is my
strength,
my treasure, my affluence, because I will find
all this at each of your doors.

Supriya's words and actions come from *another logic*:
she refuses the logic of property, profit, patriarchy;
inviting us to another *ethic of care*.
she sees the poor as a *community of people with dignity* in a
relational way;
not as individual separate units, and speaks for the many all
over the world who are challenging the logic of the master
imaginary and trying to re-find and re-build communities,
regenerating women's knowledges and wisdoms;
re-finding the dream for us all.

We need a different dream:
We need to invite each other to this different dream;
We need to re-imagine other ways to justice,
subverting patriarchal discourse,
trespassing untread terrain
weaving subjective text with objective context, moving us to
deeper layers
of knowings, of tellings
listening to the many speaking, the many more unspoken
understanding those without a name, without a face,
without a voice
standing with the rightless
refusing to separate the dancer from the dance.



Notes

- ¹ *Congregation of the Storytellers at the Festival of the Children of Soweto, Mazise Kunene, Ancestors and the Sacred Mountains.*
- ² *Sami-al-Qasim, Palestine.*
- ³ *Conversation on the Courts of Women in Asking, We Walk: South as New Political*

Re-visioning Paradigms

Imaginary Book Two, edited by: Corinne Kumar, Streelekha Publication, India, 2009.

- ⁴ Baxi, Upendra, *Writing about Impunity: the Bhopal Catastrophe*, Book Four, *Asking, We Walk: South as New Political Imaginary*, Streelekha Publication, India, 2013.
- ⁵ Nayar, Jayan *Thinking from the Ban : Rebellions Third worlds and Theory*, Book Four, *Asking, We Walk: South as New Political Imaginary*, Streelekha Publication, India, 2013.



Anna Swaraj (Food Sovereignty) **– An Agenda for Freedom from Hunger, Malnutrition, Disease and Farmers’ Suicides**

Vandana Shiva

There is no reason why India should face hunger and malnutrition and why our farmers should commit suicide. India is blessed with the most fertile soils in the world. Our climate is so generous we can, in places, grow four crops in a year, compared to only one in most of the industrialized West. We have the richest biodiversity of the world, both because of our diverse climates, and because of the brilliance of our farmers as breeders. And, our farmers are among the most hardworking in the world. Yet, India faces an emergency in our food and agricultural system. This emergency is (hu)man-made.

Firstly, the poor and vulnerable are dying for lack of food. According to the *Deccan Herald*, Lalita S. Rangari, 36, a Dalit widow and mother of two children of the Gondiya tribal belt allegedly died due to starvation. The Bombay High Court-Nagpur Bench comprising Justice Bhushan Gavai and Justice Indu Jain served notice to Maharashtra government seeking its reply to

the starvation death of a Dalit widow reported.¹

Even as India gets richer, we have emerged as the capital of hunger and malnutrition. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), 42.5 per cent of children under the age of five were underweight. This is more than double the average of 21 per cent for Africa which until recently was the face of hunger.

The second tragedy is that our food producers, the small farmers who have provided food to more than a billion Indians, and hold the potential to provide healthy food for all, are themselves dying because of agriculture and trade policies which put corporate profits above the rights and well-being of our small farmers. More than 300,000 farmers have committed suicide in India since 1995, when the rules of globalization of agriculture of the WTO were implemented, transforming food into a commodity, agriculture into corporate business, and shifting control over seeds and food from farmers to giant multinational corporations.

The third tragedy is that even those who get food are being denied their right to healthy and nourishing food. The explosion of junk food, of pesticides and toxics in our food have created a disease epidemic that is both a human tragedy and an economic burden. There is an epidemic of diseases related to our lifestyle and food such as diabetes, cancer, hypertension, infertility and cardiovascular diseases.

The recent Maggi noodle scandal highlights the rapid invasion of junk food in the Indian diet. We are what we eat. When we eat food full of toxic chemicals, we pay the price with our health.

India has emerged as the epicentre of diabetes – in 2004, 8.2 lakh were diagnosed with diabetes and 2.6 lakh died; in 2012 180 lakh were diagnosed and 7 lakh died. In 2010 India was spending 32 billion dollars on diabetes care.

Cancer has seen a 30 per cent increase in last five years with 180 million people affected in India. At Rs. 10 lakh for treatment for each cancer victim this multiplies to 300 billion dollars which is Rs. 18 lakh crore.

In extensive studies reported in *Poisons in Our Food* by Navdanya, elevated levels of PCBs, DDE and DDT have been found in the blood of women suffering from breast cancer. Studies also show that 51 per cent of all food commodities are contaminated by pesticides.

My research over the past three decades on food and agriculture systems in India and across the world informs me that the three tragedies are not separate, they are related and are, in fact, different dimensions of the food and agriculture crisis linked to promotion of an ecologically, economically and socially non-sustainable model of food production and distribution referred to variously as the Green Revolution, industrial agriculture, chemical farming. Solutions to all three dimensions of the crisis lie in shifting from the focus on an unhealthy, nutritionally empty, toxic, high cost food system to a healthy, nutritious, low cost and sustainable system which improves the well-being of the Earth, of the farmers, and all citizens.

The industrial model is energy, water, chemical, capital and fossil fuel intensive with costs of production much higher than the price farmers get. This high cost system which neither the farmers nor the nation can afford is kept afloat artificially with a huge subsidy burden which basically benefits the agrichemical corporations selling toxic chemicals. Financially it is a negative economy, vulnerable to a chaotic climate in times of climate change and a manipulated commodity market. The debt and suicides of farmers are related to this feature of economic non-sustainability.

In 2014-15, the government procured 51 million tons of wheat and paddy, which is 30 per cent lower than the previous year. With farmers now selling their food grains in the open market,

wholesale prices of paddy and wheat crashed by 16 per cent and six per cent, respectively. In several parts of Bundelkhand and Western U.P., farmers sold wheat at much more lower rate than the minimum selling price. In Punjab and Haryana, farmers were dumping stocks in front of government procurement centres. The farmers' crisis is related to exploitation and injustice. Ecologically too, industrial, chemical agriculture is a negative economy, using ten times more energy as inputs than it produces as food. Indebted and displaced farmers and landless workers drive the ranks of the hungry.

And the same system that drives farmers into a debt trap also creates malnutrition. Chemical monocultures and commodity production displace biodiversity which is a source of nutrition. Green Revolution monocultures destroyed our pulses and oilseeds which were always grown as a mixture with cereals. Today in the land of *urad* and *moong*, *tur* and *chana*, *gahat* and *naurangi*, we are importing "yellow pea dal" and in the land of *til* and mustard, *alsi* and coconut we are importing GMO soya oil and palm oil. If we ignore growing nutritious biodiverse crops, malnutrition is a predictable outcome. If we grow our food with toxic chemicals then disease related to poisons will increase. A recent field survey by Navdanya revealed that in a single village, Gangnauli (Baghpat), there are about 100 patients, suffering from various types of cancer.

Chemical monocultures are pushing our farmers to debt and suicide, they are depriving our children of the nourishment our fertile soils and hard working farmers can grow, and they are spreading an epidemic of cancer. To address the triple crisis of farmers suicides, hunger and malnutrition, and disease epidemics, Navdanya is starting a five-year campaign *Anna Swaraj* (Food Sovereignty) 2020 to make the growing and availability of healthy nourishing food the foundation of a resurgent India where no child goes hungry, and no farmer commits suicide.

Our work over the past three decades has shown that when measured in nutrition per acre, biodiverse, organic farming produces more food (health per acre). And food is supposed to provide nourishment and nutrition. We can grow enough nutrition for two Indias if we cultivate biodiversity without chemicals. Our farmers are small, and ecological agriculture is better suited for them. Organic farming also gets rid of toxics and thus reduces the risks of diseases linked to toxics (poisons in our food). And since hunger and poverty go hand in hand, we need to promote an agriculture that does not create poverty by hemorrhaging the scarce resources of the agrarian economy for purchase of costly seeds and toxic chemicals. Our research “Wealth per Acre” has assessed that farmers who have their own seed, practise chemical-free ecological agriculture and shape fair trade markets are earning ten times more than their counterparts dependent on costly corporate seeds, chemicals from the same companies and dependence on exploitative commodity markets.

If wheat farmers shifted from monocultures to growing diversity their net incomes would increase two- to three-fold. The crisis of pulses is a result of the green revolution monocultures of wheat and can be overcome through growing mixtures. And we would not need to import bad quality *dals*. Pulses grown with cereals provide free nitrogen to the soil and healthy protein to us.

The Anna Swaraj agenda for a food and agriculture revolution and food democracy with the participation of citizens and all levels of government, from the local, to the state to the national level aims to:

1. Stop treating food as a commodity to be wasted, contaminated, and profited from. Article 21 of our Constitution guarantees the Right to Life of all citizens. Since food is the basis of life, everyone has the right to food. The National Food Security Act is a step in this

direction and needs to be implemented with full commitment. Our culture teaches us “Annam Brahman.” Commodification of food is a violation of food as sustenance.

2. Promote chemical-free organic farming not as a luxury but as an imperative for the well-being of our land, our farmers, our health. Chemical-free ecological agriculture reduces costs of cultivation, hence the debt burden for farmers, as well as the malnutrition and disease burden for all citizens.
3. Move away from centralized, chemical-intensive monocultures and long distance transport, including dependence on imports to promotion of local Anna Swaraj food circles for direct consumer-producer links, bypassing the exploitative middlemen, including giant corporations which exploit both farmers and consumers.

These circles will promote biodiversity on our farms and biodiversity on our plates which is vital for nutrition. They also promote economic diversity, create employment and cultivate food democracy.

4. Shift the use of public tax money from subsidizing toxic agrichemicals and toxic and nutritionally deficient food for the vulnerable who do not have adequate purchasing power to healthy, safe, diverse, nutritious food. There is no justification for using crores of tax money to subsidize bad food when that money could promote a healthy and sustainable food system for mid-day meal schemes, PDS, ICDS through people’s participation, especially that of women who would like to bring nutritious food to their children.
5. Grow more food and nutrition everywhere, in villages and in cities – in communities, in schools, in backyards, on rooftops, on terraces. These gardens of nutrition and

Anna Swaraj (Food Sovereignty)

gardens of hope can contribute to creating a malnutrition- and hunger-free India. Gandhi had started a 'Grow more Food' campaign, and Lal Bahadur Shastri encouraged turning lawns into edible gardens. That spirit needs to be cultivated again.

In August 2015 Navdanya will start to create **Food Smart Cities** to address the food and nutrition emergency we face. Food Smart Cities will connect citizens directly to the farmers in their **Foodshed**, so they get access to healthy, local, fresh, fair food, and farmers get access to a fair market. If we join in the mission of Anna Swaraj 2020, India can become a land of good food for all.

After all, the *Taitreya Upanishad* has said the growing and giving of good food is the highest Dharma - *Annam Bahu Kurvitha*.

Note

¹ <http://m.deccanherald.com/content/488340/swaminathan-dismayed-starvation-deaths.html/#sthash.z8QndPbi.dpuf>.



Gandhian Economic Thought and Sustainable Development

D. Jeevan Kumar

“I do not draw a sharp line or make any distinction between economics and ethics ...”

– M.K. Gandhi, ‘*Young India*’, 13th October 1921.

“True economics never militates against the highest ethical standard, just as all true ethics, to be worth its name, must at the same time be also good economics... True economics stands for social justice; it promotes the good of all equally, including the weakest, and is indispensable for decent life...”

– M.K. Gandhi, ‘*Harijan*’, 9th October 1937.

Contextualizing Sustainable Development: The Earth System

A system is a collection of component parts that interact with one another within a defined boundary. The Earth System is a complex social-environmental system, including the vast collection of interacting physical, chemical, biological and social components and processes that determine the state and evolution of the planet

and life on it. The bio-physical components of the Earth System are often referred to as spheres: atmosphere, biosphere, hydrosphere and geosphere. They provide environmental processes that regulate the functioning of the Earth, such as the climate system, the ecological services generated by the living biosphere including food production, and natural resources like fossil fuels and minerals. Humans are an integral part of the Earth System.

Some experts suggest that the Earth has entered a new geological epoch, the *Anthropocene* (Zalasiewicz et. al. 2011, 2010). The word was coined by Nobel Laureate Paul Crutzen to capture the idea that humans are now overwhelming the forces of nature. An implication of entering the *Anthropocene* would be the leaving of the *Holocene*, the interglacial period that has provided humanity over the past 10,000 years with extraordinarily good living conditions, enabling the development of modern societies and a world with 7 billion people (Folke et. al. 2011).

Crutzen (2002) suggests that the Industrial Revolution 250 years ago saw the beginning of the *Anthropocene*. The unprecedented rise in human population since the early nineteenth century, from less than a billion to 7 billion at present, is inherent to the *Anthropocene* as it unfolds (Zalasiewicz et. al. 2010). Many societal changes have accompanied this proliferation of the human population, such as increased consumption of natural resources and an enormous dependence on fossil fuels.

The State of the Planet at the Dawn of the New Millennium

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, one could observe the following (Kovel, 2007):

- ♦ The human population had increased from 3.7 billion to 6 billion (62%).
- ♦ Oil consumption had increased from 46 million barrels a day to 73 million.
- ♦ Natural gas extraction had increased from 34 trillion cubic

feet per year to 95 trillion.

- ◆ Coal extraction had gone from 2.2 billion metric tons to 3.8 billion.
- ◆ The global motor vehicle population had almost tripled, from 246 million to 730 million.
- ◆ Air traffic had increased by a factor of six.
- ◆ The rate at which trees are consumed to make paper had doubled, to 200 million metric tons per year.
- ◆ Human carbon emissions had increased from 3.9 million metric tons annually to an estimated 6.4 million.
- ◆ Average global temperature increased by 1 degree Fahrenheit – a disarmingly small number that, being unevenly distributed, translates into chaotic weather events, and an unpredictable and uncontrollable cascade of ecological trauma – including now the melting of the North Pole during the summer of 2000, for the first time in 50 million years, and signs of the disappearance of the “snows of Kilimanjaro” the following year; since then, this melting has become a fixture.
- ◆ Species were vanishing at a rate that has not occurred in 65 million years.
- ◆ Fish were being taken at twice the rate as in 1970.
- ◆ Forty percent of agricultural soils had been degraded.
- ◆ Half of the forests had disappeared.
- ◆ Half of the wetlands had been filled or drained.
- ◆ Despite concerted effort to bring to bay the emissions of ozone-depleting substances, the Antarctic ozone hole was the largest ever in 2000, some three times the size of the continental United States; meanwhile, 2,000 tons of such substances as cause it, continue to be emitted every day.

Each of the above observations has had its specific causes, but there must also be a larger issue to account for the rapid acceleration of the set of all such perturbations. There is a “giant force field” at work, setting the numberless manifestations of the crisis into motion and whirling them about like broken twigs in the winds of a hurricane (Kovel, 2007).

Capitalism as the Culprit

The “giant force field” is a metaphor for capital, that ubiquitous, all-powerful dynamo that drives our societies. The established view sees capital as a rational factor of investment, a way of using money to fruitfully bring together the various features of economic activity. For Karl Marx, capital was a “werewolf” and a “vampire,” ravenously consuming labour and mutilating the labourer. Both notions are true; and the second one, applied to nature as well as labour, accounts for the ecological crisis in all its essential features (Kovel, 2007).

Manifestations of anti-ecological tendencies inherent to capital, are three-fold:

1. Capital tends to degrade the conditions of its own production.
2. Capital must expand without end, in order to exist.
3. Capital leads to a chaotic world-system increasingly polarized between rich and poor, which cannot adequately address the ecological crisis.

The combination makes an ever-growing ecological crisis an iron necessity so long as capital rules, no matter what measures are taken to ‘*greenwash*’ the manifestations.

Capital’s responsibility for the ecological crisis can be shown empirically, by tracking down ecosystem breakdowns to the actions of both private and public entities. Capital originates with the exploitation of labour, and takes shape as this is subjected to the peculiar forces of money. Its nucleus is the abstraction of human

transformative power into labour power for sale on the market. The nascent capitalist economy was fostered by the Feudal State, then took over that State, centring it about capital accumulation. With this, the Capitalist mode of production was installed as such – after which capital began to convert society into its image and created the conditions for the ecological crisis (Kovel, 2007).

Capitalism has captured the world because of its ability to produce wealth – and to constantly appeal to the wealth-producing dimension of human nature. The result is the most powerful form of human organization ever devised – and also the most destructive! The advocates of capital claim that its destructivity can be contained and that capital, as it matures, will peacefully overcome the rapacity already described. However, the other school of thought holds that with the production of capitalist wealth, poverty, eternal strife, insecurity and eco-destruction are also produced. These concomitants may be externalized and exported, as long as production is local and restricted. But as capital becomes global, the escape routes are sealed and its cancerous character is revealed – penetrating all spheres of human existence, destabilizing the ecologies of time and space, and subjecting the Earth to “ecocide.”

Capitalism cannot undo the ecological crisis because its essential existence, manifested in the “grow or die” syndrome, is to produce such a crisis. As Kovel points out, it regards the ecological crisis through the distorting lens of the effect on accumulation; by seeking to remedy the latter, it necessarily worsens the former.

And finally, capital’s iron tendency to produce poverty along with wealth and to increase the gap between rich and poor, means that capitalist society must remain authoritarian at the core and incapable of developing the cooperative space for rationally addressing the ecological crisis.

At the end of the above discussion, the major problems with Capitalism and the Capitalist Model of Development may be

summarized as follows:

- ♦ Development is understood in a limited perspective, primarily in terms of increased domination of Nature, and the use of its resources solely for the benefit of humankind.
- ♦ It prioritizes economic development, at the expense of social, cultural and human development.
- ♦ The Capitalist model assumes that consumption is the most important contributor to development.
- ♦ It ignores the fact that social stability requires the preservation of natural resources.
- ♦ It refuses to recognize that deterioration of the natural environment causes social disruption and impairs human health.
- ♦ The Capitalist Model of Development is blind to the reality that it is simply not possible to achieve a global replication of the resource-intensive, affluent lifestyle of the high-consumption economies of the North.
- ♦ The Capitalist Model refuses to acknowledge that there are clear limits to economic growth; and that
- ♦ Limits to growth are imposed by the 'Carrying Capacity' of the planet, especially the ability of the biosphere to absorb the effects of human activities.

A Case for Transcendence through the Gandhian Vision of Sustainable Development

The critical task before those approaching Gandhian economics is to define Gandhi's understanding of economics, as distinct from the mainstream economic tradition of Adam Smith. While it is true that Gandhi was not a professional economist, his economics is rich in its comprehension of the dynamics of economic processes, and imaginative and thought-provoking in its enunciation of creative alternatives.

To Gandhi, economic activities cannot be separated from other activities. Economics is part of the way of life which is related to collective values and it cannot be separated from human life. Gandhi wanted to ensure distributive justice by ensuring that production and distribution were not separated.

Gandhi's vision of sustainable development challenges the basic assumptions that the Capitalist model of development makes about the use of nature and natural resources, the meaning of growth, progress and development, the ways in which society is governed, and the formulation and implementation of public policy.

There are four key concepts in the Gandhian vision of Sustainable Development, namely *Swaraj*, *Swadeshi*, *Trusteeship* and *Aparigraha*. The contours of each one of them are briefly explained below.

1. Swaraj

Mainstream economics makes the common man completely helpless in the matter of production and distribution of resources. Gandhi visualized an alternative through the system of *swaraj*. It is necessary for the liberation of weaker economies from the commanding position of neoliberal capitalism. There is need for a new conceptual framework in which each country attains economic *swaraj*. According to Gandhi, every country should stand on its own strength.

The components of *swaraj* are based on two independent variables, psychology and ethics. Since resources are scarce, production cannot be increased indefinitely. The psychology of affluence is an irrational phenomenon. The basic principles of economic activity are based on needs and not on affluence. Affluence breeds inequality, as it is based on economic distortion. Greed grows out of the desire to be affluent. Here, psychology can play a crucial role. Values which condition the mind can change human behaviour. The goal of *swaraj* brings limits to human wants, according to Gandhi. What are the ingredients of

economic independence or swaraj? First, Gandhi gave adequate importance to the traditional sector. Highest priority is given to agriculture and agro-centric industries. The balance between primary, secondary and tertiary sectors should be skillfully maintained, on the basis of available human resources.

Secondly, villages must get more importance than cities. Gandhi observed: "You cannot build non-violence on a factory civilization, but it can be built on self-contained villages... You have therefore to be rural-minded, and to be rural-minded, you have to have faith in the spinning wheel."

2. Swadeshi

Gandhi was a champion of swadeshi or home economy. People outside India know of Gandhi's campaigns to end British colonialism, but this was only a small part of his struggle. The greater part of his work was to renew India's vitality and regenerate its culture. For Gandhi, the soul and spirit of India rested in its village communities. He said: "The true India is to be found not in its few cities but in its seven hundred thousand villages. If the villages perish, India will perish too."

According to the principle of swadeshi, whatever is made or produced in the village must be used, first and foremost, by the members of the village. Trading among villages, and between villages and towns, must be minimal. Goods and services that cannot be generated from within the community, can be bought from elsewhere. Swadeshi avoids economic dependence on external market forces that could make the village community vulnerable. It also avoids unnecessary, unhealthy, wasteful and environmentally destructive transportation. The village must build a strong economic base to satisfy most of its needs, and all members of the village community should give priority to local goods and services.

Mass production forces people to leave their villages, their land, their crafts and their homesteads, and to seek work in the

factories. Instead of being dignified human beings and members of self-respecting village communities, villagers become cogs in the wheel. In swadeshi, the machine would be subordinated to the worker. In countries practising swadeshi, economics would have a place, but would not dominate society.

Economics should not be separated from the deep spiritual foundations of life. This can be best achieved, according to Gandhi, when every individual is an integral part of the community; when the production of goods is on a small scale; when the economy is local; and when homemade handicrafts are given preference. In this integral design, there is no conflict between the spiritual and the material.

For Gandhi, a machine civilization is no civilization. A society in which workers had to labour at a conveyor belt, in which animals were treated cruelly in factory farms, and in which economic activity necessarily led to ecological devastation, could not be conceived as a civilization. Its citizens would only end up as neurotics; the natural world would inevitably be transformed into a desert, and its cities into concrete jungles. In other words, global industrial society, as opposed to a society made up of largely autonomous communities committed to the principle of swadeshi, is unsustainable. Swadeshi has sometimes been (mis)interpreted as an insistence on complete economic self-sufficiency for a community or nation. Gandhi had anticipated such criticism when he stated:

Even swadeshi, like any other good thing, can be ridden to death, if it is to be made a fetish ... To reject foreign manufacture merely because they are foreign, and to go on wasting national time and money in the promotion of one's country of manufacture for which it is not suited, would be a criminal folly and a negation of the swadeshi spirit.

From the above, it becomes clear that Gandhi does not reject trade with other nations, but he is opposed to an international

order based solely on considerations of comparative advantage or a system that celebrates global free trade but not fair trade.

3. Trusteeship

Gandhi's efforts towards "spiritualizing economics" are reflected in his concept of Trusteeship. He based the concept on the first *sloka* of the *Isopanishad*, according to which one is asked to dedicate everything to God, and then use it only to the required extent. In other words, in the first instance, everything must be surrendered to God, and then out of it, one may use only that which is necessary, according to one's strict needs. The spirit behind this concept is detachment and service.

Gandhi's idea of Trusteeship arose from his faith in the law of non-possession. It was founded on his religious belief that everything belonged to God, a higher power or Nature. Therefore, the bounties of the world were for His people as a whole, and not for any particular individual. When an individual had more than his respective portion, he became a trustee of that portion. If this principle could be imbibed by people in general, Trusteeship would become a legalized institution. Gandhi wished it to become a gift from India to the world.

Basically, Gandhi suggested this concept as an answer to the economic inequalities of ownership and income, a kind of non-violent way of resolving all social and economic conflicts in the world. Therefore, man's dignity and not his material prosperity, is the centre of Gandhian economics.

According to Gandhi, Trusteeship is the only ground on which one can work out an ideal combination of economics and morality. In concrete form, the Trusteeship formula reads as follows:

- ♦ Trusteeship does not recognize any right of private ownership of property, except so far as it may be permitted by society for its own welfare.
- ♦ It does not exclude legislation of the ownership and use of wealth.

- ◆ Under State-regulated Trusteeship, an individual will not be free to hold or use his wealth for selfish satisfaction, in disregard of the interests of society.
- ◆ Just as in the case of a decent minimum living wage, a limit should be fixed for the maximum income that would be allowed to any person in society. The difference between such minimum and maximum incomes should be reasonable and equitable, and variable from time to time, so much so that the tendency should be towards the obliteration of the difference.
- ◆ Under such an economic order, the character of production will be determined by social necessity and not by personal greed.
- ◆ Trusteeship provides a means of transforming the present capitalist order into an egalitarian and sustainable one.

As man advances from a narrow sphere of personal satisfaction to the nobler concept of the welfare of all, he marches closer towards self-realization. The whole idea of possessing wealth only to guard it from being misused and to distribute it equitably, aims at protecting human dignity. If it is possessed for any other objective, it is objectionable on moral grounds. Gandhi enjoins this moral obligation on the part of the trustees, as he is fully aware of the ills of capitalism, which only widens the gap between the rich and the poor.

The Gandhian concept of Trusteeship departs significantly from Marxian economic philosophy too. If Marxism is the child of the Industrial Revolution, Gandhian theory can be understood only in the context of certain basic spiritual values of the Indian tradition. Marxian socialism aims at the destruction of the capitalist class, whereas the Gandhian approach is not to destroy the institution but to reform it. Gandhian socialism, being ethical, is different from Marxian socialism. Man, to Gandhi, is an ethical being first, and a social being later.

The most significant difference between Marxian socialism and Gandhian socialism lies in the method recommended to achieve an egalitarian society. Whereas Marxian socialism harps on violence, Gandhian socialism aims at a change of heart on the part of the rich. There is no place for violence, but only trust. The common man trusts his trustee and the latter plays the role of a custodian.

Though this kind of socialism is difficult to achieve, Gandhi advocated it as he believed in the basic strength of the goodness of man and the value of morals. All other “isms” address the problem superficially, whereas Trusteeship strikes it at the root. What must not be forgotten is that at the centre of the concept lies the need to protect human dignity, while promoting egalitarianism and sustainable development.

4. Aparigraha

Since 1987, when the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) of the United Nations, chaired by Gro Harlem Brundtland, submitted its report ‘Our Common Future’, the idea of Sustainable Development has become a buzzword in the discourse on development. According to the Brundtland Commission Report, “Sustainable Development is development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” This definition, of course, begs the question of what constitutes the needs of today. According to one scholar, the answer has remained blurred, out of focus and even usefully ambiguous: everyone has become adept at talking about sustainability, without having to wade into the treacherous waters of consumption, or to be more precise in today’s context, over-consumption! (Basole, 2005).

Over-consumption is the level or quality of consumption that undermines the species’ own life-support system and for which individuals and societies have choices in their consumption patterns. The concept of an ‘ecological footprint’ tries to quantify

the ecological impact of an individual or society by measuring aspects of its lifestyle. The level of consumption of material goods largely determines the size of the ecological footprint, and developed nations like the US and the UK have per capita footprints many times the size of developing countries like India and Bangladesh. The consumptive habits of the world's elite have long been a matter of concern in economic thought, as evidenced by Veblen's concept of "conspicuous consumption" (Veblen, 1994).

However, the era of global free trade, with its unprecedented opportunities of consumption, as more and more people all over the world adopt consumerist lifestyles, has made the issue more complex and acute. Once again, the seeds are to be found in the core assumptions of the economics that shape our societies and our lives. A standard textbook on modern economics defines one key assumption as, "society's material wants are virtually unlimited and insatiable." The economics built on this foundation is a wants-based one, in which agents are 'maximizers' (as opposed to 'satisfiers', in Herbert Simon's language), engaged in the eternal quest for material progress. Such consumption cannot but be environmentally destructive. With the developing world embarking on the road to consumer-driven economies, the critical question before us is: Can this planet sustain seven billion individuals with capitalist lifestyles?

Gandhi denounced Britain's industrialized lifestyle as essentially unsustainable and stated:

God forbid that India should ever take to industrialism after the manner of the west. The economic imperialism of a single tiny island kingdom (England) is today keeping the world in chains. If an entire nation of 300 millions took to similar economic exploitation, it would strip the world bare like locusts.

In Gandhi's view, non-possession or minimization of wants is a natural consequence of ethical considerations.

Gandhi summarizes the motivation for aparigraha thus in *Hind Swaraj*:

We notice that the mind is a restless bird; the more it gets, the more it wants, and still remains unsatisfied. The more we indulge our passions, the more unbridled they become.

And again:

The Moral Law also requires that the strong men of a community or nation should regard it as their paramount duty to protect the weak and the oppressed. If all men realized the obligation of service, they would regard it as a sin to amass wealth; and then there would be no inequalities of wealth, and consequently, no famine or starvation.

It needs to be emphasized in this context that Gandhi did not glorify poverty. Gandhi labelled poverty a sin, and his system of political economy was intended to eradicate India's poverty and bring about parity of means. As one scholar points out, "doctrines calling for limitation of wants can easily be construed as an attempt at ideological justification of the status quo." However, even a preliminary reading of Gandhi should make it clear that he was anything but *status quoist*. His doctrine is "not intended as a glorification of austerity but rather as an exercise in the optimization of overall individual welfare" (Dasgupta, A.K., 1996).

It must be noted that Gandhi, while emphasizing the interests of the poor and dispossessed, was simultaneously appealing to the consumptive middle and upper classes to embark on a lifestyle of voluntary simplicity. The 'Tolstoy Farm' in South Africa is one of Gandhi's early experiments in creating a voluntary simple community. Today, the Voluntary Simplicity Movement (VSM), with its motto of simple living, restriction of wants and minimization of the size of our ecological footprint, is slowly gaining ground. At least one scholar is convinced that Gandhian thought can, once again, provide the philosophical justification that can take the VSM beyond a yearning for simple living and make it

the only viable option for peaceful coexistence and sustainable development (Basole, 2005).

Concluding Observations

At the end of this discussion, the following points may be emphasized:

- ◆ Gandhi challenges the Fact-Value/Positive-Normative/ Descriptive-Prescriptive dichotomy in modern economics, and argues for a system in which economic decisions of individuals, societies and nations are always taken, keeping in mind the values of Truth and *Ahimsa*.
- ◆ Economies and societies organized along Gandhian lines are unlikely to suffer from the malady of over-consumption, and its accompanying consequences like global warming, climate change and ecological degradation.
- ◆ With the Post-Modern age lies the responsibility of taking modernity to task for its evils, including the construction and continuation of an economic system that is leading the planet to ecological disaster.
- ◆ The need of the hour, in the present context of ecological catastrophism waiting to happen, is to acknowledge the contemporary relevance of Mahatma Gandhi and his ecological wisdom, and to strive to incorporate it into our policies and practices.



Are we ready to be the change?

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***We Will Write a New Song:* Re-visioning Identity and Transformation**

Dexter S. Maben

In our journey in life, we meet many people, but very few remain in our thoughts, inspire us and challenge us to ponder and wonder at realities of life and think alternatively and critically. Rev. Dr. David Selvaraj is certainly one among them in my life who plays a critical role in my formation and engagement. My initial association with David began while I was a student of the Bachelor of Divinity (BD) programme at the United Theological College in Bangalore. What attracted me was David's passion for just peace, willingness to imagine alternatively and articulate boldly, all at a risk. My meeting with Sebastian Kappen along with David during the Quiet Day at UTC, will forever be etched in my memory as a call to commitment to 'counterculture', and never realized that our meeting will be the beginning of a close association with David and Visthar. The invitation to be a trustee at Visthar is one of the

*This is translation of a line in a Folk Song in Kannada sung mostly in North Karnataka.

biggest surprises in my life, of which I am yet to come to terms with. It is my great honour to contribute an article in this collection to honour the life and work of Rev. Dr. David Selvaraj and 'Re-visioning Paradigms', is an appropriate title, since offering paradigms of Justice and Peace is David's visible contribution to Church and Society. For me, one of the key ideas or words contributed by David is 'Transformation' and my article is an attempt to revisit the idea of Transformation along with Identity, locating my paper in Chikkabeedanalu, a place which is challenging me to re-vision paradigms for my own life and work.

I

The idea of India is becoming elusive than ever because of the reality of multiple identities, which are contested by dominant identities. One of the defining aspects of understanding India is therefore through the lens of 'Identity'. Identities are not abstract concepts, but represent peoples and communities who are pushed to the margins because of hegemonic identities. They normally have two choices: to assimilate to the norms and values of the dominant group, abandoning alternative identities or may choose to emphasize a separate identity in contrast to dominant norms and to draw individual pride and collective strength in demonstrating it. In reality most marginalized groups create a middle path for themselves between these two extremes.

Probably our search for understanding issues of identity is real, with our efforts to translate the word 'identity', into our own indigenous languages. At least I am aware that in Kannada, we are yet to arrive at a reasonably accepted word, although words like 'Guruthu' and 'Asmitha' are employed. Social relations in India is being determined and shaped by identities, be it religious, social, cultural or political. Any paradigm intended for the liberation of the margins should necessarily deal with identities and should ask the primary question, *Can an identity be transformed?* Further, any paradigm which moves towards transformation should be involved in a process of re-visioning,

and this should begin with a rediscovery of the religious and cultural texts. Otherwise, a paradigm will become an abstract concept and will remain at the conceptual level. We all have visions, but most of the time our visions are for ourselves and probably extended to our families and to people who cater to our interests. Re-visioning is a process towards transformation based on a vision for people who are in the margins of society. Re-visioning is equally a social, as much as it is a religious, cultural and political process. It is a scientific, ideological and theological process. Re-visioning is a process of moving beyond rethinking and reimagining. Re-visioning is to have a vision of what is liberating and transforming.

In his book, *Nine Lives. In Search of the Sacred in Modern India*, William Dalrymple, helps us rediscover nine lives, which illustrate the socio-cultural, religious and political landscape of the country. It brings to life, nine identities that are not necessarily mainstream in India. One among them is, “The Daughters of Yellamma,” which highlights the life of Devadasis in Belgaum district of Karnataka. One of the songs sung by Rani Bai, a Devadasi, goes like this, “Everyone sleeps with us, but no one marries us. Many embrace us, but no one protects.” In this paper, I wish to narrate about the work of Visthar among Devadasis in *Chikkabeedanalu*, a village in Koppal district (about 390 kilometres from Bangalore) of Karnataka, where the work of Visthar is making difference in the transformation of identities. My interaction at Chikkabeedanalu with the Devadasis and their daughters, leads me to the conviction that a ‘context’ has to help in the process of re-visioning of paradigms and a paradigm should not be imagined without a context. A paradigm as a liberative process must be visible in processes that are social, cultural, literary and religious in nature. In my own case, I have attempted to draw parallels in the Vachanas and the Bible, both of which are shaped by particular social, cultural and political contexts of its own time.

II

The Devadasi system is one of the most evil forms of internal migration and contemporary forms of slavery existing even today. Devadasi in Kannada or Sanskrit literary means, “Female servant of God.” Devadasi is a religious practice that consists of the votive offering of girls to the deities in Hindu temples. The dedication usually occurs before the girl reaches puberty and requires the girl to be available to be sexually exploited by the members of the community. Since she belongs to the deity, a devadasi cannot be married to one particular man, in the sense of the traditional sense of marriage. Instead she is a property of a divinity, and a property of the whole community, because they worship the deity. This concept can be summarized by a saying that goes like this: “a devadasi is servant of God but wife of the whole town.”¹ Apart from Karnataka, the system is also practised in Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Orrisa.

Each region or location has got its version of the system, but the foundations of the system are alike. Almost all the devadasis come from the Dalit community, and they are not a caste themselves, but refer more to a profession of sex work, to which they are compelled. Traditionally they were exploited by men of the upper caste, who are rich and dominant in the community. In Karnataka, this practice has been there for more than ten centuries.² When it began as a temple practice, a devadasi in many places was placed high in the social ladder, as a helper to the temple priests, and their services were commended. But today, she is discriminated from helping in the temples, because of her caste. The temples no longer need her. She is rather sexually enslaved by her own family, who fear the curse of the deity, in case they do not dedicate. There are attempts to come out of the system, but because of economic degradation and debt slavery, the devadasis are reinventing the practice to suit contemporary practices in human trafficking. The families that once proudly dedicated their daughters may not hesitate them to push them into sex trade. The challenge is not just to rehabilitate the

devadasis, but to help the children, particularly the girl children to be liberated from this contemporary form of slavery. In other words, they must migrate from this evil practice, otherwise, they may not be able to bear the stigma and discrimination, which is oppressive and dehumanizing.

In my conversations at Chikkabeedanalu with the girls of the devadasis, one of the key issues that emerged was the narration and navigation of multiple identities and the intersection of them as a lived reality. Three of the lived realities that intersect are issues related to caste, gender and class, which are interwoven together by religion. The context of the devadasis at Chikkabeedanalu taught me that 'Identity' is a reality that has the potential to shape the concept. Identity-formation and navigation in India is complex, because of the intersection of more than one lived reality. One of the dangers of liberation is limiting our scope to any one of the identities and stay with them. Almost all the devadasis are Dalits and caste identity is visible and is sanctioned by religion, in the form of myths and scriptural narration to sanction the practice of the devadasis.

In one of the songs of which the girls sing with sense of joy and celebration and found it hard to write it, because probably they miss the celebration, when they write, because they sing and celebrate. It says, "We build and we will certainly build the broken minds and the dreams seen. We will build the broken minds and build dreams." It goes further, "We will build a land where there is no caste, where there is no fear. Where there is no race, but human race. We will build a new land, we will write a new song for this land." This is not just a song, but a celebration of their transformation of their identities, because they are now free and dream of a future that is contested, but is possible.

III

It is no coincidence, that in the same region that we find such oppressive structures like the Devadasi movement, we also can trace the emergence of the caste-class-gender nexus which is

challenged by the Bhakti movement. Locations of social inequality and social exclusion caused by identity are also locations which inspire paradigms of freedom and liberation.

The Bhakti movement which is the indigenous expression of spirituality deserves more attention in our country, even as we read our religious and political history only from the perspective of dominant religions and end up criticizing them. The *Bhakti* tradition was one of the first movements to identify the political nexus between religion, culture and literature, and the visible manifestation of the caste hierarchy because of this nexus. It effectively articulated the caste-class-gender nexus, as a stumbling block for the experience of the divine by and in every person and community. It revisited the transcendence of God, with the human experience, and emphasized the divine indwelling in human beings.³ On the other hand, it translated this God experience into human liberation, by opposing the Brahminic domination over scripture, tradition and rituals. The *Vachana* movement in Karnataka in the twelfth century CE, with its roots in the *Bhakti* tradition, is, in my opinion, among the first Reformation/ Enlightenment movements in the world, and shares many similarities with the Protestant reformation,⁴ which came later. The *Bhakti* tradition appeared explicitly from about ninth century CE, with the appearance of Alvars in Tamilnadu, Eknath through to Tukaram in sixteenth and seventeenth century Maharashtra with Kabir, Ravidas, Mirabai and others pioneering the movement in the nineteenth century in North India.⁵ The *Vachana* movement is also helpful, because most of the medieval or contemporary Kannada literature bases its ideological and literary positions on the *Vachanas*.

The contemporary debate about gender equity is picked up effectively by the *Vachanas*, because it had women who were able to articulate the intersection of caste-class-gender thereby challenging “hegemony,” as an accepted social reality. The *Vachanas* deliberated the individual identity, household identity and community identity which are discussed widely in the gender

discourse. I wish to refer to only one⁶ by Akkamahadevi, popularly known as, Akka, addressed fondly as 'Sister'. It reads:

Love child of Him who can make happen
what cannot happen!
Bedecked myself with that distinction
for the whole world to see.
I vowed to fight Lust, Anger, Greed, Desire, Pride an Envy.

Smearing the perfume called guru's grace
Adorning the forehead with a thilaka called great
submission,
I shall slay you, I shall conquer you
With the sword called submission to Shiva.

Beware Karma
I shall not stop before killing you.

Pay heed to my words
I shall slay you, I shall conquer you
Using the unfailing sword called Shivasharana.

Akka's words echo the cry for liberation and justice of the daughters of the devadasis. It was a new song for its own time and echoes equality and justice. Akka's words reverberate the challenges of the devadasis to seek gender justice in communities.

IV

My modest involvement with Visthar and its work at Chikkabeedanalu has constantly challenged me to think of similar narratives in the Christian scriptures, the Bible, because my life and vocation revolves around teaching and preaching this in diverse communities. Contexts are divided by time, but not by identity which shapes social exclusion and social injustice. It is here that that we find the possibility of 're-visioning paradigms'

that move towards transformation. One of the texts that have always provoked me is the encounter of Jesus with a woman in the Gospel of Matthew Chapter 15, verses 21 to 29. It is the narrative of Jesus' encounter with a Canaanite woman. The scene is located in a social and religious space that indicate exclusion and marginalization due to identities of gender, ethnicity and class, interwoven by religion. Jesus does not appear to be exempt from prejudices that are built on identities that are different from those of the woman. The woman is not even named and is identified by her ethnic identity and nothing more is narrated about her family or background. But what is striking is the Canaanite woman appealing to Jesus about her daughter, who is tormented by a demon. Her cry is, "Have mercy on me." The daughters of the Devadasis are not tormented by a demon, but are tormented by evils of the society which are demonic in nature and powered by lust, greed and power which are reinforced by 'Identities'. We see the disciples of Jesus wanting to get rid of her. The cries of the margins always fall on deaf ears and we do not want to see the margins in our sight. The cry of the mother is an acceptance of her own situation and identity, but not necessarily of her daughter. It is her desire that the identity of her daughter is transformed. It is a cry for re-visioning of a paradigm, a paradigm where there is compassion, love and justice.

V

We are living at a time where there is a deep cry for spirituality, for social justice and modernity and our future lies in the way we are going to reconcile them for communities seeking justice and peace. One of the key aspects that is important in understanding this process is the idea and reality of 'Identity'. The paper is an attempt to answer an important question, "Can an Identity be transformed?" To answer the questions, the life of the devadasis in Chikkabeedanalu in Koppal district is discussed which can help in re-visioning paradigms which emerge from the margins and not paradigms that are experimented in the margins. The

paradigm at Chikkabeedanalu is a paradigm that challenges us to re-vision that identity can indeed be transformed. The phrase, 'We will write a new song,' illustrates the hopes and aspirations of the daughters of the devadasis, who are not just dreaming, but living transformation.

Notes

- ¹ Prasannakumar Shivasharanappa & Dr.L. Srinivasa, *Devadasi Practice in Karnataka*, Golden Research Thoughts, Hampi University, March, 2012, p. 2.
- ² *Devadasi Practice in Karnataka*, p. 2.
- ³ Wesley, *Radical and Religious*, pp. 12-13.
- ⁴ Shivakumar Pawate, *Mangalavada Mathu Ithara Lekanagalu* [Magala argument and other writings] (Mandya: Dhrishya Prakashana, 2009), esp. pp. 97-102.
- ⁵ Arun Kumar Wesley, *The Radical and the Religious* (Bangalore: BTESSC/SATHRI, 2006), pp. 12-13.
- ⁶ This citation (No. 1117) is from the English translation of the Kannada original, *Vachana*, edited by O.L. Nagabhushana Swamay (translated from the Kannada original edited by Dr. M.M. Kalburgi) Bangalore: Basava Samithi, 2012, p.361.



Re-Orienting Paradigms







The Art of Living

Douglas Huff

It is an honour to write a few words in celebration of David Selvaraj's sixtieth birthday, and in the spirit of David and with much less wisdom, tell you how to live. Socrates put some urgency to this endeavour when he suggested that some lives are not worth living. In the *Apology* he states this clearly, "The unexamined life is not worth living."¹ For Socrates, some lives are clearly meaningless and count for nothing.

The temptation here is to quickly identify what makes a life worthless and then do whatever we can to avoid doing that. Now in Socrates' case what makes a life meaningless is relatively straightforward. If, as he argues repeatedly, your actions and ideas do not accord with reality, if your ideas are based on falsehoods, then your life is obviously meaningless, worthless, and does not count for anything in any context or in any environment where truth still remains a value.

Although Socrates' way of approaching the problem is extremely valuable when and if we realize we do not know what we thought we knew, we at least can begin to search for the truth, we can begin to purify our souls of falsehoods. Still, there is another way. The search for meaning may also require us to change



our attitude toward life itself. Rather than thinking that life is something to be used up and grabbed with gusto, as when we say “he lived his life to the fullest,” or “she got the most out of life,” or when failure and disappointment strike, “I have nothing to expect from life anymore,” we should instead think of existence as expecting something from us. Perhaps we should think we owe something to life. As Victor Frankl stresses, “... it (does) not matter what we expect from life, but rather what life expects from us.”²

In short, if we as human beings have obligations to the gift of life itself, there are some things we must do if our life is to have meaning. Whatever they are, they surely come after personal and familial obligations of survival and well-being are met. Yes, the harvest is in, the barns are full, there’s money in the bank, everything is covered by insurance, family trips are taken, gifts are given, the children are educated and married if they want to be married. And to top it off you’ve stopped drinking and smoking, and run three miles a day.

Now is there something else you were supposed to do to make your life meaningful? Well, yes, there is. If you owe something to the miracle of existence, then you better respond or you are just another person who managed to grab as much pleasure, power, and fame as he or she could every time the brass ring came around. And God knows we have enough of those. No, you need to do something else.

There are three things you must do to make your life meaningful: 1) you must help the poor, the sick, the disenfranchised, and the marginalized, 2) you must help build a great civilization, which necessitates a high culture, which also guarantees the two bedrocks of every civilized society: universal health care and universal education; and 3) you must search for God.

Number two is the one that preoccupies many of us in the world today, since a great civilization requires a high culture –

The Art of Living

great art, great science, and great philosophy, all of which require education. For those of us living in the United States, the deterioration of the American culture can often frighten us. There are moments when it does not seem possible to escape all the vulgarity and greed hammering at our doors, corroding our institutions, and undermining our noblest aspirations. (I am starting to sound like Cicero.) But this is the main tragedy of current American life: a colossal disrespect for truth, an utter contempt for facts, and finally a cavalier contempt for each other. We are surrounded by barbarians and like the medieval monks before us, sometimes it seems our job is simply to huddle together in university cloisters, keeping the remnants of civilization alive for a better day. But that is not the case. Our job in education is in the here and now. Our job is to celebrate genius, compared to which, as Proust would say, all social position and official rank are as nothing; and thereby help to raise the spiritual and intellectual aspirations of our students. Of course, encouraging genius is a tricky business. To echo Gertrude Stein, it is difficult to be a genius; you must sit alone for long periods of time and do nothing. Do absolutely nothing. Try selling that to students glued to their cell phones, i-pads, and laptops, and you know what we are up against. Of course, we do not expect all of our students to become geniuses, but the emulation of genius will always make them more than they are which, of course, is the final goal of education.

Still this business of helping others, building civilizations and searching for God is all for naught if we do not manage to avoid doing one other thing; and this other thing is the one thing that most of us cannot resist doing. There is a sense of urgency here, since performing this action will always harm us, and perhaps even destroy us. We must, in short, avoid making a certain kind of mistake. We must avoid making a tragic mistake.

The question now is: what is a tragic mistake? There are many places we can go for an answer, and it is always the same answer, but one of the best is surely found in Shakespeare's play,

Hamlet: Prince of Denmark. Now, since this play is often considered *the* play of the Western canon, and after eons of adoration and praise, it must now be approached with a serious amount of humility if not downright trepidation. This is especially true if one were foolish enough to aspire to say something new or even relevant to what has already been said. The words of Wittgenstein can make us pause if nothing else will. “I am deeply suspicious,” he says, “of most of Shakespeare’s admirers.”³ And to make matters worse, he goes on to say, “... an enormous amount of praise (has) been, and (is) still to be lavished on Shakespeare without understanding, and for the wrong reasons, by a thousand professors of literature,”⁴ to say nothing, I might add, of philosophers and playwrights.

A tragic mistake is a moral mistake. Tragedy is, in essence, a moral concept. Thus, we might think it shares something with philosophy, but caution is required here, as well. Tragedy plows a different part of the ethical field than does moral philosophy. There are limits to what moral philosophy can tell us about right and wrong, and tragedy easily demonstrates why. In conventional moral thought – and it makes little or no difference what moral theory we prefer – when I do something wrong, make the wrong moral decision, I will cease to be looked upon by others, or even by myself, with the same admiration and respect as I once enjoyed. They may feel sorry for me, they may feel bad for me, but let us face it, when I make a wrong decision that I did not have to make, but insisted upon making, contrary to all advice, then it is my own fault and the consequences are just, even if sometimes harsh.

This is the exact opposite of what we experience in tragedy. When the tragic hero makes a moral mistake, which leads to his or her destruction, we do more than feel sorry for the person. We, in effect, say two seemingly morally contradictory things: 1) we say the tragic hero is completely responsible for his or her decision, and 2) the tragic hero does not deserve his or her fate. The exact opposite, in other words, of what conventional morality would

conclude. Justice plays no role here. This seeming contradictory notion of moral decision-making, where you are responsible for the decisions you make, but do not deserve the consequences of your decisions is the very heart of tragedy. How are we to understand this? What is it that makes any such notion coherent?

The answer lies in the concept of tragedy itself. Tragedy, of course, is here a technical term of dramatic literature, which often, if not always, involves suffering of some sort, but it must not be confused with the common use of the term for any unfortunate happenstance, accident, or crime. If when walking home, I am run over by a garbage truck, that is not a tragedy. So, what is a dramatic tragedy? We can quickly summarize a tragedy into four essential elements: 1) a tragic hero, 2) a tragic situation, 3) a tragic mistake, and 4) a tragic flaw. The key here is the relationship between the tragic hero and the tragic situation, or between plot and character in Aristotle's terms. The tragic hero is, at the very least, morally above average, and quite often, as in the case of Hamlet, morally and intellectually exceptional, and well beyond us. Like Prufrock, we may be lesser lords, perhaps, fit to start a scene or two, but alas, no Prince Hamlet.⁵ Virtuousness, i.e., a substantial degree of wisdom, courage, self-control, and justice is always a requirement for the tragic hero, and it may even be a necessary condition for happiness, as Aristotle insists, but in the end it cannot protect him, it cannot save him, it cannot prevent him from making a tragic mistake. His virtuous character has no doubt served him well in the past, has saved him from much misfortune before, but not here and not now. As great as he is, he will insist on making the wrong decision, and he will make it contrary to all advice and all opportunity to do otherwise.

It is, however, the situation in which Hamlet finds himself that makes it possible for us to say he did not deserve his destruction. He did nothing to create or deserve the problems he faces. Nevertheless, the world he now faces demands action from him. He will fail to deal successfully with the situation because he is not perfect. He is a human being with strengths and great

virtues, but they cannot save him, because no one is prepared and equipped to deal with every problem. The world, the contingent dreadfulness of the world, will have its way with him as it will have its way with all of us sooner or later. The tragic hero and the tragic situation are, in other words, tailor-made for each other. Some situations bring out the worst in us, and this is no less true for the tragic hero than it is for anyone else. If Prince Hamlet had been in Macbeth's situation, for example, King Duncan would never have been stabbed in his sleep. There is nothing in Macbeth's world that would have had such an effect on Hamlet's character; nothing there would have brought out any weakness in him. But in Elsinore, it is entirely different. Once Hamlet has the opportunity to make the wrong decision, nothing in heaven or on earth can stop him, and he destroys himself, i.e., he can never again be the man he once was. There is no redemption in tragedy.

Still, we feel Hamlet did not deserve his destruction, because he did not deserve to be put into this situation, which is why we all resonate with tragedy. It is this tragic sense of life that makes tragedy morally profound and we carry it with us from cradle to grave. None of us asked to be here, in this world, but here we are, with loads of duties and obligations to perform until we are racked with disease and die, and no one deserves to die. It may be the way of nature, as science assures us, but it makes no moral sense. There is really no point to it, and we do not deserve anything of the kind. Like tragedy, there is no justice here. It is as if we have done something terribly wrong. It feels like punishment; punishment for the crime of existence.

Nevertheless, our tragic hero, Hamlet, does make a tragic mistake. Why did he do it? He did it because of a flaw in his character, a tragic flaw, which is simply a character fault, frailty, or weakness that is brought forward by the tragic situation for perhaps the first time in his life, but most definitely for the last time. Again, tragedy is a theatrical notion. Not that there cannot be tragedies outside of the theatre, but it is the theatre that gives us the knowledge a tragedy is meant to teach us, although from a

slightly different perspective in each case. This is why the tragic flaw always seems to be a case of moral hubris, i.e., the failure to recognize any moral authority greater than our own, human or divine. Each individual tragedy uniquely says that this is what moral hubris looks like here, and here, and here. The more you see it, the better you understand it, for some things must be seen to be understood at all.

Now this may be all well and good, but is *Hamlet: Prince of Denmark* a tragedy in any of Aristotle's senses? And if not, what is it? If we read the play in terms of classical tragedy, we notice immediately that it falls into two distinct parts. Acts I through III follow the classical form quite closely. Act I introduces a tragic hero in a tragic situation, which as we know will eventually prove to be beyond his powers. This itself is saying something, since Shakespeare has made Hamlet well above the average in terms of moral virtue and intelligence. For instance, his capacity for self-reflection is extraordinary, and he is a superb athlete. He is also young, and a prince. When we first meet him, he has returned from university in Germany for his father's funeral, only to discover that his mother has been unfaithful to his father with his uncle Claudius. To make matters worse, his rightful crown has also been usurped by Claudius. Death, adultery, estrangement from his true love, political corruption, and finally rumours of murder confirmed by a ghostly apparition, all provide Hamlet with his tragic situation.

Act II begins a month later, with Hamlet in a sorry physical and psychological state. He feels the duty to act, but has taken no action to avenge his father's murder. This rather sad and frustrating state of affairs has led some to miss the entire import of the play. To this day, Hamlet is sometimes seen as a typically indecisive intellectual, who simply cannot make up his mind, to the point of hopelessness if not cowardice. Others, following Freud, have argued that Hamlet waited because he was psychologically incapable of taking action against his uncle because he suffered from an Oedipus complex. In other words, Hamlet did nothing between Acts I and II because he is either an indecisive coward,

or suffers from a crippling psycho-pathological state. In either case, we lose the play as a tragedy because we no longer have a tragic hero. He is either without virtue or he is psychologically impaired. There is no justification in either case for seeing the play as anything more than a psychological case study or a warning against indecisiveness. In reality, there is no justification here for bothering to see the play at all, much less seeing it as a masterpiece of Western literature.

Hamlet did nothing between Acts I and II because he is not insane. He is not going to kill someone because of a ghost story, even if it is a story that seems to confirm what he already believes to be true. Hamlet does not believe in ghosts any more than we do and probably less, but on the other hand Horatio saw it, and anything Horatio sees Hamlet is going to take seriously. Especially when even palace guards feel that something is truly rotten in the state of Denmark. Since Hamlet is not crazy, he will only really believe and act on the ghost's story if and only if he can corroborate it with additional evidence. If not, killing a man on the basis of what an apparition tells you in private is paramount to madness. And no one knows this better, or fears it more, than Hamlet.

How to confirm the ghost's story? This is the question, and his weeks of failure to answer it has brought him to thoughts of suicide. Why can't he get confirmation? What is so difficult about that? Why doesn't he just spy on Claudius? Why doesn't he read Claudius's mail, listen in on his private conversations, or send allies, and Hamlet has allies, to spy, or bribe people to spy. Why does he not do what we might do? He doesn't because he is Hamlet. Spying is not a moral option for Hamlet. In *Hamlet: Prince of Denmark*, if you spy, you die. There are no exceptions in the play to this moral law. Everyone who spies dies – Ophelia, Polonius, Claudius, Gertrude, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

Hamlet, of course, gets his confirmation of the ghost story in Act III. It is also in Act III that he makes his tragic mistake and

destroys himself. The confirmation he seeks comes through the play within the play. Where incidentally Shakespeare also gives Hamlet the talent of a playwright along with his other talents, and has Hamlet write and insert a scene in *The Murder of Gonzago* in order to test the King's reaction to seeing his own crime writ large before his eyes. Although hardly evidence enough for a court of law, it will be enough for Hamlet, if and only if Horatio sees what he sees. This is part of Hamlet's genius. Like us, he knows that he will see only what he expects to see, since the things we see are the things that are already within us. He rightly doesn't trust himself, especially here, and makes sure that Horatio can corroborate it. This power of self-reflection is part and parcel of what makes Hamlet, Hamlet. But there are limits even to this power, and it fails him when he needs it most. It is here in Act III that Hamlet makes his tragic mistake, does the morally wrong thing, crosses a line that must never be crossed, and destroys himself. Like Creon in *Antigone*, Hamlet too will eventually realize that in a profound sense he too no longer exists. But unlike Creon, Hamlet has unfinished business, and he will forge ahead, even though it has and will cost him everything.

Tragedy, in short, involves a peculiar kind of mistake. Ordinarily, when we do the wrong thing it is always possible to make restitution to some degree. Redemption of some kind always seems possible. There are even cases where we have learned a profound lesson from our wrong doing, and become a better person for it. This is not possible in tragedy. In tragedy, we are always faced with a very specific situation, a tragic situation, where we are called upon to take action, and if we take the wrong action, nothing, especially ourselves, will ever be the same again. Tragedies, in essence, are meant to tell us something about the boundaries of a moral reality that circumscribe our lives. Watching Hamlet or Creon exceed those boundaries tells us a great deal about where they are and what it takes to violate them. It tells us what attitudes, inclinations and postures must be avoided by us at all costs. First and foremost, of course, tragedies warn us against any

form of moral hubris, which encourages us to elevate our judgments over and above everyone else's, including the judgment of an all-powerful and divine being, as Mrs. Turpin discovered in Flannery O'Connor's story, *Revelation*. To her utter amazement, Mrs. Turpin found herself at the end of the story shaking her fist at heaven and yelling, "Who do you think you are?!"⁷ For one magnificent moment, she was the sole moral authority in the universe. For one terrifying moment she came face to face with demonic rebellion.

We are all prone to place ourselves at the center of the moral universe. There is nothing mysterious about this. We know that sometimes the lone individual in a group is indeed right and everyone else is wrong. Popular fiction worldwide is filled with such stories. But what is often ignored in these heroic tales is that the criterion for right and wrong is not the lone individual's strong convictions or feelings. A madman could have strong feelings, and perhaps even do something positive by accident, but we would not praise him for it. He has no idea what he's doing. He's just doing something he evidently has to do. What makes his action right or wrong has nothing to do with the strength of his feelings. To call an action right has no meaning unless there is a benchmark other than feelings – feeling good does not make it good, contrary to Nietzsche, Sartre, and Hemingway.

So where did Hamlet go wrong? Evidently, he must have committed moral hubris. But where? He does it in Act III. In fact, he does it twice in Act III. The first, when he takes it upon himself to prevent Claudius from going the heaven, which foreshows the second, when he takes it upon himself to chastise and punish his mother in spite of God's commandment to honour her, and in spite of the ghost's command to leave her alone. "Taint not thy mind, nor let they soul contrive against thy mother aught. Leave her to heaven."⁸ Heave will judge her, not you. While she remains a loyal and devoted mother to Hamlet, her failure to his father is none of his business. Hamlet has usurped the moral authority of everyone, including God. It could not be clearer than that.

We might pause here for a moment, however. Of course, we all come into existence in a rather terrifying place, mitigated only by a mother's touch, but is turning on her, scolding and humiliating her, enough to constitute a tragic mistake. Of course, we all know that small actions can have enormous consequences; pebbles in the road can indeed destroy lives, as Ophelia discovered. But is Hamlet's failure with his mother really enough of a mistake for the grand goals of tragedy? To see why it might be we must return to the first instance of moral hubris. Hamlet on his way to his mother's chamber comes across King Claudius praying. Hamlet surmises correctly that Claudius is asking God for forgiveness (or at least attempting to). Hamlet, Claudius, and everyone in the audience knows that asking for forgiveness is the theological loophole through which all sinners can be saved, no matter the monstrosity of their crimes. The caveat here is that the forgiveness must be requested in complete sincerity, a requirement Claudius cannot meet. Hamlet does not know this, of course, but he is taking no chances and refuses to kill Claudius and perhaps send him to heaven. Under the right conditions, God would take Claudius, but Hamlet is not going to let that happen. He will kill him later when he is immersed in sin. Hamlet will decide who goes to heaven or hell and when. Hamlet has replaced God. There is no moral authority higher than Hamlet at this juncture. Hamlet has dramatically exceeded his moral prerogative

A major indicator as to the level of Hamlet's hubris is that he never confers with Horatio, his loyal consigliere, about the wisdom of this decision to ignore Claudius and rush off and chastise his mother. Hamlet seeks Horatio's advice in everything but this. In Hamlet's mind, there is no need to confer with anyone at this point, for nothing could be more just, more right, more proper than his deciding where Claudius will spend the afterlife, or in his punishing his mother for her infidelity. Unfortunately, when Hamlet confirms the ghost's story, he also confirms the admonition to leave his mother alone. This he ignores, and so he goes to mother, and in his haste and anger accidentally kills Polonius, thus

preventing him from taking immediate action against Claudius. To forge ahead and kill Claudius now would be seen by one and all as the action of the homicidally deranged. Hamlet's attempt to rectify all things at Elsinore has collapsed and come to nothing. The tragic consequence is the sacrifice of his virtuous character. Hamlet as we knew him is no more. Both of these consequences are presumably realized by Hamlet as he drags poor Polonius's body around the back hallways and lobbies of the castle with remorse and regret. The tragedy of *Hamlet* is all but over that this point. It is here that a soliloquy calls out to be inserted in the play. If there was ever a moment when we needed to know more of Hamlet's innermost thoughts, this is it. A speech of recognition filled with pathos is surely what Aristotle would have expected at this juncture. It may even have been the conclusion Shakespeare was looking for, but decided not to take. Shakespeare wants to know what happens next. For that to happen Hamlet needs to carry on. Thus there is no suicide, no mutilation, and no stopping him. It has cost him everything to this point, and it was all completely his fault. So be it. Claudius will still pay, and in Acts IV & V Hamlet will do whatever it takes to make him pay dearly. The Hamlet of Acts I to III is no more.

In part two of the play, we are confronted with a different Hamlet. The Hamlet of Acts IV and V is a dramatic hero of action, one we are all too familiar with from any number of revenge sagas. From here on, it is a question of will he or won't he overcome all obstacles and pull it off in the end. Hamlet now condones and performs actions he had refused to stoop to performing before Act IV. He lies, dissembles, spies, bargains, conspires, plots, and kills without hesitation, even old friends, and nearly succeeds in the end. In fact, he is within minutes of exposing Claudius to the court with hard objective evidence, e.g., Claudius's letter to the English King asking him to kill Hamlet, and the arrival of the English ambassadors asking for their reward. All he had to do was stay alive long enough, which Shakespeare made sure would not happen. If Hamlet had been allowed to live, everything, given all

the chaos, would have worked out reasonably well, i.e., Claudius punished and dead, Hamlet king, Hamlet reconciled with his mother, and perhaps even with Laertes. Shakespeare, like Aristotle, knew that this was not a satisfying or adequate structure for tragedy, and consequently, Hamlet must lose absolutely everything in the end, including his life.

In conclusion, we can now see that in writing *Hamlet* Shakespeare conjoined two theatrical forms: classical tragedy and revenge saga. Although it is not an especially happy marriage, it works once we understand the destruction of Hamlet's virtue in Act III, and how this change in character made the action in Acts IV & V possible. Thanks to the classical tragedy in Acts I-III, we leave the play with a profound feeling that Hamlet did not deserve any of it, even though he was solely responsible for the worst parts of his own destruction. Our knowledge of what cannot ever be done morally, our knowledge of the limits to what is morally possible for us has increased tenfold after following the decisions of a virtuous young man in a terrible situation that he did nothing to cause, but one that was clearly beyond his powers to deal with successfully. There is a line we cannot cross. We may not always know where it is, but we do know it is there. And knowing that is the birthplace of wisdom; forewarned is forearmed.

Notes

¹ Plato, *Apology*, 38a



² Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1962), p. 77.

³ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Culture and Value* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981), p. 84.

⁴ *Culture and Value*, p. 48.

⁵ T.S. Eliot, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*.

⁶ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet: Prince of Denmark*, Act I, Scene 5.



The Dilemmas of the Spirit- Inspired Mind of an Activist

Dhyanchand Carr

Christians accept the Bible as the Word of God. However some of us concede that every word of the Bible individually cannot be taken as God's Word. Only the carefully discerned message after putting the words of the Bible through the sieve of God's Love, Justice and Holiness can be accepted as God's Word. The fundamentalists who believe in the inerrancy of the Bible, however, will differ. They close their eyes to the realities of human error, defective theological perceptions, culture-specific statements, and ethical values of the authors being undeniably present in what they recorded. The beauty of the Bible, in fact, consists of God speaking clearly to discerning minds revealing God's own self though those who did the actual writing were not perfect. God's nature revealed in Jesus gives us the clue to discern God's Word.

For those of us who have reached the above understanding and are actively involved in justice and peace concerns still have to find a way out of one problem in reading the Bible. It has to do with some of God's favourites falling far short of the perceptions of justice. Quite a few of them are misogynists and narrators of

The Dilemmas of the Spirit-inspired Mind of an Activist

their stories who tend to justify their positions of wealth and power in the name of God.

We believe that the Spirit of the Lord enabled us to reach understanding about Justice and of God's inclusive Love (Is.11:1-9). Therefore it is difficult to understand why the same Spirit could not have helped "God's Favourites" such as Abraham, Joshua the protégé of Moses, the Prophet Samuel, David and Solomon, and early Church, leaders like James and Paul, reach the same level of understanding as has been possible for lesser beings such as ourselves. Unmistakably the biblical characters referred to have been effective instruments of God in their own time. The challenging examples set are difficult to emulate. For example, Abraham uprooted himself and the entire household from being an urban elite to be a nomad in an unknown land. And, there he was acknowledged as a friend of the people. This is not something anyone could easily emulate. We need to be careful, therefore, to acknowledge that though we may have better understanding and sensibilities, our effectiveness in turning that understanding into real change for the better is too little. Therefore, our query is intended to seek an understanding about how God continues to work with frail humans, puts up with disappointments and yet will accomplish His purposes. Yes, with people like us, God intends to build a new human community of peace with justice and to liberate creation from being plundered. We shall become a fit enough people, in all of "the Holy Mountain of God" there will be harmony and peace among all creatures.

Let us examine a few examples of God's frail partners. God tirelessly continues to work with human partners. It is costly to God as the weak partners of the past and of the present keep enlarging the countless numbers of victims of neglect and wanton abuse. God bears this heavy burden and eventually has planned to bring redress to the victims, effect forgiveness of those who inflicted misery through them and a change of heart in those who inflicted the pain and misery. It must be deeply hurting God's own self because often the wicked deeds are done in the very

name of God. Let us just take two important agendas of God and refer to some of God's partners tangibly revealed in Jesus First, we shall attempt to take stock of our efforts to dismantle patriarchy in order to establish proper gender justice. Second, The Spirit inspired dream for another world of equity for all. An egalitarian world of equitable distribution of wealth, resources and opportunities with an emergent equality among races, nations, castes and religions arising from an inner compulsion beyond law and custom. As we go along, let us keep in mind the enormous losses and intense suffering endured by millions because such dreams have been dismissed as fanciful and impractical; because of the spirit of compromise accepting false peace sustained by the powerful and the dominant. Much more, the arrogating of privilege and power most often happens in the name of God the Creator, God of inclusive Love and God of impeccable commitment to justice.

The Dream to Dismantle Patriarchy and Bring about Awareness and Repentance on Misogyny

At the outset we are confronted by some shocking facts of God's redemption history. For we find even God's chosen one, Abraham, wanting in this respect. The narrator of the story of Abraham tries his level best to cover up. He says that it was because God told Abraham that he sent Hagar and his first born son Ishmael away (Gen.21:12). Would God have said that it was enough if Abraham gave her a loaf of bread and a flask of water for their upkeep? Paul in the Christian era wants this story to be understood as an allegory about Judaism (son of Hagar) and Christianity (the child of Promise) (Gal.4:21-31). Paul seems to imply that we should not worry about the irony of injustice embedded in it. Not only does the narrator put the blame on God for the disinheritance of Ishmael, he also drags God in to cover up the shameful act of Abraham surrendering his wife to Pharaoh when he went to Egypt on account of a famine (Gen.12:10-20). God had to step in to warn the ruler of dire consequences if he touched Sarah. For how

many such women betrayed by their husbands does God step in to protect them?

Similarly the conscripting of a young woman Abishag to arouse sexual desire in the dying old man David, with his consent, in the hope that this might revive him to fight the forces of death is narrated without the slightest indication of any sense of wrong doing. Women had been created by God just for this, so has been the patriarchal value. There was not a single male with a different consciousness. This whole episode is quietly omitted by the author of the post exilic book of Chronicles; interestingly the concordance of Robert Young on KJV (1879) says of Abishag: 'a beautiful maiden who was employed "to nurse" the aging David'. If so, why then shut her up in the harem after the death of David? No, not even Nathan seems to have protested. His challenge to David was not because Bath Sheba was violated by David. He chided David for taking Bath Sheba only because Uriah was deprived of his only wife. David was not criticized for giving in to lust but only for taking the wife of another. So not even Nathan, though a prophet to whom the origins of the hope in the Messiah to come is traced, did not have any concern for women's rights. Neither Bath Sheba nor Abishag had any choice when the king demanded their services. Once Bath Sheba is given the status of a wife the sin of David gets wiped off and the Lord loved Solomon the second son born to Bath Sheba. So, the question arises, "Do we trace the Messianic Hope which now starts the line of descendants from Solomon to Joseph the foster father of Jesus ultimately to God? Solomon was named Jedidiah by Nathan. The name Solomon has become all too common for Christian parents to name their child. Some probably have become embarrassed because at least the author of Kings says that Solomon fell from the grace of God. However, they still would like their boys to become wealthy and wise like Solomon so now they choose to name their boy babies as Jedidiah, the name given to Solomon by Nathan. Little do Christians seem to worry as to how Bath Sheba got taken by David and how Solomon who was the child of such a union usurped the

kingdom from the legitimate heir Adonijah and how Solomon amassed wealth through taxing the foreigners heavily and making his own people to serve in labour camps to work in his ambitious building program. Solomon also conscripted many women to gratify his insatiable lust. Worst of all, when probably his devotion to YHWH made him feel guilty, Solomon resorted to worshipping the deities who endorsed orgies and unlimited expressions of lust. But it is the foreign wives and the many concubines who get blamed for the religious waywardness of Solomon and not his immoral desires. The post exilic chronicler glosses over all this. As do many Christians even today, all because Solomon claimed that God appeared to him in a dream and promised him wealth and honour because he sought wisdom.

Patriarchal values rule the roost throughout the Bible. Jesus, however, set a challenging example. He refused to indict women supposed to have been caught in acts of adultery for in all probability he judged rightly that it is the men involved who were the root cause of their “guilt” if it was such. Jesus did not mind being approached by a sex worker who stood at his feet during a dinner, wept, wiped the tears away with her hair, anointed his feet with a costly ointment. Nor would Jesus join the world in ridiculing a Samaritan woman who had been, in all probability, thrown out of marriage five times but who had been blamed for walking from husband to husband. Rather, he engaged her in a theological dialogue revealing himself to be the Messiah. Most important of all, when he rose from the dead he appeared first to the women disciples and asked them to be the messengers of the Good News to the male disciples. In spite of such a challenge all his disciples sought to dismiss their testimony. In the very first recording of the appearances which was handed over to Paul, there is no reference to any interaction with women (I Cor.15:3-7). The first Gospel writer Mark says that the women who were the only witnesses to the empty tomb and the announcement from the angel, kept quiet because of fear. Apparently, according to him the Risen Lord found another way to reach his disciples. This was perhaps to avert the

danger of the world dismissing the news as belonging to the “Idle Tales of Women”. But God saw to it that the witness of the women Disciples is given due recognition in the Gospel Tradition of Matthew and John. The patriarchal and misogynist attitudes of the disciples is hinted at by Matthew in the account of Jesus’ response to the question whether a man had the right to divorce his wife. Matthew’s record of the stand of Jesus against divorce records a comment by the disciples, “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is expedient not to marry” (Mat. 19:10). Paul goes through a struggle and does not come out altogether clean. In principle he concedes that in Christ there is neither male nor female. But when he resorts to give pragmatic advice he slips back into asking wives to be obedient to their husbands. This is symptomatic of most of us “conscientized Christian men” who continue to enjoy the unstinting services of our wives who have internalized the traditional cultural value and so serve spontaneously. We don’t try hard enough to get them liberated and so it was with Paul.

The Dream about another World – A World of New Humanity

Let us move next to our dream for the entire world to assimilate egalitarian values: Equity for the poor and equality among races and nations. Unlike in the case of patriarchy which is deemed to have divine endorsement, in one sense, we have an unambiguous mandate. We are to follow the Messianic Mission to establish justice and equity to the poor.

Our chosen text to discuss this dream is Isa. 11:1-9. The Messiah shall enjoy the abiding presence of the spirit of the Lord, the spirit of Wisdom and understanding. This abiding companionship, as envisioned by the Prophet Isaiah, would enable the Messiah to see differently why the poor are poor. He shall refuse to agree with the common rationalizations. He would recognize the great contribution which the poor make to sustain the world though their dignity as human beings in the image of God is wiped out by

all the indignities heaped upon them. The Messiah would therefore come up with a counter logic and promulgate a new ideology which will nullify all the rationalizations of the rich and the powerful. Only then there will be a cosmic revolution. All nature will also undergo transformation. Predation will be no more. The carnivore will become herbivore. All poison and venom will have been neutralized. Fear will become an unknown emotion everywhere. So be it, Amen.

If this was all, how wonderful it would be. However, it is a long road to see even glimpses of the dream becoming real. Where are the roots of the problem?

A while ago we talked about the womanizer Solomon of whom the narrators seemed to say that everything he enjoyed was given by God. However, we also saw that biblical narrators felt rather uneasy at times. Abraham's biographer had to drag in God to save the reputation of the Father of the Multitude of Nations. The second biographer of Solomon, the Chronicler, not realizing that one day his readers will have access to the original biographer (the author of I Kings) expunges some very unpleasant details of Solomon. But the same chronicler, however, is proud to report the enormous wealth Solomon had. Let me quote one small passage in 2 Chron. 9:13-28:

Now the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred and sixty-six talents of gold, besides that which the traders and merchants brought; and all the kings of Arabia and governors of the land brought gold and silver to Solomon. King Solomon made two hundred large shields of beaten gold. Six hundred shekels of pure gold went into each shield ...The king also made a great ivory throne and overlaid it with pure gold... All king's drinking vessels were of gold ... silver was not considered as anything in the days of Solomon ... Thus King Solomon excelled all the kings of the earth in Riches and in Wisdom... which God had put into his mind.

But how did Solomon become so rich? He exploited the hundred and fifty three thousand foreigners who dwelt in the land by making them do hard labour. He subjugated all the other kingdoms and collected heavy tribute. He conscripted his citizens to build his house and the Temple. He had an officer called Adoniram to ensure that no one dodged forced labour. He appointed twelve officers to take away the produce of the land to meet the needs of the king. The narrator of Kings is rather ambivalent. On the one hand he says that people of Israel and Judah were happy in the reign of Solomon. The reason why God decided to take away the ten tribes of Israel and bring them under the rule of Jeroboam was not because of Solomon's tyranny of extracting hard labour but because of his falling away from the worship of Yahweh to worship the gods of Moab and Ammon. But when Rehoboam becomes king the truth comes out. People who groaned under the forced labour asked Rehoboam to lighten the load. It is clear Solomon was a tyrant. For even the elders in his council advised him to listen to the people. So the truth is that the kingdom broke away because of Rehoboam's refusal to lighten the yoke of hard labour laid upon the people. Did God approve of this? It is a pity that Christians would say "Yes, in the end Solomon fell from God's grace by choosing to go after gods of fertility." But they wish to remain blind to the fact that from the day one, Solomon begins with a hit list and eliminates Shimei who criticized David, his father. Then he saw to it that Adonijah his elder brother is also eliminated. Then Solomon indulges in revelry and gluttony and proves to be a womaniser with an insatiable lust. He embarks upon an ambitious building programme and in the end the Kingdom gets split because Rehoboam wanted to keep the people as slaves. In spite of all this woeful record Solomon continues to be held in great esteem as a wise man was blessed with wealth and grandeur. In fact, it has now come to light that all the wisdom attributed to Solomon, namely the proverbs and the songs are from a much later age and that he is not the author.

The question that should bother all thinking Christians concerned about unjust accumulation of wealth is “How God could be made responsible for such wealth accumulation and wasteful indulgence?” The simple fact that Solomon being an Israelite deemed as from a “Peculiar People of God”, his being known to be above all other kings of his time in wealth and status alone seemed to have been sufficient for the people to put up with all suffering inflicted upon them by their king who was God’s favourite. Thereby they seemed to think that they themselves were made superior to other nations and peoples. Solomon indeed was a clever crook. How that could be attributed as wisdom which is a sign of the fear of God of which Solomon did not seem to possess any? And why do Christians continue to feel that God made Solomon a great and wise man?

Our related concern in the quest for an egalitarian world, is about the ethnic particularity which the people of God nurtured in their hearts. Sure enough, God was with the people of Israel in their experience of slavery. It was God who made it impossible for Pharaoh to annihilate them and made Moses to be brought up in the palace keeping alive a feeling of solidarity for his people. God’s own special name revealed to Moses was “I Am who I Am” (YHWH – an unpronounceable Name) indicating that God was present in the midst of the experience of a fiery persecution. Finally they were redeemed from slavery and were settled in Palestine. According to God’s expectations they were to internalize and nurture ethical monotheism; which meant that they showed attributes of inclusivity without compromising ethical principles. Their own bitter experiences of the alienations they had suffered, God hoped would make them differently with aliens in their midst; God hoped to make them treat their slaves with a sense of fairness; Alas, they remained stubbornly patriarchal, chose to alienate themselves from their neighbours and even developed justifications for their hatred and animosity towards other nations in whose land they chose to settle.

How do We Resolve the Dilemmas?

It is from the Bible we learn about the Spirit of the Lord who sustains the Messiah's Mission of establishing God's Just Reign. This would imply that there will be peace with justice and harmony. Nation shall not war against nations. All weapons of destruction would either be changed into instruments of production or destroyed.

This would not come about overnight. It would be like a seed which germinates and grows into a tree. This process of transformation will come about through God-human cooperation and partnership. God expects us to grow and become like Him in every respect.

But the same Bible, also contains stories of God's people who claim to have God's sanction for ill-treatment of women, for their indulgence in luxury and immoral behaviour. It is these patriarchal, exploitative and exclusivist ways of living which appeal even to Christians. They tend to justify, therefore, accumulation of wealth because it is God who helps them amass wealth. It is God who has ordered women to serve men.

The problem, it seems to me, lies in a false understanding of the sovereignty of God. According to that understanding God is a despotic monarch the unmoved mover of everything that happens. We need to say that the God who is witnessed to by the Bible, is not this despotic monarch. Rather God gets everything done only through God's trusting partnership with people whom God has created in God's image. If we take note of the story of the making of the Bible we could easily perceive this important truth.

At least forty different authors wrote various parts of the Bible, over a period of 1100 years approximately. None of them knew he/she was contributing to the Word of God to be revered for generations to come. Their theological perceptions were not always perfect. The information they communicated was not always

accurate. They were conditioned to accept patriarchy as ordained and misogyny came along with such a belief. They accepted hierarchy without question. Some narrators tried their best to cover up the faults of their heroes. They did their best but the Emperor was without his clothes could be seen even by a simple reader. In addition to the forty different authors, God also relied on the first generation readers of the documents that comprise the bible to recognize their worth, preserve and hand them over from generation to generation until such time several centuries later, the officialdom of Judaism and the early church recognized the documents as worthy of the honour of being the canon (The measuring rod for faith and order). It is when so compiled our problem surfaces that we cannot accept the entirety of the Bible as Word of God.

In spite of this awareness, there are those on the one hand who insist that the Bible is infallible in all aspects. But for us, the Bible, though not inerrant is the means whereby we discern God's Word. The first category of people are those who would swear with Calvin and several others that God is a despotic monarch, who if he says something which is wrong in our perception, we frail humans should not question.

On the other hand the way to resolve the dilemmas in the light of the Gospel seems to the present writer, is to affirm. God is not a despotic Monarch. Rather, He is a persevering Facilitator. Because all of us God's partners keep failing God's Trust and consequently inflict pain and misery on millions. Millions of women of all classes and races are victims in addition to millions impoverished and war ravaged. Wealth accumulation under Globalized trade leads to starvation of millions and, as Pope Francis has pointed out in his recent encyclical, leads to desertification of the earth. Hopefully, both these realities that God depends on our partnership and that all our neglect and wanton indulgence if not directly certainly indirectly keeps enlarging the Victim Collective who are the real partners in God's plan to lead humanity to transformation.



The Dilemmas of the Spirit-inspired Mind of an Activist

All this means we give up understanding God's absolute sovereignty. We give up our insufficient understanding of Christ's death as substitute punishment for sins of individuals. It is Christ the Human One in solidarity with the Victim Collective who removes sin. Our dilemmas would then get resolved. Our excuses will get exposed. Our desire to be like Solomon, hopefully will be no more. Rather, we will want to be like Jesus the Human One who learnt obedience through his suffering. A New Human Community of Peace with Justice will emerge in God's time, which can be hastened by our faithful partnership.





Theatre as Pedagogy in Religious Studies

Victoria Rue

Theatre is all about bodies. Because I am a theatre artist as well as a religious studies professor, teaching works best for me when it is an experience of the mind and body. When I discovered feminist theology, I was inspired by its commitment to the primacy of women's bodily experiences. It is through this lens that I connect my theatre-making to teaching religion and empowering all my students. Here's how I do it.

The Classroom and our Bodies

As class begins, students know to expect something new. They come hoping for it, actually. This is an introductory course to religious studies. Our intent is to explore to what extent students can enter into the mystery and meaning held within religious experience through empathy and somatic experience. There are some 30 students present. We meet once a week for three hours. The room is large and carpeted – easier to move around, work on the floor, and create environments.

We push the desks aside and take off our shoes because we



are on the “holy ground” of creativity. We immediately begin with exercises that energize the body. Doing this allows all of us to concentrate more fully. These exercises include, walking to music/rhythms, walking in slow motion, and games that challenge listening and visual awareness. I remind the students that there are many ways of “knowing.” We are beginning with our bodies.

As a professor melding disparate disciplines, it has been my experience that when the arts are utilized within courses, students learn on both cognitive and experiential levels. Pedagogically, the arts are not only tools for communicating in the global arena, they are also models for cooperation, community building, and somatic learning. Thus, I bring to my theatre-related courses my training in social issues and theology, a perspective that makes theatre an ethical and social enterprise. In religious studies programs, on the other hand, I use a blend of teaching modes that include seminar-style student learning and dramatic enactment. Introductory courses I teach in Religion and Spirituality, the Abrahamic Religious Traditions, Mysticism, Women’s Studies, and Creative Arts all utilize theatre as an embodied technique for learning.

The class is now AWAKE and ready to work together. As a way of modeling a subsequent exercise, I ask volunteers to create body sculptures. Students form improvised “photographs/sculptures” of one-word themes: earth, sky, family, mother, father, religion, and finally the word “God.” As they join the exercise one at a time, I direct students to link physically to form the sculpture. To depict earth, some students are flat on the ground; another sits on a prostrate body cradling a student representing a child. Others spread their limbs as trees connecting earth, sky and forest. This exercise demands that students rely on one another physically to form an idea. At the end of all the sculptures, we begin to unpack the images. What do you find compelling about them? What felt untrue to you? Were any images similar to another? Why? They are often surprised by the similarity

between the “father” and “God” sculptures—controlling, commanding, suspicious and frequently angry. This exercise stirs up student responses. It’s important to acknowledge all impressions of the sculptures. Students see that multiple interpretations are possible for a simple image.

So far, these exercises have introduced students to the use of their bodies as a “way of knowing,” which assumes the importance of bodily experience and that they can communicate in a classroom without words.

Following this, we create an exercise that is a variant on the one above, but allows everyone in the class to “make their experience visible” and become witnesses to their own stories. I divide the class into groups of four or five. Each person in each group molds her peers like clay to create a “photograph” of her grandparents’ notion of religion; she then remolds her peers to show her parents’ or guardians’ notion and then her own. There are lively discussions after each picture has been created. What was that image about? What was your mother doing in that image - I wasn’t clear about it, what was going on? Afterwards, each group will select one person’s image to share with the entire class. Once the images are shown to the whole group, I direct the discussion to the purpose of the class: what is religious experience? How diverse is it? Was it depicted in any of these “pictures?” And off we go.

Embodying a Text

In a mysticism course, after reading *Being Peace* by Thich Nhat Hanh, I introduce *vipassana*, or mindfulness meditation, as an aspect of religious experience (Hanh, 1987). Students have been instructed to memorize a “gatha” written by Thich Nhat Hanh. “Gathas” are small poems that when repeated with everyday actions usher in an awareness of the present moment and our connectedness to other human beings.

Serving Food

In this food,
I see clearly the presence
of the entire universe
supporting my existence.

Brushing Your Teeth

Brushing my teeth and rinsing my mouth,
I vow to speak purely and lovingly.
When my mouth is fragrant with right speech,
a flower blooms in the garden of my heart.

(Hanh, 1990)

One day in class a woman student had chosen the gatha for washing feet and offered to share it with us in class. “Peace and joy in each toe—my own peace and joy.” She sat on the floor, took her shoes off, and began to heartily rub the toes of her feet. Breathing steadily, fully engaged with the sight of her toes, she repeated her gatha over and over again. She began to cry, still focusing on her toes. And slowly she began to laugh. All the while, the words of the gatha floated like water lilies over her emotions. Afterwards she told us that her feet, particularly her toes, had been broken, sprained, and cut many times in her life. During the gatha’s repetition, she experienced the history of her toes. Specificity and universality were held in that present moment.

Another student had chosen a gatha, again written by Thich Nhat Hanh, regarding how to view one’s hand to feel the convergence of past and future in the present moment.

Whose hand is this?
Whose hand is this that has never died?
Whose hand is this that will yet be born?
Whose hand is this?

(Hanh, 1990)

But in the enactment, the student forgot to look at her hand when she recited the words. In her nervousness, she also did not

allow herself to breathe. I suggested she begin again this time gazing at both hands, breathing and giving voice to the text from what she was actually seeing in her hands. When she repeated the exercise, she used her breath, sight, hand and the text. She was fully engaged, through her body, in the present moment. This time, the student and the text came alive!

The exercise introduces the power of using theater in an academic setting. First, simply being able to memorize a gatha is a new challenge. Second, using one's body to express and communicate opens up new levels of understanding of the text and its concepts. Third, students are encouraged to witness their own shyness or resistance as an act of being in the present moment, and fourth, through concentration and experience, students, for a moment, can enter into Hanh's world of "meaning." Following the enactment of the gathas, the class engages in a discussion of everyday mindfulness and how it connects to Hanh's ideas of interdependence with the past, present and future.

Embodying Text and Character

I have worked in the theatre for some thirty years as a theatre director, playwright and teacher. In the course of teaching acting, I began to notice the power in the act of memorization. Words of another hold a piece of that person's identity. Playwright and actress Anna Deavere Smith says it this way: "If you say a word often enough, it becomes you." (Smith, 2001) By memorizing another's words, a meeting of self and other takes place. An actor invites someone else's words into their being and allows her body to discover movement from the words. With constant repetition, the actor both creates and surrenders to her character. The paradox is that the actor is wholly present to herself as well as inhabited by the energies and psyche of another. Grotowski has referred to this as a kind of possession. Perhaps this is too strong a word. There is a fusion, but not obliteration.

Anna Deavere Smith interviewed people involved in the Crown Heights, Brooklyn [1991] and Los Angeles [1992] riots. Two

plays were developed using those interviews, “Fires in the Mirror” and “Twilight.” I use her approach to language with my students to help them enter into religious experience.

Some people use language as a mask. And some people want to create designed language that appears to reveal them but does not. In our day in age, language is often a camouflage or cover or even confessional. We rely so much on mass communication. And mass communication controls what gets to us as well. We are very far from the personal, from the one to one conversations—the human touch. Language is a dance between you and the other, it is not meant to camouflage and cover (Smith, 2001).

In a course that is an introduction to religion and spirituality, I invite three students to interview people in their communities. I ask them to listen and observe, to listen carefully to the language of the other. How a person expresses himself in word and gesture is a signature. When thoughts are spoken from the heart, the words and feeling under the words offer the listener an essence of that person. My students are asked to listen not only to form and content but to the spirit contained in the words.

In a recent class, a female student “became” a local shaman she had interviewed. The student memorized the words and enacted the physicality of the shaman. The shaman had answered the question, “what is shamanism?” A second student enacted a local Presbyterian minister who had responded to the question, “what is religion?” A third student embodied a local yoga teacher who had answered the question, “what is spirituality?”

The student who interviewed the shaman reflected afterward:

Speaking with Cathy was by far the most rewarding academic experience I have had at college. I have never had to act out the part of another living human being in a classroom setting before, and I think that enhanced everything that I learned from Cathy. When I listened to her speak, I not only

listened to her words, but her body language and just the subtle nuances of who she was on an introductory level. I thoroughly enjoyed the entire process and I feel that this element of the class should be introduced to other classes as well.

From the student who interviewed the Presbyterian minister: “Interviewing Reverend Mike was an experience that I can carry for the rest of my life, and I am glad that I had the opportunity to conduct this interview with such a great guy.”

Each student had encountered an essence of the person they had interviewed. The people they interviewed spoke sincerely, from their hearts. They transmitted feeling. The students received it. Each took the words, the physicality, and the indefinable into themselves. Each then re-presented that person to us in the classroom. In re-presenting the other, the student had to transmit an essence that lives under and in the words. The student found Rev. Mike to be a no-nonsense pastor that didn’t mince words and occasionally even swore to get his point across. The student discovered a place in himself that understood and felt Rev. Mike. Through this empathy, feeling with, he was able to enact Rev. Mike’s essence. The class was astonished and riveted by such a plain talking minister as enacted by the student. They responded to the student who “became” Rev. Mike. They received it, felt it. They empathized.

The circle of empathy, compassion, to feel with, was complete. In the initial interview, the presenting students felt the lived commitment and passion of the shaman, minister and yoga teacher. Then they embodied and transmitted this to their peers. And what was communicated was something larger than these student presenters. They had entered into another’s belief and believed it for a moment in themselves. Students in the classroom received these beliefs, through the three students, and for a moment felt with, empathized, with the lived experience of others.

At the same time, through the process of enacting the other, the three students encountered new pieces of themselves.

In a course on mysticism, we attempt to enter into the religious experience of mystics. My study of mysticism leads me again and again to the necessity of using the theatre in teaching. In approaching Christian mysticism, we look at women mystics of the Middle Ages who spoke of God as a sensory experience. “Let Him kiss me with the kiss of His mouth!” cries Teresa of Avila (Avila 1980). Mechthild of Magdeburg expresses the anguish of desire when she says “God burning with His desire looks upon the soul as a stream in which to cool His ardor” (Brunn 1989). Mysticism is not a mental encounter with the Divine. It is a full body moment.

In the coursework, students read and discuss the writings of several mystics and scholarly articles providing context and interpretation. They choose a text by a mystic that “speaks” to them. I ask each student to write a biography of the mystic in the first person. Like actors, they explore the background and intentions of a character they will enact. They memorize the text. I ask them to get inside the words, to discover what is not being said and what is being said beneath the spoken words. They also create an everyday action that will accompany the spoken text. Words and physicalization. One student who had memorized a text by Mechthild of Magdeburg was having trouble choosing an action. I asked her to polish her shoes and to let the action affect the words. This action, possibly something that Mechthild might have done, engaged her body and demanded that she be in the present moment with her shoes and with Mechthild’s words. The words emerged from the action. The student wrote me a note about her experience of enacting Mechthild and her poetry:

The enactment of sacred texts changes us by giving us direct access to the mystical experience itself. Perhaps because this result has been more elusive, I have found it to be all the more transformative. What I am trying to convey are rare moments

in which the sacred text ceases to be “the script” and becomes instead direct experience. In these moments, I am granted the exquisite privilege of sharing the mystic’s insight, the intensity of his/her merging with the mystery.

Conclusion

I act as a pedagogical consultant to colleges and individual professors. At St. Lawrence University in the Religious Studies Department, Kelley Raab utilized several theatre methods in her course on “Christian Heroines.” Afterwards, she said

I see this approach as a very feminist technique. Having mainly women in my course, I found these techniques gave women a voice and helped them feel comfortable in experiencing their opinions. They could act out a character, become emotionally involved in it, and really express themselves. These creative exercises balanced research and reading and helped to develop critical thinking skills as well.

At the University of the Redlands, Fran Grace taught a course entitled “Religion and Hate.” In it she used a mirror exercise she had experienced in a workshop I’d taught for professors. The exercise invites two participants to face one another and maintain eye contact as they “mirror” each other in non-verbal motions and gestures. Fran explains,

We were dealing with the role of religion in race conflicts. I invited the students to do the mirror exercise with someone in class they didn’t know. A Black woman paired with a white man. He found it difficult to follow her when it was her turn to lead. They both said it was hard for them to look into the eyes of the other. Basically, they had great difficulty trusting and being in sync. Their honesty coming out of this exercise (which required their BODY to reveal what their mind would not in cognitive or discursive learning) led to a heated and meaningful class discussion about racial difference and fear.





Theatre as Pedagogy in Religious Studies

Theatre is a tool, a journey, and a magnifying glass. Through it, students can meet the issues and challenges of our times and can rehearse and reimagine their lives in a more just world.

Teaching students using the body, memorization, enactment, and characterization is an opportunity to witness the challenges, richness and complexity of our lives. In the courses I've described, students study religious experience. Through using theatre as a pedagogical tool, the intellectual art of studying expands outward to include an experience of the self and other. In this way, we begin to touch the mystery and meaning of religion through the pedagogical tool of theatre.

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A Pedagogy for the Oppressor: Re-envisioning Freire and Critical Pedagogy in Contexts of Privilege

Chris K. Bacon

“I knew as well as I knew anything that the oppressor must be liberated just as surely as the oppressed. A man who takes away another man’s freedom is a prisoner of hatred; he is locked behind the bars of prejudice and narrow-mindedness. I am not truly free if I am taking away someone else’s freedom, just as surely as I am not free when my freedom is taken from me. The oppressed and the oppressor alike are robbed of their humanity.”

Nelson Mandela (1994: 625)

“Dehumanization, which marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also (though in a different way) those who have stolen it, is a distortion of the vocation of becoming more fully human.”

Paulo Freire (1970: 44)

“A study of education for social justice is not complete without reference to the work of Paulo Freire.” At that time, I had no idea

who Freire was, only that I would have to completely revise what I thought was my final paper. Though chagrined about the added work, I had no idea that my entire outlook on education was about to change.

This was one of many transformative conversations I had with David Selvaraj, Executive Director at Visthar, a non-profit organization advancing the rights of marginalized populations in Bangalore, India. That semester, I was one of fifteen undergraduates from the U.S. participating in Visthar's "Social Justice, Peace, and Development" programme. For many of us, our experience at Visthar was the first time we had truly grappled with issues of power, privilege, and our own complicity in systems of oppression - systems like those explored in Freire's seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970).

A decade later, Freire's work is a cornerstone of my own practice with students, youth workers, and future educators in the U.S. and abroad. Much of this work, however, is conducted among participants whose race, nationality, sexual orientation, and a host of other factors place them in positions of relative societal privilege. Among such populations, Freire's work generally elicits one of two reactions: Some participants feel unjustly pigeonholed into a stigmatized role of the "oppressor" and therefore distance themselves from the work. More often, however, the opposite occurs - as participants increasingly identify with the cause of the oppressed, they begin to identify *themselves* as oppressed, and we are left in what Allen (2002) called "a delusional space where everyone is the oppressed and no one is the oppressor." In such a case, we rally to resist the oppressors but neglect to identify whom exactly we are resisting, for if this is done, we may come to realize that we are speaking of ourselves.

Since Freire's approaches, and those of the wider field of critical pedagogy, are characteristically geared towards the oppressed, less work has explored the application of these theories among more privileged populations. Since these groups arguably represent

Freire's "oppressor," one must ask: Is critical pedagogy relevant for such groups? And more important, are such groups relevant to critical pedagogy? Answering these questions requires a re-envisioning of the paradigm of pedagogies of the oppressed. One must explore what role, if any, the oppressor should play in what Freire called "the human task: the permanent transformation of reality in favor of the liberation of people" (1970: 102). These ideas will be explored below as a "Pedagogy for the Oppressor."

PART I: IS A PEDAGOGY FOR THE OPPRESSOR NECESSARY?

The "Why Bother?" Mindset

For Freire, true liberation can only stem from the oppressed themselves. In his words:

Although the situation of oppression is a dehumanized and dehumanizing totality affecting both the oppressors and those whom they oppress, it is the latter who must, from their stifled humanity, wage for both the struggle for a fuller humanity; the oppressor, who is himself dehumanized because he dehumanizes others, is unable to lead this struggle (1970: 47).

This paper takes no issue with that point. The transformative work done within and among the oppressed must continue unabated. However, does this mean that the oppressors are released from any obligation to act? Should the oppressor play any role, albeit secondary, in expediting the movement toward liberation? Just as France and England completed the English Channel Tunnel by digging from their separate shores, perhaps too, in justice, there is movement to be made on both sides.

Some discount the need for critical pedagogies among the privileged. Derman-Sparks and Ramsey noted that many shrug off the idea with a "why bother" mindset: "After all, *their* children [are] not confronted by negative identity-damaging stereotypes and alienated from images and practices in their classrooms"

(2004: 1). This mentality overlooks two key points: First, it presupposes that privilege on certain social spectra, such as race or social class, inherently immunizes individuals from all other “negative, identity-damaging stereotypes” grounded in gender, sexual orientation, or otherwise. While unfounded attempts to imply false equivalence between all forms of oppression must be eschewed (McLaren 2001; Peel 2001), the dismissal of critical pedagogy as inherently irrelevant to the lived experiences of the privileged oversimplifies the dynamics of oppression.

Secondly, the “why bother” mentality absolves the privileged from any examination of their own role in oppressive systems. As Breault stated, while students from privileged backgrounds “are seldom considered at-risk.... They come from a social class that is at-risk to maintain the status quo” (2003: 4). Since, historically, those in power control the systems that create, maintain, and reproduce the social order, this population is the linchpin of the system’s continuation. As such, pedagogies that explicitly explore the dynamics of oppression are deeply relevant among such groups, particularly in addressing the role that privilege plays in maintaining unjust systems.

A Different Pedagogy for a Different Positionality

For Freire, the oppressor and the oppressed exist in dialectical kinship and, therefore, must *both* be liberated from the dehumanizing system of oppression (1970). This should not be taken to mean, however, that the oppressors themselves are oppressed (Allen 2002). Consequentially, Freire’s approaches cannot simply be transposed onto the situation of the oppressor; fundamental differences in privilege, access to power, and investment in the status quo must be taken into account. While a Pedagogy for the Oppressor may ground itself in the same liberatory goals as pedagogies for the oppressed, it must be theorized and operationalized differently within contexts of relative privilege.

While some work has been done in this vein, certain points of ideological dissonance arise when enacting a Pedagogy for the

Opressor: First, there is the question of how one identifies the oppressor in the first place, particularly in contexts where the distinction is not always clear-cut. Second, there is the problematic nature of how the oppressor should be viewed: as a complexified individual, or as a faceless problem to be corrected. Finally, there is the seeming paradox of an educator's desire "change" the oppressor without reverting to an anti-Freirean "banking model" of education that categorically devalues students' background funds of knowledge.

The remainder of this paper explores these tensions. However, it must be kept in mind that a Pedagogy for the Oppressor must only exist in explicit service to the larger liberatory goals of the oppressed. Therefore, at each juncture in exploring a Pedagogy for the Oppressor, one must continuously ask "Does this expedite the journey toward liberation?" and use the answer as a metric for the efficacy of such a pedagogy.

PART II: A PEDAGOGY FOR THE OPPRESSOR

Complexifying the Caricatured Oppressor

Freire wrote from a context in which, for him, there was a clear demarcation between the oppressor and the oppressed. As such, his work puts little emphasis on how one identifies and names the oppressor. While there are certainly circumstances of unambiguous oppression, in many contexts, making such a clear distinction becomes problematic. An effective Pedagogy for the Oppressor must, therefore, be able to readily specify and contextualize variegated dynamics of oppression. Many discussions around oppression, however, revolve around a *caricatured oppressor* - a faceless, unnamed entity that represents all things oppressive. Such a conceptualization, however, often becomes impractical when confronted with a classroom full of living, breathing students and the multifaceted roles they occupy.

To draw out this complexity, Allen (2002) advocated a more nuanced understanding of oppression, borrowing from Collins's

Black Feminist Thought (2002). Rather than a bifurcated dichotomy of oppressor and oppressed, Collins outlined a matrix of *intersectionality*:

Intersectionality refers to particular forms of intersecting oppressions, for example, intersections of race and gender, or of sexuality and nation. Intersectional paradigms remind us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice (2002: 18).

For Collins, oppression is not static; its dynamics shift depending on the context, the issue at hand, and the individuals involved. For example, Collins argued that women may act in solidarity against oppressive patriarchal systems, but this does not nullify *other* power dynamics, such as race or class, that continue to exist *within* the oppressed group. In this way, oppression is operationalized contextually, highlighting the particular dynamic being addressed, but also acknowledging the multifaceted identities of the actors involved.

The complex, contextualized nature of this approach is decidedly relevant within a Pedagogy for the Oppressor. Through such a matrix, students can begin to engage in a more nuanced exploration of the oppressed-oppressor dynamic. As Allen and Rossatto wrote,

Students should understand that they can be simultaneously the oppressor within one totality and the oppressed within another, and they should be concerned about both their own oppression and their oppression of others (2009: 171).

As such, a student who considers herself oppressed in terms of her social class may be confronted with her own privilege in terms of race, sexual orientation, or any number of social dynamics. Under the traditional, bifurcated understanding of oppression, such a situation regularly creates a predictable ideological dissonance: If one can only exist as either oppressed or oppressor,

individuals confronted with their own privilege often become defensive and resistant. Acknowledgement of privilege, after all, would mean aligning oneself with the oppressor and renouncing all solidarity with the oppressed. On the other hand, a more complexified conceptualization of oppression carves out a space in which contextual privilege can be acknowledged and explored, free from the dichotomized-oppressor stigma that obstructs open and honest dialogue before it can begin.

The Humanized Oppressor

Even after oppression is complexified, a second ideological dissonance emerges: A strong body of educational literature argues that effective pedagogies must value students' home cultures and the "funds of knowledge" they bring into the classroom (Delpit and Dowdy 2008; González, Moll, Amanti 2013). But what happens when those funds of knowledge constitute the very ways of thinking that a critical educator sets out to change? As a result of this tension, many discussions of critical pedagogies among the privileged involve an "enlightened" teacher who must "fix" a group of "broken" students.

So how does one reconcile the valuation of students' funds of knowledge with the fact that, in all likelihood, these knowledge funds reinforce oppressive systems? To answer this question, one must ask whether deficit-based views of students as "oppressors to be fixed" will expedite freedom for the oppressed. Since teachers who hold deficit views of their students are far less likely to be impactful (Ford, Harris, Tyson, Trotman 2002; Howard 2013; Ladson-Billings 1999), a solution may lie in giving recognition to individual students' personal journeys toward critical consciousness - seeking to understand, rather than dismiss, their background knowledge base. Jansen (2009) described an encounter with a white undergraduate at a South African university who "returns from a field trip to the Apartheid Museum and is filled with anger as she challenges the professor for what she feels is a lack of balance in dealing with the pain of loss among whites" (Jansen 2009: 186).

Rather than writing off the student's objections, Jansen advocated first understanding her reaction in terms of her background knowledge base:

The young white woman... had just had a terrifying experience. Until that day, her belief system rendered blacks as the aggressive enemy and whites as decent and civilized. Everything she was told about her people fell apart as she encountered, for the first time, the racial oppression and economic exploitation of whites upon blacks. To simply dismiss this young woman as an incorrigible racist is to incite racial anger and conflict on both sides of the divide.... [Instead,] her humanity must be accessed (Jansen 2009: 188)

The challenge, therefore, lies not only in humanizing the oppressor, but in compellingly accessing that humanity in a way that takes students' prior knowledge and value systems into account - even if these are the value systems brought into question within a Pedagogy of the Oppressor. It is, indeed, a delicate and difficult balancing act, particularly as the critical journey turns inward, as one's own role in maintaining oppressive systems must, inevitably, be confronted.

Gradients of Gradualism

While complexifying oppression and humanizing the oppressor lay important groundwork for a Pedagogy for the Oppressor, the role the privileged play in maintaining social inequities must be addressed for meaningful change to occur (Kemmel 2002). Most proponents of critical pedagogy agree that a) oppression must be made visible, b) students must understand the ways they benefit from oppressive systems, and c) students must critically examine *their own* role in perpetuating these systems. While most approaches incorporate all three tenets, some address all aspects at once, asserting that students must immediately confront their own privilege and complicity in oppressive systems. Others argue that "direct and unmediated confrontation with disruptive

knowledge” seldom results in lasting change (Jansen 2010: 374). Instead, such shock-and-awe approaches often “chas[e] off resistant oppressors, leaving them unchanged and still perpetuating their dehumanizing tendencies against the oppressed” (Allen 2002: 31).

While some might argue that a gradual approach is tantamount to coddling potential oppressors, as Freire argues, “One does not liberate people by alienating them” (1970: 79). Additionally, a distinction must be made that *gradual* does not mean *slow*. A gradualized approach is a decidedly strategic one that takes into account the human tendency to fear and resist fundamental systemic change, even when such changes are beneficial (Marris 1974). While arguments for more forthright approaches are valid, a more *direct* route is not always more *expedient* if one is fighting an uphill battle against defensive resistance. It must again be remembered that the larger goal of a Pedagogy for the Oppressor is emancipation for the oppressed, and a pedagogy that alienates rather than creating allies is likely of little help to the that cause.

Conclusion: Solidarity in Difficult Dialogues

It is at this point that the educator plays an increasingly pivotal role in a Pedagogy for the Oppressor. As students begin to critically examine their own complicity in oppressive systems, there will likely be defensive resistance (Derman-Sparks, Ramsey 2004). However, in such situations, there may be a desire for educators to ideologically distance themselves from the students. As Jansen (2010) noted,

The natural compulsion of any teacher is to tell, to demonstrate authority and to inculcate (what a brutal word) knowledge.... It is especially the case that when controversial questions or difficult subjects emerge, the teacher is even more attentive to *managing* the classroom situation lest things get out of control. Unfortunately, this is the direct opposite of what is required for a critical dialogue.... (371)

Ironically, this leads some to fall back on pedagogies grounded in the very “banking concept” of education Freire argued against. In such a system “knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing” (1970: 72). However, it is at this point that critical educators, rather than placing themselves *above* the dialogue, must become *part of* the dialogue. In a truly impactful Pedagogy for the Oppressor, educators must be present in solidarity with their students throughout the complex, demanding journey. If complexifying oppression and humanizing the oppressor mean valuing students for *who* they are, and a gradualized approach recognizes *where* they are, then the next stage of a Pedagogy for the Oppressor is about truly *being* where they are.

In this way, a Pedagogy for the Oppressor returns to its source: Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed. For Freire, education was not a vertical hierarchy in which an enlightened teacher hovered above flawed students in need of knowledge deposits. Instead, Freire advocated a co-constructive education *between* teachers and students. As he wrote,

Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, though the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human being pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other (1970: 72).

This co-constructive knowledge forms the foundation for an impactful Pedagogy for the Oppressor. Complexifying oppression, humanizing the oppressor, and a gradualized, strategic approach all offer possibilities for productive applications of Freire’s work in contexts of relative privilege. Rather than dismissing the need for critical pedagogies in such contexts, a Pedagogy for the Oppressor fosters critical dialogue among educators and students, all of whom represent a miasma of privilege, funds of knowledge, and contextualized experiences from which to draw strength in solidarity. While this approach cannot take the place of the work occurring among the oppressed toward the larger emancipation

of humanity, a Pedagogy for the Oppressor may provide possibilities for expediting the journey.

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A Pedagogy for the Oppressor

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Dance and the Dancer

David Selvaraj

Lord,
I came to the dance.
Dazed by its splendour
Mesmerized by the dancer.
Uplifted, humbled and crushed.
Lord,
I stayed with the dance.

In awe and in fear
I sat still, captivated.
The fire in his eyes –
the beat of the drums
he stamped – he thundered
he roared
spitting out fire
Destroying, Consuming, Destroying
by his presence, by his dance
the demons, the demons, many demons.
But Lord, I stayed with the dance.

Dance and the Dancer

Petrified
Fighting back the bile
I stayed with the dance.
And then,
as if satiated
by the destruction
the dancer emerged
A new Avatar.
Loving, caressing, serene
Graceful – Ah! So graceful
creating with every
flick of her fingers.
The embodiment of love
drawing one and all
to her bosom
caressing, nurturing, caring
And I swayed to her rhythm
Engulfed by her love.

Soothed by the calm
lost in wonder and in praise –
I felt a nudge, it was the dancer
beckoning, beckoning
beckoning me to join in the dance.
As if in a dream
one hesitant foot followed the other
faltering at first
Confident with each subsequent step.
But move I did
for choice I had none.

With the beat of the drum
the scales fell off.
My entire being awakened.
Moving in a frenzy –



Re-visioning Paradigms

Keeping pace with the dancer
For it was then that I realized
the rhythm
the dancer
and the dance
Were you, Lord.
The Creator and Creation
merging as one
Inviting me to the Dance -
BEHOLD I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW.





Contributors


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Re-visioning Paradigms

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