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While we speak of gender issues, the first thing that flashes in mind is vulnerability of women and thereby the need of emancipation of women. The dominant ethos in almost all societies and cultures have the notion that it is women who are weak and vulnerable. It is women who lack the courage and confidence but a look at the following poem changes the popular perception

“There is strength in Women.

Does the body shape scare you?

What power do you witness in the Goddesses of this Earth?

Why do you fear us so?”

The poem presents a completely different image of women who laugh in the face of foolishness of men. The poem urges men to face the reality with open eyes and emerge out of ‘non-conscious’. At the same time ridicules the social behaviour of men who knowingly and at times unwittingly undermine the strength of women and never feel ashamed.

The modern day feminist movement no longer lives under the shadow of patriarchy. It celebrates the womanhood though without allowing it to become women against men.

About fix it men, I could disappear but...

by HaliJo Webster

For all you do, I feel worthless.
where did my name go?
Everything lost.
No direction.
you have taken it all -
my dignity,
my voice.

Two in a room,
I disappear
like a child.
My voice is not heard.
Incredulous in your ignorance,
no idea of your ego
and raw male pride.

How dependant are you on
others who feed your overblown ideas.
Poor things.

If you would only allow yourselves to cry.
Imagine the time you could spend on your selves
instead of having to protect us "weak inferior beings".
Us Woman,
Women, I prefer.

Open your eyes you fools
see and hear the miraculous female gender.
Say the word vagina,
be free to connect with consciousness.
Why choose to be unconscious
and model after your forefathers
whose role was to be blinded by reality?

There is strength in Women.
Does the body shape scare you?
What power do you witness in the Goddesses of this Earth?
Why do you fear us so?

When your penis swells in your pants,
why do you say, "look what you have done to me"?
Why do you not take responsibility for your thought.
Could it be that you act like a little man
and are ashamed to face the unconscious behavior
you have become unaware of until now?

You may wish to sit at the heads of tables
but you are no hero.
Your words are human and actions are
carried out as a play already written for you.

Break free the chains around your spirit
and allow the light in to pass your depression and darkness.
Choose to love yourself
and allow the new thought of happiness
to enter the shadows of your youth.

The freedom to be is only a thought away.
Come join me in this spirit dance won't you?
Let us frolic,
and be one with consciousness.

Other Side of Culture

There can be no people without a culture. Their culture may be too simple, or complexly understandable, or primitive, and of values foreign to many. But no People can be without a culture. Every People, every society, every group and every sub-group has a culture of its own, similar and common in many respects with the proximate people, or the group of which they are a sub-group. That is the social reality world over. But, if there are strong cultural differences between any two proximate groups, that means those groups are not only distinctly different, but have come together from altogether different geographical and hence differing racial ethnic religious ritualistic social and cultural backgrounds. If the two groups have been existing in the same place or adjacent areas of reasonable proximity with access across the area in between, for considerable long times of history, and if in spite of their co-existence for long two proximate groups have distinctly different cultures unacceptable to each-other, then there is something wrong. They must have begun their existence in the area as antagonistic conflicting groups, with one or both the groups coming to the region as conquerors, or forced on to the area by some other powerful group or groups living elsewhere, for their own personal or other interests! Dalits and caste Hindus in this country are two such groups living in proximate places all over the country for nearly three millenniums, but still are different, looking diametrically in different directions in many respects, opposed, antagonistic and can not digest or accept the presence of each other, even though social necessities make the Dalits not only necessary but absolutely essential for the caste Hindus survive. For everything essential for human survival, right from food are produced only by the Dalits. Others live in this country, only on the labour, work, produce and creations of the Dalits. That makes the Dalits an absolute necessity for the Hindu society, particularly the dominant caste Hindus(DCHs) like the Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Baniyas(BKBs) for their very existence.

In spite of living in proximate areas virtually all over the country, through out the known history of the nation, there are no social interactions between the Dalits and caste Hindus. And the DCHs are very remotely off and away from the

Dalits, though not in physical measures, except in the case of many ST Dalits living in North-East and isolated tribal belts. The DCHs have built up so much of dependence on the Dalits for their basic needs that, they particularly the Brahmins and Kshatriyas, have become total parasites living on Dalits' labour, but with a great aversion to both work and workers. With the culture of the DCHs set by the Brahmins, is therefore a parasitic culture, while that of the Dalits is one of hardworking people. This is universally true all over the country. With these basic differences in social living and existence, are superimposed on the basic racial varna differences of Black Dravidian Dalits and Caucasian pale faced BKBs, with associated differences in food, dress, living styles, rituals, tools and animals of use, means of living and social life, you get nothing but conflicting antagonistic social groups. Living in conflict, with the DCHs robbing the Dalits of their land, homes, fields, farms, cows and women, the DCHs and Dalits have both built up only distrust and disgust towards each other. Trust, friendship, fraternity and brotherhood necessary for any social understanding, social interaction, social mixing, and coming together as a people to build a society have never evolved between the Dalits and DCHs. Distrust, antagonism, enmity, hatred, revulsion, conflicts, fights, denigration and contempt for each other is all they have in between. Time and trials only reinforce these differences, keeping them apart, never coming together even when living in proximity for many thousands of years generations after generations.

The culture of DCHs is one of cheating stealing robbing and swindling others. They are parasitic, shirking work and leisure loving. They take the form of begging, enforcing fees and levies, collection of tolls and taxes, priesthood and offerings, donations and gifts, trade and commerce, money lending and other unfair practices.

The culture of the Dalits is one of hard-work and rest, honesty and simplicity, achievements and celebrations. Dalits are always creative and productive, celebrations and enjoyments. Come with that freedom, frankness, open heartedness, songs, steps, beats, drums, dance and drama; food, feasting, festivals, thanks giving, worship, prayer and sacrifices. It is an

agriculture based agrarian farm culture. Culture of the workers and working classes. The same thing continues in the new-world of urbanised industrial areas. Work workers celebrations and rest. Adulterated with ulterior motives cunningly by the Brahmins, stealthily by the Baniyas, and extracted crudely by the Kshatriyas are liquor drugs and evil practices, particularly in the mode of celebrations, thanks giving and rest. Done only to cheat, swindle and rob the Dalits of their creations and produce! Still these DCHs claim themselves superior both culturally and intellectually! Frauds!

The shameless DCHs go around the World saying that they are cultured, civilised, and are scholarly. What is the scholarship of the Brahmins? What are their achievements and record? They could not educate the people even today! They could not even compare themselves with the achievements of the distant missionaries in the North-East and their work in the rural areas, and Tribal-India! They could not make the people scientific. They could not make the people rational. They could not make the people thinkers. They could not make the people inventors. They could not make the people creative. They could not make the people honest. They could not make the people useful. They could not make the people productive. Anything worth mentioning in this country are that of the West, British, Missionaries, Moghuls and Islam! If anything else exists, they are also mostly influenced by these, are by the Romans, before that the Arabs, Greeks and Persians. Otherwise they are of either the Southern Dravidian Origin, are pre-historic achievements - destroyed thanks to these DCHs, in a nation of relative peace and settlement, with a continuous habitation and social living of the people without any break. Yes, breaks there are in the civilisation, construction, building, founding of cities, evolution of arts and crafts right from pottery to agriculture and farm practices and road building to irrigation. One nagging question that always haunts or lingers in the mind is that why Indians have never built anything lasting after the Indus Valley Civilisation! Why and how it was not only destroyed but also kept hidden and forgotten? Why the Hindus who came up thereafter, never created anything as magnificent as Pyramids, or later day South-Indian Temples. Nothing ever as spectacular as Taj Mahal! Never as grandeur as the Agra Fort and Red Fort before the Moghuls!

Never as tall as Qutub before the Muslim Slave Dynasty! Never as magnificent as the Parliament of India, Presidential Palace, South

and North Blocks before the British!

The Culture of Dalits is one of hard work, and not of rituals and leisure that are characteristic of the DCHs. Out in the early morning to the fields and fishing much before the sun-rise. Whole families working - old and young, men and women, boys and girls equally, sharing and enjoying. This in stark contrast to the DCHs indulging in make-ups, artificial beautification, and the like! Wherever the DCHs have intruded like a thorn, they have become a problem. One side they have all taken the bulk of produce leaving the Dalits and their children hungry, and on the other they have begun to control the basic means of production - the land, leaving the Dalits without job!! Added to that hard liquor and drugs, the enslavement of Dalits was complete! The culture of Dalits, radically different from the DCHs was adversely affected by the surreptitious exploitative activities of the DCHs. The productive work culture of Dalits was slowly transformed into a culture of poverty and joblessness, but with more and more DCH controlled endless inputs of dangerously hard liquor and drugs. What remained with the Dalits were the Arts and crafts! In the end even those were taken away by the Brahmins, to become Masters in Arts, Cultural Ambassadors and International Czars and Czarinas of Crafts! One thankful aspect of Indian life is that, whatever the DCHs may do, and whatever cruelty and base deeds they may indulge in to keep the Dalits down, the DCHs are never willing to work themselves. Here the unwanted hated Dalits become relevant! So the Dalits are an inescapable need for the Indian society!! This is the secret for the Dalits' survival, and the truth behind being allowed to survive in spite of three millenniums of unwanted proximate helpless existence with the DCHs.

Essential and unwanted, the Dalits are no doubt denigrated humiliated and marginalised. Antagonistic, and radically different, the Dalits are totally different culturally and socially! Immersed in work in an exploitative environment, and steeped in associated poverty of shortages, the Dalits' culture is a peculiar mix of culture of work and creation, poverty and production, enjoyment and happiness, in spite of sufferings and shortages! This is a direct result of the exploitations by the DCHs. It is this culture, which the DCHs feel is no culture. It is these Dalits that the DCHs say are people with no-culture!

Courtesy : www.dalitindia.com

Cultural Rights of Adivasi Peoples and the Indigenous Roots of Bengali Culture*

*Devashish Roy***

Very few will perhaps disagree with me when I say that Bangladesh is blessed with a rich cultural heritage. The richness of Bengali literature, music, and other art forms for example, easily spring to our minds. The vibrancy of Bengali culture is felt everywhere in the country, not the least, of course, because the vast majority of the population of this country in Bengali-speaking. But the cultural heritage of Bangladesh has been enriched by the languages, traditions, literature, arts and crafts of various other peoples as well, those whose mother tongue is not Bengali. I will refer to these peoples as Adivasi, and include both the “hill” or so-called “tribal” peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, and the Adivasi and other “tribal” [sic] peoples in other parts of the country. Yet, what we normally see in the more visible aspects of our ‘mainstream’ cultural practices is scarcely reflective of this ‘pluri-cultural’ heritage. And even when we look at various elements of Bengali culture today, we see that many of its rich traditions are lost in the labyrinth of practices that deny a proper place to the indigenous roots of this cultural heritage.

I feel that a lot has to do with politically-oriented cultural trends that have come from abroad during colonial times whose hangover we are still suffering from. Let us take the origin of our peoples, say the Bengali-speaking people. So many people take pride in an external origin: that they are descended from conquerors or other Immigrants from the Arab-speaking countries, or from Iran, or from Northern India, and so forth, where the people are generally tall and fair of skin, and consequently, from a “superior” culture. Thus it is not surprising that the most sought-after bride must be a ranga bou, a bride that is fair or pale in complexion. Whatever

happened to Tagore’s Krasihnakoli, one may wonder.

As I have suggested above, I think that this hangover of an inferiority complex concerning our indigenous roots has a lot to do with the continuing dominance of mainstream and elitist perspectives of our histories that have been written largely by the former political elite of the country, whose ancestry was rooted in a foreign country, or at least supposedly so. Thus when we take a bird’s eye look at official versions of the history of this country, or even that of some of our neighbouring countries, we can hardly fail to note a recurring theme: a series of invasions from abroad, of the establishment of ruling dynasties from foreign countries, and of the patronage of the language, culture, music, history, traditions and so forth of the people or nation who ruled the concerned country at any given period in history. But what about the culture and heritage of the people who were in our country, and in the South Asian sub-continent in general, before the arrival of the British, Mongol/Mughals, Persians, etc? What about the Kiratas, for example, about whom Suniti Kumar Chatterjee has written so eloquently about? Have we totally forgotten about them? Because the British during their imperial period were a conquering nation, they had a political interest in portraying the history of this subcontinent with an emphasis on the series of invasions by foreigners so that they could say that they were only one among many other foreign invading nations of the past.

But do we still have to continue such trends? Certainly not, some would say, and they could point to, with justified pride, the Bengali Language Movement of the 1950s and the freedom struggle of that fateful year of 1971; the struggle of the hill peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts of the 70s through to the 90s, and other examples as well. Yes, we do have positive examples, but let us look a little deeper.

Independence in 1971 led to the adoption of a national constitution that sought to emancipate the toiling masses and to protect the rights of the peasants, workers and the “backward” [sic] section of our citizen. The Constitution also sought to protect and promote the cultural heritage “of the people”. But at the same time, the Constitution speaks about our national culture and language, and gives to Bengali the status of a “state” language. Given the chauvinistic attempts in the 1940s and 50s to impose Urdu as the sole state language of Pakistan and the sacrifices made by the Bengali leaders and activists of 1952, the prominent place given to the Bengali language in the national constitution is quite understandable as a natural development from a political struggle that sought to defend the people of Bangladesh who had been grossly discriminated against. But today we have an independent country where the Bengali-speaking people from the overwhelming majority of not only those who are placed at the highest echelons of government, but are also leading the major civil society organizations, and leading the major civic movements for human rights and democracy across the country. Let us therefore pause now and reflect on the situation of those peoples whose mother tongue is not Bengali, and who too played their share of the role in the anti-British-colonial movement and in the independence movement of 1971. What of their language, culture and heritage? Since members of these peoples play only a peripheral role in the governance of the country, is it not their culture and heritage which is far more threatened than the language and culture of the more than 120 million Bengali-speaking people of this country? And what are we doing to safeguard the culture of these peoples? Yes, the Hill Tracts Accord of 1997 has expressly or impliedly recognized-although not constitutionally-that the Hill Tracts is a “tribal” [sic] area and that there is a need to protect and promote the language, culture, etc. of these “tribal” [sic] peoples. But is this enough? Sadly enough, I do not think so, and I am sure that I am not alone in believing this.

I need hardly state the more than obvious fact that the culture and heritage of the Adivasi peoples of the country hardly finds any place in

mainstream writings. There are so many aspects that need to be acknowledged: the historical role of these peoples in the struggles against oppressive governments, their contribution to the national economy (past and present), their contribution to the language, arts and crafts of the country and so forth. In fact the heritage of many of these adivasi or indigenous peoples has not only enriched the multi-cultural heritage of our country as a whole but even the culture and heritage of the Bengali-speaking peoples. Let me give a few examples.

Apart from the few people who can genuinely trace their ancestry (or a part of) from countries to the west of Bangladesh, most Bengali-speaking people both in Bangladesh and in West Bengal in India are known to have traces of adivasi peoples in their ancestry. Classical anthropologists say that the majority of the members of the Bengali race are either of Austro-Monoloid or Mongolo-Dravidian origin. If this is true, then the average Bengali may well have traces of such peoples as Santal, Munda, Oraon, Garo, Rakhaing and other indigenous or Adivasi peoples. Let us also look at the origin of Bengali words. Words that are classed as of Desi or native origin are all those that are not derived from Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic or from modern European languages. No doubt some of these words may be of Prakritic origin, having links with Sanskrit and other Indo-European groups of languages, but many other Desi words are clearly originated from many Adivasi languages such as Santali. Yet, these facts are seldom acknowledged other than by linguists and a handful of anthropologists. Let us also look at other contributions of the Adivasi peoples to the national heritage. Few perhaps know that one of the most important sources of raw material for the world-famous Bengal muslin was hill cotton from the greater Mymensingh area and from the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Of course, on the other hand, the Adivasi or indigenous peoples too have accepted many elements from the language and culture of the Bengali people, the Santal, Chakma, Rajbangshi and Tripura, being prime examples. Over the centuries many of these peoples no doubt inter-married amongst themselves and with the Bengali people, or with their ancestors, as there is surely no “pure race”

in Bangladesh, as anywhere else in the world. But given the overwhelming influence of our national educational curriculum and the media, although cultural intercourse is no doubt a two-way affair, there is little doubt as to which direction the flow is stronger.

Let us now turn to the romanticised and clinically packaged – not to mention the prejudicial – perspectives of the Adivasi peoples. No doubt many find their culture to be “exotic” or “simple” and even as “primitive” and “frozen in time”. Actually, if one were to live among these peoples for a considerable length of time, I am sure that many of their traits would not appear to be either exotic or simple or “primitive”. These peoples too have dynamism in their societies, which are far from “static” as many seem to believe. Many of their traditions and practices may then appear to be based upon sheer common sense and rational considerations. And if we are truly respectful of these peoples and their cultures, we should do well do more than just admire their “colourful” dresses, songs and dances and keep them as aesthetic “exhibits” for foreign and local tourists, or worse still, merely emphasize on preserving their artifacts and other material objects to be preserved and exhibited in museums and ethnological centres. And I need hardly mention that with such perspectives the languages of these peoples are considered as mere “dialects”, their literatures are relegated to mere folklore, and so forth. But these people are a living part of Bangladeshi society. They have differences as well as similarities with the Bengali people. We should strive to promote the things that bind the Bengali people and these peoples together, but not by trying to make them pseudo Bengalis.

But all is not lost, I think. In fact, when we look at some of the actresses and women models on Bangladesh television, for example, we see many who don't fulfill the criteria of the classical concept of an Indo-Aryan “beauty” I (apologize that I only mention women in this context). Classical concepts of such “beauties” invariably portrayed them as having not only pale skin, but with aquiline noses (Bengali: baanshir moto nakh) large eyes (dagor dagor chokh) and long wavy tresses, unlike many of our currently popular television artist. One well-known

Bengali-speaking litterateur of Bangladesh once told me that he was proud to have discovered his ancestors were adivasis or aboriginals, Santals, in fact. I wish we had more people like him: not people who are necessarily of Santali “stock”, but people who are not ashamed of a family lineage that cannot be traced to a western origin. The same also goes for the Bengali language and other aspects of our “national” [sic] culture.

But if we are to really take effective measures to protect the multi-cultural heritage of Bangladesh, I feel that we should start by considering amendments to the national constitution to both recognize the cultural integrity of the Adivasi peoples to adopt measures to protect and promote them. To label the adivasi peoples as members of a “backward” [sic] section of citizens is not only disrespect towards them but it also totally disregards their cultural identities, since “backwardness” connotes a disadvantaged situation with regard to social and economic opportunities only. And surely, the Adivasi people's unique identities contain many other features than just their marginal and peripheral situation with regard to social and economic justice. Labeling the Hill Tracts unrest as an “economic” problem did not bear any fruits in bringing peace, as we all know. Recognizing the Adivasi peoples in the Constitution will not threaten the integrity of the country; rather, their recognition is more than likely to make them feel a far more “integral” part of Bangladeshi society. And when I say “integration” I mean it in the sense of a positive and substantive role in “mainstream” activities, by keeping their cultural integrity intact, and not my assimilating themselves in an artificial manner.

Demands of Adivasi peoples for self-government through constitutional safeguards have been termed by many reactionaries to be attempts with “secessionist” motives. I would suggest the opposite. If the Adivasi peoples, such as the “hill” peoples of the Hill Tracts for example, were to have nurtured secessionist sentiments, they would have sought to obtain a political settlement outside the purview of the Bangladeshi, constitution, rather than within it. Therefore, I would say that the struggles of these peoples were “integrationist” rather than

secessionist sentiments are fueled only when integration in the positive sense, as mentioned above, has fails to provide justice through a truly democratic process.

Prejudicial perspectives play a large role in denying their due cultural and other rights to the Adivasi peoples. We can try to attempt to remove these tendencies, at least partly, by following-to the extent that is appropriate to our country-the themes set by the International Convent on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the ILO Convention on Indigenous and Tribal Populations (Convention 107 of 1957), all of which have been ratified by the Government of Bangladesh. A few small measures could start a trend in the right direction. These could include: (a) steps to remove discriminatory and incorrect portrayal of Adivasi peoples and their culture in the national educational curriculam (b) by including write-ups on Adivasi peoples and their culture in a respectful and accurate manner in the national curricula; (c) by providing necessary training to all government functionaries dealing with policies and programmes that affect the lives and cultures of the peoples concerned; and most importantly, (d) by promoting their social and economic welfare by recognizing their land and resource rights and by giving them a meaningful say in governance at various levels. The protection and promotion of Adivasi peoples must be looked at in a holistic manner, because their culture will be threatened unless their basic rights and ways of living are not protected from externally imposed development programmes that are not acceptable to the people concerned.

I have mentioned that the 1997 Accord on the Hill Tracts has at least partly recognized the need to protect the cultural integrity of the hill peoples of the region. But if the global trends of profit-oriented economic processes are allowed to envelope the economy of the Hill Tracts in an unrestricted manner, then there is little doubt that the peripheral and marginalized situation of the hill peoples, especially those living in the "remote" areas, is bound to deteriorate further. It should also be borne in mind that some of the hill peoples of numerically small indigenous group of the hill region have not been provided

adequate and direct representation in the CHT self-government system. Even apart from political representation, if measures are not undertaken to provide them a real say in the governance of the region and in the "development" process, then in the foreseeable future these peoples and their communities may well wither away or migrate to our neighbouring countries (as has happened in the past).

Let me now turn to issues concerning Adivasi women. Although women from most Adivasi or hill peoples of the country face less discrimination with regard to social issues than in the lowlands of the country, they are still a long way away from achieving social and economic justice and in being politically empowered. Even in the case of cultural matters, it is difficult to deny that women have in many instances upheld and protected our cultural heritages far more than our menfolk. This applies both to the Adivasi women and to women from the numerically majority peoples and communities of the country.

Turning to a more positive note, we can recall with justified pride that the Bengali people of his country have set a unique example in the world by successfully protecting their language and culture from foreign aggression as has been recently recognized by the United Nations. No people will perhaps better understand the pains of cultural aggression than them. It is to be hoped that enlightened leaders from the mainstream Bengali community will show their magnanimity by supporting the Adivasi peoples in their just struggle for cultural rights. And that will not only bring all our different peoples a little closer to each other, it is also likely to deepen our sense of pride in the indigenous roots of the cultural heritage of this country.

Reference:

- * Almost identical versions of this article have been published in Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples' from, Constitutional Recognition for the Indigenous Peoples : Solidarity 2001, Dhaka, 9 August 2001 and in Earth Touch, No. 9, March 2005, Society for Environment and Human Development, Dhaka, pp. 1-6.
- ** Raja Devasish Roy-Chakma Circle Chief and Chairperson of Hill Tracts NGO Forum.

Bismillah of Benaras

Rama Chandra Guha



“
*The spirit of
Bismillah Khan
is the
spirit of Varanasi,
an irreducibly
composite city.*
”

Living Legacy : Bismillah Khan, the Icon of an Inclusive Tradition.

In a delicious paradox that can only be Indian, the man who best embodied the spirit of the holy Hindu city of Varanasi was a Muslim. Although he was born in Bihar, Bismillah Khan moved to Varanasi as a young man, and lived there until he died, spending some seven decades in an old, crumbling *haveli*, surrounded by his shehnais, a large extended family, and an even larger circle of hangers-on.

Sense of Belonging

Bismillah came from a family of musicians who had traditionally been employed by the Kashi Viswanath Mandir in Varanasi. His own identification with the city went beyond that. He went here and there to perform, but always returned to the soil, the air, and the water that nourished him

and his craft. As he liked to say, he was a worshipper of both Allah and Saraswati. Once, a rich American university invited Bismillah to be their musician-in-residence, and asked him to state his terms. Negotiations were abruptly concluded when the musician replied that he would only come if he could bring his beloved Ganga with him.

That a Muslim musician personified Kashi so stuck in the gullets of Hindu bigots. Not that the orthodox Muslims had much time for Bismillah either. In the wonderful documentary that Nasreen Munni Kabir made of him—whose title I have stolen for this column—Bismillah explains how for some *mullahs*, music is the work of the Devil, *haram*. “*Harrrraam*”, he repeats, and then cackles delightedly. Then there was the little earring Bismillah wore, this in violation of

some versions of Islam yet a mark of the catholicism of his own, uniquely inclusive, spiritual tradition.

A Personal Debt

I personally owe Bismillah Khan a great deal, owe him my interest in classical music in fact. As a schoolboy I listened to film music and Western pop music, and nothing else. Awake one night owing to an attack of asthma, I was fiddling with the radio when I chanced upon the music of the shehnai. I listened, at first with boredom, and then with an increasing enchantment. Within minutes I could tell that this was altogether superior to the stuff I used to hear on the BBC's "Top Twenty" or Radio Ceylon's "Binaca Geet Mala". As the bronchodilators took effect and my breath eased, I immersed myself in the music. When it ended half-an-hour later, the announcer informed us that we had just heard Raga Durga, played on the shehnai by Ustad Bismillah Khan.

So, that was my first experience of Bismillah—listening to him between 2.30 and 3 a.m. on the General Overseas Service of All India Radio. I graduated to listening to him in the more conventional way—by going to evening concerts where he played. In the five years I spent in Delhi University, I must have heard him play on at least four occasions. The one I remember best was at the Kamani Auditorium, where he played before the interval and M.S. Subbulakshmi sang afterwards, a true "dream team", indeed, of two great musicians who were also great human beings—one man, one woman, one Hindu, the other Muslim, one North Indian, the other South Indian, and both born in the same year, 1916.

Twenty-five years after I first heard Bismillah, I was able to repay—in small measure—a debt that had by then accumulated beyond all repayment. A friend who was a high official asked me to write a

piece for the press urging that M.S. Subbulakshmi and Lata Mangeshkar be awarded the Bharat Ratna. I accepted the commission, since I likewise believed that it was past time that India's highest honour was rescued from the politicians, and returned to the artists and scholars for whom it was originally intended. However, when I wrote the article I strayed somewhat from my friend's script, and added the names of Ravi Shankar and Bismillah Khan to the ones he had given me. All four, I am happy to say, were awarded the Bharat Ratna in due course.

Like so many other readers of *The Hindu*, my life has been lived to the music of Bismillah Khan. We all have our memories of where and when we first heard him play. And we all have our own favourite compositions. The Bismillah melodies that I especially love are his Durga, naturally, but also his Shankara and his Kedar, and his Chaiti and his Pahadi *dhun*.

Citizens' Tribute

On Bismillah's death the Government of his home State, Uttar Pradesh, announced that it would set up an Academy to honour his memory. As it happened, a better and more enduring memorial to Bismillah had already been set in motion. I refer, of course, to the magnificent response of the citizens of Varanasi to the bomb blasts that rocked their city earlier this year. Intended to set Hindu against Muslim, the blasts instead reinforced the ties that bind the two communities in this irreducibly composite city. In affirming their trans-religious solidarity, the residents of Varanasi took heart from the example of their greatest fellow townsman, who had himself refused to celebrate his birthday in protest against the terrorists. For, the spirit of Bismillah is the spirit of Varanasi, and, the rest of us willing, the spirit of India too.

Courtesy : The Hindu

Our Heritage and the Present

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The lack of proper scientific perspective has tended to make the question of Heritage controversial in almost all the societies. Not only the lay people but also people who should know are apt to confound the issue. The reason appears to be the lack of appreciation of different connotation of heritage according to its context—individual or social. As individuals we inherit many things including our appearance, behaviour, attitudes and may be an old, dilapidated ancestral home and of course, the liabilities. Whether we like them or not we cannot protest but meekly accept whatever is handed down. However, in the case of social inheritance the position is slightly different. There is a scope for selection. For example, we might have been born in any country, religion, sect or tradition. That is our heritage. We may accept part of it or reject part of it. In the present Heraclitean (ever-changing) society people tend to leave the confines of their country and community and settle in another place and among other people. They may even change their faith. In short, they change their inheritance and adopt a different one.

This sometimes leads to a very piquant situation. The society having a common heritage gets divided and from here begins a talk of two heritages. This may as well come about on account of differences in the nature of the political power or even in the interest of the ruling classes. Such divisions and sub-divisions may at times become so confusing and conflicting that we are led to think that there should be a common heritage for the entire humankind. This is precisely in the interest of humanity. It is a

scientific reality. However, at present there do not appear any propitious indications on the horizon for this to come about.

On delving a little deeper we will not fail to see that heritage is essentially linked to culture and history. But in the present society actuated by economic and political considerations, while every other person appears eager to utilise culture and history for selfish considerations, nobody seems to be too enthusiastic to appreciate its essence and to take it to higher inclines in the interest of mankind. In fact, majority could be seen singing in unison with the American capitalist Henry Ford the dirge of denouncing history as of little or no consequence. Their argument is simple, "What does time gone by is of any use for those who are concerned only with the here and now? The past is already dead and gone." It would be different if it could be shown that the past has a utilitarian value. Consequently, the time gone by and the heritage are test-weighed on the scales of profit and loss. According to them the opportunistic philosophy of considering End justifies the Means of the 16th century Italian thinker Machiavellee or his forerunner our very own political thinker Chankya has universal application.

In short, that alone is useful which brings in returns. In fact Machiavelee had gone, as far as to say that Italian history must contribute to the building up of the nation. If it does not it should be suitably remoulded. Even to this day many people adopt this Machiavellian concept of history.

Infact, the entire history is our heritage, positive as well as negative. All the achievements, all the failures, all ambitions and social limitations, all humanness and the inhumanness are our heritage. Let us clarify this with a few

examples.

We have been bequeathed with the heritage of treating all the living beings like ourselves (Atmivat Sarv Bhooteshu) But there are human beings who on account of their birth, over which they have no control, are untouchables and are constantly insulted and humiliated. We have inherited yet another gem of a message “*Yatra naryastu poojyante ramante tatra devataa*”. It signifies that the God inhabits there where woman is worshipped. However, the harsh reality here is that even *Seeta*, declared as the Ideal of Womanhood, had been insulted and oppressed. We have also received ancient wisdom in the saying “*Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam*”, the entire world is a family. However, reality is that there is prohibition on people leaving the confines of their dwelling places and even on crossing the seas on penalties of excommunication. Even as late as Gandhi’s life time this prohibition ruled. We inherited the essence of Sufi Movement in the teaching of Universal Brotherhood. It was also the aim of *Akbar’s* administration. Despite this distance between man and man has kept on widening with the resultant conflict. Last but not least we had the Buddhist teaching ‘Be your own guiding light.’ However, far from undertaking an expedition in search of enlightenment we do not even feel the enveloping darkness from the West entering within us.

Under these circumstances it becomes imperative to accept the entire inheritance as it is bequeathed to us and the force of our right to selection as well as the capacity to choose alongwith the deepening of understanding of our common heritage. This freedom of choice is a double-edged weapon. It has the potentiality of both development as well as degeneration. It is not that choice is always for better. If it is dictated by ignorance, backwardness and selfinterest it would lead us to wander aimlessly through blind alleys.

We can further understand this by taking some examples from physical and social sciences. Even to this day there is a raging controversy over whether it is the subjective genetic factors or the objective environmental ones which have a decisive effect on human lives. Rather than enter the *chakhroyooha* of these arguments why not take the middle path since both lend a hand in human upliftment? But then how can we overlook the fact that the process of evolution of man from the natural environs and the fulfillment of the consequent growing needs could not have come about except with such an intervention? History tells us that a change in the circumstances and conditions of living can transform not only the individuals but also the communities. The most positive and creative evidence of this can be had from the experiments and findings of Paulo Freire and Bhatare whose experiments proved that not only the man changes but he can also be changed.

In conclusion we can only say that the taking stock of heritage should be a continuous process. We must go on with it and obtain encouragement and empowerment for making the world in transformation more people-friendly, just and human. He/she alone would be considered the rightful successor who enriches the heritage and passes it on to the next generation.

Consequently, we cannot claim that there is any pre-determined relationship between Heritage and the Present, which can be expressed in terms of a fixed equation. That is to say that their mutual relations are essentially dialectical and dynamic. A democratic and creative society must consider heritage as a life-giving power and engage in ensuring its present but also the future so that every Present can enrich it and pass it on to the next generation in a better form.

Translated by Subhash Gatade

1857 : A Symbol of Composite Heritage

Prof. Salil Misra

Quite often discussions on Composite Heritage tend to focus more on monuments, culture, traditions and other abstract ideas and less on concrete political events. If we were to focus on the history of South Asia, the rebellion of 1857 stands out as a prime example of a composite struggle waged by a substantial section of the people of Indian subcontinent against the mightiest imperial power of the world in the 19th century. The rebellion was one of the most powerful resistance offered to any imperialist in any other part of the world in the 19th century. For the people of north India it represented an unprecedented example of Hindu-Muslim unity. The heights of Hindu-Muslim unity reached during the struggle of 1857 remained untouched in all the subsequent political events.

So why has the rebellion received so little attention as a symbol of Composite Heritage? Part of the explanation is that as a political event it failed. The rebellion was not successful in achieving the objectives for which it was fought. Failed projects are generally not invoked as symbols for positive, desirable values like those of Composite Heritage. But the tragedy of 1857 was that it failed twice over – historically and historiographically. The first failure was that of the event; the second, of the attempts to understand the reality of 1857. Both the failures are instructive for us and need to be understood.

Till the end of the 19th century, the British officials continued to look upon the rebellion primarily as a 'sepoy mutiny'. The reasons for the mutiny were seen, not in any deep and pervasive discontent, but merely in the use of the newly arrived enfield greased cartridges that contained the meat of cows and pigs. Cow was considered sacred by Hindus; pig was considered impure by Muslims. The cartridge had to be bitten by the mouth before loading. This practice was resented by both Hindus and Muslim sepoys who 'mutinied' against their masters. This in short was the favourite British explanation for why the

soldiers rebelled. Yet another British tendency was to look upon the event as a 'Muslim' reaction. Upon this view, British had taken over power from the Muslims who made the last consolidated effort to regain their lost power and glory through the revolt of 1857. Thus 'sepoy mutiny' and 'Muslim reaction' were the main components of the way in which the British chose to understand the reality of 1857. Leading 19th century Muslim reformer and the founder of the Aligarh Muslim University, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, tried to dispel the myth of the revolt being a Muslim conspiracy, in his book *Asbaab-e-Baghawat-e-Hind* (Causes of the Indian Rebellion). But by then the Muslim tag had come to be strongly glued to the rebellion and it appeared unlikely that the tag would be removed.

It was at the beginning of the 20th century that the rebellion was taken out of the Muslim domain and established firmly in the national domain. This was done by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, who called the rebellion the first war of Indian independence, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the event. Quite ironically Savarkar was to later emerge as the leader of the Hindu Mahasabha and lead a narrow and exclusivist Hindu communal movement in the 1930s and 1940s.

Savarkar's was the first attempt to establish the rebellion as a nationalist event. A group of the Indian revolutionaries active in North America were also inspired by the event and named their party *Ghadar* (rebellion) party. But the attitude of the mainstream leadership of the Indian National Movement remained somewhat ambivalent towards the rebellion. On the one hand, the nationalist historians acknowledged the popular and radical character of the rebellion and saw its roots in the exploitative character of the British rule and the deep Indian discontent against it. But on the other hand, they saw the leadership of the rebellion in the hands of feudal elements and the princes. On the basis of the leadership of the rebellion they tended to characterise it as feudal and backward. It was indeed unfortunate that just as the 'Muslim tag'

was removed, the 'feudal tag' was stuck to the rebellion. Jawaharlal Nehru praised the revolt for its popular character, militancy and fierce anti-imperialism in his famous book *Discovery of India*, he too looked upon it as the last serious effort by the old aristocratic and feudal elements to reestablish the old order. According to Nehru the leadership of the rebellion was in the hands of those people who had played out their historical innings and there was no role left for them in history. This was also the perspective of the dominant Marxian historians in India who considered the leadership of the rebellion as a spent force.

This ambivalence continued to characterise the major historical writings on 1857. In spite of all its militancy and anti-imperialism, it was considered as revivalist and anti-modern. It was generally not seen as a forerunner to modern Indian nationalism. It was considered the last major traditional rebellion, not the first major modern rebellion. Its connections with the Indian National movement were not explored and it was readily assumed that these connections did not exist. At the same time leading historian R.C. Majumdar tried to retrieve and restore the Muslim tag by considering the rebellion a mere Muslim reaction. Taking a dig at Savarkar's characterisation of the revolt as the first war of independence, Majumdar dismissed the rebellion as neither *first*, nor a *war*, nor for *independence*. This was a paraphrasing of Voltair's description of the Holy Roman Empire as neither *Holy*, nor *Roman*, nor indeed an *Empire*. Majumdar saw 1857 as an attempt by the old ruling groups, displaced from power, to reclaim their lost power.

It was interestingly in 1957, the year of the hundredth anniversary of the event that some of these misgivings came to be questioned and demolished. New researches initiated on the occasion of the anniversary of the rebellion were able to establish it not just as popular and militant, but a prime example of a Composite Heritage of the people of the Indian subcontinent. It has now become clear that it was not just a sepoy revolt but a huge mass upheaval against British imperialism involving peasants, artisans and other poor sections of the population. Feudal and princely elements may have joined it, but there was nothing exclusively feudal about it. It was a civil rebellion, along with a military one.

It was also not confined to North India. The new researches have established that large parts of the subcontinent (north, east, west and parts of south) had been engulfed by the fires of the rebellion. Moreover, the rebellion also stood out as a shining example of Hindu-Muslim unity. The spirit of comradeship displayed by the Hindu and Muslim rebels was seldom seen before the revolt, or indeed after. Waging of common struggles, Muslim generals leading Hindu soldiers and vice-versa, banning of cow slaughter by Muslim rulers in their areas of control exemplified Hindu-Muslim solidarity in unprecedented ways.

And perhaps the most important point in the end. The rebellion may not have been entirely nationalist, but it contained some vital elements of modern Indian nationalism. In this sense 1857 should be remembered not just as the last major traditional resistance against British imperialism, but also as the precursor to the Indian National Movement fought under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. The connections between the two need to be explored and brought out. One example from Allahabad city of North India should illustrate this connection. After 1857 the British had hanged many rebels by trees in their retaliatory violence. The people of Allahabad had identified many such trees symbolizing the courage of the rebels and the brutality of the British rulers. They also started worshipping these trees. This practice however discontinued after a few years. Then many years later and quite a distance away from Allahabad, the brutality of British imperialism was displayed in 1919 in Punjab, at Jallianwalla Bagh in Amritsar where hundreds of innocent people were gunned down in a cruel massacre. Responding to the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre, the people of Allahabad, without any mediation or instructions of political leaders, started worshipping the same trees which were associated with 1857 in their collective consciousness. Thus the people of the subcontinent had established the connection between 1857 and the national movement in their own innovative and spontaneous ways. It is therefore necessary for historians to recognise this connection and grant it historical legitimacy.

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Globalisation and Media- Its impact on Culture and Composite Heritage

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At the outset, it must be clarified that the term culture has been used interchangeably in some places in this article since Composite Heritage is only one among many parts of the whole. Composite Heritage, however, is not related to each and every facet of value-loaded culture in the same way, as for example culture of mass consumption.

Media, we know that refers to the means of communication like news papers, radio broadcasts and television. The content of mass media-entertainment, news, educational programmes, advertising, projection of images of various kinds-has formidable social impact 'on stabilizing or destabilizing existing social, political, cultural economic, legal and moral arrangements'. The question to be probed is what makes the media efficient and what circumstances are responsible for media to have the social impact that it has. The explanation lies in the realm of technological progress and process of globalization. Although a relationship between both may not be discernible to a superficial observer, they are symbiotic. While growing individually, both media and globalization feed on each other and together they are having a greater impact on human existence than ever before. They share an interesting similarity-both are processes that have been in operation since man began to live in social formations. Initially, these processes were very slow and small and were imperceptible. If globalization is considered as a process of "integration and intermeshing", Isolated tribes have been doing the same since ancient times-tribes meeting together for periodic palavers; mercantile communities traveling far and wide in search of new opportunities for boosting trade; missionaries moving across continents for propagating their religious beliefs; or warring tribes venturing out for conquests are all modes of integrating dissimilar communities. There was, in fact, local to regional and regional to national

level which had been burgeoning, subject to the constraints of communication and economic activity. The same integrating disposition can be seen discerned in the national-to-global movement today.

The two poles of social life in this context are: (a) the small communal tribal unit ('gemeinschaft' to use Tonnie's term) where there was face-to-face interaction; and (b) living in a global village denoting an integrated globalised existence. This gives impetus to rapid changes and the pace of change engenders a process of churning in society which benefits some and harms others, i.e., some are winners and others are losers. Further, it creates enormous tensions resulting in social conflicts.

The proponents of globalization have realized that hegemonic colonization of other nations brings economic advantages only at considerable political costs whereas economic globalization by the economically strong can be advantageous with only limited political consequences. Globalisation means liberalization of free movement of goods, services, capital across national boundaries and privatization of national enterprises. During the last two decades, the revolution in computer and telecommunication technologies has given a tremendous fillip to the integration of world economy. However, these technologies have not catalysed increased productivity. 'While some aspects of processes of production have become more efficient, there is no corresponding increase in overall productivity. To give an illustration, though reservations can be done instantly at the railway station counters, the trains tend to run inefficiently as before.'

Since earlier ages, 'development of communication skills and cultural forms had become the social need that encompassed a complex web of relationships and beliefs, values and motivations which is at the heart of culture (Perez de Cueller, *Our Creative Society*, UNESCO Report)'. Music, poetry, ballads, religious and ethical ideas, painting, drama, sculptures and artifacts are some of man's cultural creations. However, the media available to transmit these

were few-predominantly oral-that could cover only a limited geographical and social arena. An amazing array of cultural diversity prospered-an offshoot of the fact that communities remained isolated due to lack of effective communication. Man's endeavors to reach out and interact with wider audiences throughout history have been either peaceful or violently confrontational. When people are in interaction-particularly face-to-face interaction- they start sharing common meanings, definitions, values and strengthening of sentimental bonds and social power. Mass media also enables to bring the audience closer to their groups by sharing of common experiences. However, in doing so, it adopts a *top down vertical communication strategy, without face-to-face or horizontal communication.*

In this context, there is a need to examine the notion of 'culture'. Culture is a complex phenomenon not easily amenable to singular definition. Some anthropologists have estimated that to date culture, has 164 definitions. By and large, it refers to his 'capabilities and habits' (E.B. Taylor, Primitive Culture) acquired by man as a member of society. Culture acts as a defence against chaos and conflict. As such knowledge systems, language, ideas, beliefs, customs, codes, religion, morals, institutions, family, law, works of art and anything and everything by which man lives and regulates his existence-all fall in its ambit. Culture has a contagious quality because direct borrowing of cultural traits is quite common. Since all elements of culture are interrelated, even a minor change in a cultural system has a profound impact on other cultural systems. According to many humanist thinkers like Diderot, Rousseau, Kant, Mathew Arnold, culture can be either natural, organic, creative, genuine; or artificial, mechanical, stereotyped, superficial, servile, mindless, corrupt and alienated. To digress a bit, it is the first set of attributes which allude to the notion of Composite Heritage. Raymond Williams (*Culture and Society* 1780-1950) is of the view that modern meanings of culture appeared in the 18th and 19th centuries since it simply referred to cultivation of soil until then : (1) it came to mean to general state or habit of the mind; (2) it signified the general state of intellectual development in a society as a whole; (3) it denoted the general body of the arts; (4) later in the century, it came to indicate a whole way of life-material, intellectual and spiritual.

Mathew Arnold opined that "in an age of

democracy, industrialization, mechanization, cultivation of culture is vital to stop society from destroying itself." Through the example of Cortes, a ruthless Spaniard who almost decimated the Great South American civilization, Tzevetan Toporov (*The Conquest of America*) observes; "Cortes slips into the other's skin to understand the other's language and a knowledge of the other's political organization." But in doing so, he has never abandoned his feeling of superiority. Then, during the second phase, in which he is not merely content to reassert his own identity, but proceeds to assimilate the Indians to his own world. "Lessons provided by Cortes's conquest has been internalized by all colonizers including the media-led cultural imperialism. A new trinity takes over from the old conqueror with the sword which consists of the scholar, the priest and the merchant. The first collects information about the field to be conquered, second promotes a spiritual annexation and the third collects the profits, roughly corresponding to the 'market researcher', 'advertisement man' and the 'capitalist' in today's context-whether one describes it as 'cross-cultural synthesis' or modernization, the fact is that they are subtle variations of 'cultural imperialism'. According to an UNESCO report on culture and development: "From Ladakh to Lisbon, from China to Peru; in the East, West, North and South-styles in dress, jeans, hair-dos, T-shirts, jogging, eating habits, musical tunes, attitude to sexuality-have become global. Even crimes related to drugs, abuse and rape of women, embezzlement and corruption transcend the frontiers and have become similar. The underlying ideological basis of globalisation and liberalization can be traced to ideas like 'free market', 'progress' and 'intellectual freedom' implying a certain kind of cultural environment. Hence, one has to get assimilated into a uniform global culture dominated by a few advanced nations to get the optimum results from globalisation and liberalization. As a result, it creates tension between national culture and the steady penetration of globalised culture. Not only this, what is worrying is the ability of the media to hegemonies regional sub-cultures controlled by the metropolitan centres. The process of globalisation governed by some basic principles : market knows best (individualism) ; satisfaction of the individual by supplying 'what he wants' including pornography (hedonism). The point is that it leads to homogenization of diverse cultures

thereby making humanity poorer.

Before venturing further, it would be fruitful to outline some of the deleterious features that boost the process of symbiosis between market and media to produce current global culture.

(1) The target audience is unknown to message giver so that the message can be tailored to suit the audience. Therefore, information being passed on has to be encapsulated in general terms bereft of diversity. A typical media presentation of a folk art would emphasise on the general structure without any reference to the nuances prevalent in different parts of the region and a discerning audience would not be able to learn much. This generalized mode, over a period of time will become the standard to be adopted by every practitioner. The same holds true for language. It is common knowledge that language is regional and local specific. Therefore, a neutral type of language is fostered on the media to cater to a wider variety of audience and over a period of time one particular usage becomes the universal model.

(2) Given the heterogeneous character of the audience, the message giver is impelled to bring down the level of discourse to the lowest common denominator. According to an eminent journalist, Carl Bernstein, it results in the creation of a "time idiot culture." As he puts it, for the "first time in history the weird, the stupid and the vulgar are becoming our cultural emblems, even our cultural ideal." To gain wider audience, media hands out slick, pre-digested, easy to understand capsules. In fact, the universe of the TV screen, tabloids and glossy magazines have blown to bits the possibilities of critical examination and reflection. Over a period of time, the audience hankers after only this kind of exposition of information. The audience is induced to seek simple answers to complex problems and interest in complex and subtle phenomenon diminishes greatly and is replaced by soft disciplines at the cost of interest in studies requiring hard analytical effort among the new generation.

(3) Size and scale determined media usually ignores the tastes and interests of minorities and marginal groups. Local elements cannot effectively compete with the globalised media.

(4) Culture forms that developed organically during the long course of human history have been altered to suit the very different purposes thanks mainly to novel means of communication made possible by mass media. For instance,

religion which developed initially as a mode of communion with the Infinite, has become an instrument of political mobilization.

(5) All traditional cultures were based on the edifice of ethical behaviour. The media operates in a competitive world where all means can be employed to increase coverage and profits. Information that comes through the media is invariably slanted and certain titillating and bizarre aspects of the event are highlighted thus belying any ethical consideration.

(6) Since the early ages, fiction and legends have become part of the 'authentic experience' of the people. As a scholar has noted the need of the hour is to develop a technique of reading 'archive of the present'-not just philosophy, history, politics but an entire body of visual, chanted, painted, imaged and spoken texts which are part of the recent history.

However, there is a flip side marked by positive aspects, and that is the emergence of universal values, societies which are not noted for their concern for environment, or gender sensitivity or human rights, have to face opposition not only from within but from different quarters of the globe as well. Global concern is being expressed, admittedly only by a small, section to launch movements on eradication of poverty and exploitation. Hence, large gatherings of protestors in Seattle or Genoa can not be dismissed off hand as the handiwork of certain misguided people.

Culture, as a way of life is constantly undergoing change. Certain developments in modern times have helped greatly the process of change leading to baneful consequences: (a) reduction in cultural diversity; and (b) increasing the hegemonic control in the name of 'free trade' and 'freedom of communication' at all level including caste, linguistic, regional, religious and other aspects of multiculturalism that people use in their everyday lives to recognize each other's identity. The implications of this change are varied and there are no indications that they are in any way increasing the social, material or spiritual well-being of humanity. These identities are to be understood on the basis of plurality and multiplicity of Indian society conforming to a broad 'social consensus'. While certain conflicts of identity are inevitable in the process of social change through modernity and challenges to caste norms, construction of meta-identities related to religion turn out to be full of pitfalls. In the Indian context, thinking or theorizing about 'individual

identity' is an onerous task given the social primacy of group identities in everyday life.

We will now dwell on some of the baneful effects of globalisation and media which may have disastrous consequences for the future of mankind.

Unable to anchor themselves in the world of standardized and homogenised consumer culture and having no means to gratify their tastes coupled with tenuous linkages with their age-old heritage, the poor youth are being mobilized on the basis of ethnic, religious and national identities. This has given rise to social conflicts on an unprecedented scale. An examination of these conflicts reveals that they emanate from unequal distribution of wealth and power. Massive job losses and unemployment due to global economic restructuring has accentuated economic inequalities and social unrest. These circumstances in turn, have given rise to an atmosphere where the identities are perceived to be under threat. With the downturn in class-based politics, the innocent youth has become an easy prey for fundamentalist movement in their single minded pursuit. Fundamentalist movements are thriving by mobilizing the losers of globalisation process in the above-mentioned configuration of forces. It is no wonder that the social base of fundamentalist movements, by the large, consists of the poor and disadvantaged sections of people who are forced to join such movements to retrieve their lost identity and economic stability by capturing state power.

Examples galore: the largest Islamic seminary in South Asia at Deoband spawned the Jihadis (holy crusaders) through a huge network of madarsas (schools for imparting religious education) with a uniform curriculum, across the board. This network of 8,934 Deobandi madarsas in India and a host of others in Pakistan have helped in disseminating the tenets of fundamentalism. The Taliban identified the Deobandi madarsas in Pakistan as the breeding ground for recruitment of cadres including themselves. The Deobandi brand of Islam, emphasises going back to the Islamic texts and eliminating every trace of 'syncretism', unlike the Sufis who promote acculturation. The Deoband was designed as a traditional institution in the aftermath of 1857 uprising to withstand the assault of Christian missionaries and the spread of western education which the founders thought would undermine their faith. Ironically, it is a trio of responses to the challenges of imperialism

along with the MAO college in Aligarh with its espousal of modern education and the Nadwat-ul-Ulema in Lucknow with its synthesis of the traditional and modern. Since then, the Deobandi madarsas have been recruiting the poor disenchanting Muslim youth. A similar process of recruitment on religious lines marks the Rashtriya Swayam Sangh, its militant outfits, and educational institutions based on Hindu exclusionism. Take the case of strife-torn Kashmir. There is a resurgence of Sufi festivals (Urs) and spiritual functions which is being seen as a renewed search for roots and a longing for their Composite Heritage which has permanence unlike the transitoriness of political identities. Even in the prevailing times of polarization many people in the near and remote villages and charting their own journey towards healing by falling back on the tenets of universal love nurtured by the age-old Sufi tradition. In such a scenario, Asiya Andrabi-a women- makes her entry. The self-styled moral police under her charge (she is the chief of Dukhtaran-e-Millat) were conducting a 'raid' to enforce their code of conduct, were recently arrested for hooliganism along with six of her associates for physically assaulting a married woman who was with her husband at a restaurant. This was happening in the land which has equal respect for Lal Ded, a Hindu Sufi poetess and Nund Rishi, a Muslim Rishi.

Over the years, attacks on nation-state by ethnic groups are on the increase. Wherever chauvinistic and zingoist agenda has been politicized to capture power, the world has witnessed an unleashing of a reign of terror against other ethnic groups. In many parts of Asia, and Latin America, Fundamentalist movements based on ethnic, religious and linguistic identities are challenging the integrity of existing states in several ways. The demands are varied: some ethnic movements are demanding greater autonomy while others are seeking complete independence. A majority of ethnic conflicts and civil wars are taking place in the poorest regions of the world. More wars have been fought on ethnic rather than on ideological grounds in this decade. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, formation of new states based on ethnicity witnessed a sharp rise as exemplified by formation of 20 new states after the collapse and dissolution of USSR and Yugoslavia. This trend is expected to continue in future as well.

In Memory of Ajeet

“
*If you want
to know
a person
either
you travel or
stay with him.*
”



To Ajeet

Oh dear one
Moments and days Crawled
since you left
Countless! No! cannot count them
Listen! Recall!!
My head resting on your shoulders
Your shirt soaked in my tears
Did I know?
That parting is round the corner
for the life itself!
Remember you said once on 14th Aug.
'Happy Independence day'
'Am a Kshatriya, you a Pathan
Am a Hindu you a Musalman
And we traveled together with
Dreams!
Vision!!
Not mine ! not yours!
Ours!!
Together on difficult terrain
With promise with Hope
Hold me Ajeet
I know you are still around

—Tariq Zaman

I have tried to share my reflections for Ajeet with a heavy heart :
There is a saying, if you want to know a person either you travel
or stay with him.

It was at the reception of Godavari in Kathmandu and I was
supposed to share a room with a stranger from India for five days.
The anxiety invaded me as I being a Pakistani born and raised in a
different environment had to live with a person from “so called
enemy” country – it was like “sleeping with enemy”.

I was guided to my room. The door was open and a familiar
voice welcomed me. It was a ghazal sung by Mehdi Hassan, “Ranjish
hi sahi, dil hi dukhane ke leay aa”. And then came a smiling face at
the door with big blue charming eyes, saying “Adaab”. Ajeet
welcomed me with open arms saying “Aiye Moazzam Ji”. Pleasant
shocks one after another. And then a “Jadu ki jhappi” melted down
all the negative thoughts rooted down for years and years. Later we
met twice in other trainings, and off course we were room mates in
every training.

And then there is a story of friendship converted into
brotherhood. We ate together, walked in the mountains of
Kathmandu, went for shopping, discussed music, culture, politics,
religion and on top of all “humanity”. Ajeet was a beautiful human
being. I will cry if I say more about him. Love you “Bhai”. Wait for
me there somewhere in the skies, I will come and we will be room
mates again, there too.”

—Moazzam Ali
PAKISTAN



I first met Ajeet Pratap Singh at Mamallapuram Resort, Chennai, India in November 2008. I went there to facilitate a Training of Trainers course on Local Capacities for Peace along with other five international facilitators. The place was very pleasant and beautiful situated by the bank of Bay of Bengal. Having reached the resort, I asked the room boy, where is Dr. Khurshid Anwar? He told me, "He is working in the session room along with two other German people". At once I threw my luggage in the room and rushed to the session room. I saw that Mr. Wolfgang, Mr. Jochen, Ms. Shruti and Dr. Anwar were doing preparatory work of the workshop. I joined with them.

After half an hour we finished the work and then Khurshid Anwar told me Ajeet has come. "He is my bosom (very dear) friend, has come from Deenabandupuram. He will participate in this ToT course. You are already acquainted with him by name. Let us go to the sea shore." Ajeet's room was just above the session room. Khurshid called Ajeet and introduced me with him. At first sight I had fallen in love with him. Ajeet was tall, handsome and very humorous man.

Sitting on the sea beach we talked about our personal life and contemporary development issues and enjoyed the natural beauty of the sea. I had two other reasons for liking Ajeet. First: in my boyhood I had a

bosom friend named Ajeet Mondol. After our liberation period he migrated to India. After that I have never seen him. Ajeet Pratap Singh looked like him and was of same age. Second: In 1991 I visited Deenabandhupuram in cooperation with Dr. Badal Sen Gupta. Ajeet was working there.

I had been in Mamallapuram resort for 12 days. Everyday after the training session rest of the time I spent with Ajeet. At the time of site seeing, shopping, taking breakfast, lunch and dinner, cultural evening, morning walk, etc. Ajeet was with me. Since then he was my best friend. Sometimes I can't believe that he is no more in the world.

Ajeet was sympathetic and empathetic with everybody. He felt pain of anybody's sorrow. First of all he cooperated to solve anybody's problems. In Mamallapuram, one day we all participants and facilitators (24/25) went out for site seeing. In the evening at the time of returning back we stopped for shopping and tea. After a little shopping we went to a hotel for taking tea and snacks. Having reached the hotel we found that Monisha is not there. Monisha was the younger participant than all. We lost Monisha. Some of us become tensed and worried. Some participants told, "She will come, don't worry". Ajeet told me, let us go out Dada, we should find Monisha.

Then we started walking and after nearly half an hour we found Monisha nearby a park. She was crying. We took Monisha to the hotel and Ajeet tried to relax her by his humorous comments. Finally, she laughed and the situation became easy.

Ajeet Da also loved me very much. There are also some religious and ideological similarities between Ajeet and myself. We both believe in Sufism. I am follower of Lalon and Sree Chaitannaya. Ajeet was follower of Sufi Kabir. Though I am not a good singer, nevertheless when I sung Lalon, he enjoyed the song by his heart. I like classical music and songs, so did Ajeet. He brought for me many audio CDs from India. Those audio CDs were produced and composed by Pankaj Mallik, Rahul Sharma, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Ghulam Ali and many other famous artists from India and Pakistan. Now when I get time I hear the audio CDs and remember Ajeet a lot. I feel that he is smiling behind me.

Ajeet was attached with my family members very cordially. He visited my house twice. My wife considered him as Brahmin by religion. So, she honored him specially according to the Bengali culture. She always cooked for him vegetarian food items. One day in my house, at the time of adda (chatting) he heard that, my wife has been suffering from asthma. At once he made a phone call to his wife Bharati and asked her to buy a herbal medicine named "Breath Eazy" for my wife. By using this medicine my wife got more or less recovery from her illness. So, we couldn't forget his feeling of kinship with my family.

It appeared to me Ajeet managed the domestic life very well. He came to HOPE Foundation, Baroipara, Savar, Dhaka four times. Most of the time, I spent my time with him. I saw him talking with his wife Bharati and son Adi everyday morning and evening. He did shopping for them like mad. Ajeet was very fashionable man in his life. Always he wore very sober and gentle dresses. He used the mobile phone with 16 GB memory card, in which 8 GB was full of his son and wife's photographs and the rest 8 GB was full of classical music and songs. When I think that I will never hear the classical music from Ajeet's mobile, I feel very bad.

I saw that Ajeet studied a lot when he got time. Last time when he came to HOPE Foundation to facilitate a ToT course on Composite Heritage, I saw him to read a book named "No Full Stop in India" written by Mark Tully. I borrowed the book from him for one day and I read an article "The Kumbh Mela". Ajeet invited me to visit Allahabad at least once at the time of "Kumbh Mela". At the time of leaving HOPE Foundation he gifted the book to my son by writing on the inner cover page "Animesh- with lots of love". Ajeet said, Dada if you would like to know about the

culture of India, you must read the book. Animesh is in teenage now; he also should read this book. I have read almost entire book.

Ajeet was one of the family members of HOPE Foundation. Each and every staff member knew him by face and by name. They also loved him very much. Last 30th July I heard about the demise of Ajeet. It was Friday, our weekend. Next Sunday I went to the office. In the mean time everybody knew the incident. I saw some staff members were waiting to listen again the sad news from me. After listening to the sad news they invited me to the chapel. They made a special prayer for peace of Ajeet's soul. Since last one and half months we started every training and workshop by praying for eternal peace of Ajeet's soul.

The 30th July 2010 was very sad day for me and my family members. In the evening I was returning home from the market by rickshaw. I received a phone call from Mr. Chanchal. He told me, Dada we have a sad news. Immediately, it clicked my mind that might be our Pakistani friends have sad news. Because, only one day before an airplane had crashed in Pakistan near Islamabad. The participants of Composite Heritage training returned back home that day. I was tremendously worried about them. But Mr. Chanchal didn't tell about them. He told about Ajeet. I couldn't believe. I came to home with a hurry and made a return phone call to Mr. Khurshid. Mr. Khurshid told me the same news with a crying voice. After a while I shared the demise news of Ajeet with my son and wife. They become motionless and wordless. Ajeet was little younger than me by age. We saw he maintained a very peaceful, tensionless and punctual life. I have never heard any complain about his health. He walked in the morning and took vegetarian food. He always went to bed in time and woke up in the morning. So, we couldn't accept the news of his heart attack. I have no so sound health like Ajeet. After this unpredictable incident my family members and colleagues forced me to go to the heart hospital and get a heart check up. I did that and found my bad cholesterol level is very high and good cholesterol level is low. My physician advised me to walk everyday at least one hour. Last July Ajeet, Paban and I walked everyday I morning inside and outside HOPE Foundation. Now I am walking alone and feeling Ajeet is walking behind me.

Ajeet was a very good facilitator especially for the peace building process in South Asian region. We have lost an encouraging and creative colleague in our peace journey. We can never recover this loss.

—Kalipada Sarker
CCDB-HOPE Foundation.
BANGLADESH

Our Fellow Facilitator Ajeet Ji

First, we met in a workshop on Local Capacities for Peace (LCP) which was held at Mamalumpuram, India in November 2008. I discovered his talent when we did group work and conducted real life workshop together there.

I found him as one of very cooperative, friendly and good communicator. He played excellent role as a team leader of the workshop. Through the workshop we became closer friend.

As a young participant I was little bit weak in understanding the discussion topics as well as the analysis of issues among the participants. But where ever I faced any problem he tried his best to help me which made me one of his fan.

Later we also met in Nepal and Bangladesh as participants or as facilitators of the LCP and the Composite Heritage process. During Nepal Social Analysis workshop, our Lead Facilitator Khurshid Anwar bhai requested me to present a brief on the situation of Indigenous People in Bangladesh as one of the participant and Indigenous person from Bangladesh. When I was asked to make preparation I was a little bit confused and anxious and became sick. I was thinking how it is possible for me to present or

stand in front of so many scholars.

Next day morning at my presentation I tried my best and was surprised when our Lead Facilitator and Ajeet Ji appreciated to see my performance. It was very memorable when I see their happy and satisfactory face. This encouraged me a lot and made me confident, fearless and taught me how to help the junior fellows to overcome from the fear. I found he was one of us who adopted, accepted and started facilitating the process of peace in South Asia through Local Capacities for Peace and Composite Heritage.

I could not accept in his sudden demise. His absence is great loss for our entire peace process. Although I believe the process will not slow down, somebody could replace him, but we will never get anyone like him, I again say he was one of the real facilitator in practical life also because I saw when our Bangladeshi participant Nadira requested him to get a good physician in India he tried his best to help her.

His facilitation, smiling face will remain with us all as long as we live in the world.

—*Nyo Hla Mong* Member Secretary,
Maleya Foundation,
Chittagong Hill Tracts, BANGLADESH

Fond Reminiscences' of our brother Ajeet the Invincible !

For me Mamallapuram a.k.a Mahabalipuram in Tamilnadu (TN) was not only the venue for LCPP's Training of Trainers (ToT) IV but it was the place where I was blessed with gem of friends! Ajeet was amongst them.

Ajeet Pratap Singh, the name aptly suited his intimidating appearance. But this towering person was a fun-loving kid at heart. He easily mingled with people making friends with them whom he always amused with his anecdotes. Enchanting smile with a mischievous glint was Ajeet's trademark! So was his Hindi which remained unchanged in spite of his southern abode.

During ToT, as fellow participants, Ajeet and I not only seriously worked together on given assignments but also enjoyed playing pranks on others. People around him always rolled in laughter with his spontaneous remarks and comments. He always managed to bring in delight and cheer where ever he was... He was a simple human being who believed in spreading joy. He never made an

ostentatious show-off of his knowledge, seniority or position. He not only preached equality but practiced too! After ToT, I met him in series of meetings at various places and it was always a pleasure meeting him. Got to observe that he had a level of sagacity with which he explained intricate and complex things in a very simple manner. He was an invaluable resource too! Always succeeded conveying his message with fitting examples that everyone could relate to.

The last I met him was in July'10 at Dhaka during Composite Heritage Workshop. This time too the entire group had a blast together as most of us were already acquainted. Besides fun, the plans were chalked to take ahead the learning. Plans were made and shared! Ajeet was quite excited about the workshop he was going to organize at his place - Deenabandupuram (Tamil Nadu) in coming August and had even invited me for same. With other mates, I was looking forward for this wonderful reunion but all of sudden the news of Ajeet passing away came crashing! It was so painful to believe it as the memories

of our time together in Dhaka were still afresh. I remember how animated he was about the workshop that he was going to conduct and I was told that while preparing for the same he departed from us forever.

Ajeet is no more with us... It is unbelievable. Not only for me but I am sure those all who knew him shall be a void. We'll always miss him, he's just irreplaceable! Friendly, caring, affectionate, always ready to help... He always met others' need from the bag he carried always... It was so that this time in Dhaka we named that magical bag of his as 'potlee baba ki'! Generous at heart, setting an example of simplicity and humility by his own demeanor, always eager to learn and ready to share from his experiences without boasting, he always made the

atmosphere lively and refreshing with this presence. He was truly invincible as he was named; unaffected by the pettiness around!

At this moment, we can join in prayers to thank Almighty for the joy he had placed amongst us in the form of wonderful soul - Ajeet. Let us also thank for the noble work HE has carried out through Ajeet and the legacy he has left behind. I remember his family members especially his wife and son whom he loved so much in my prayers as they are coping with this irrecoverable loss ask Almighty to give them the required strength and support.

—Vikram A. J.
CNI SBSS, INDIA

No matter how many ways I describe Ajeet, still it will be uncomprehending, inconceivable and incomparable. I can say, his dreams are shattered and we lost a beautiful person with good mind and heart for bondage in peace and harmony in the region. We say many good things about a person when he is not around us but we hardly articulate good things on face or public when they are around us. But it was exception with Ajeet. I had a real opportunity to know this beautiful person for last 3 years. Whenever I appeared to him he would say "what has happened dada"? I have all of his shared attachment as memory that he sends to me to adopt in real life situation in family, work and friend circle. I thought many things in my life but I never, ever thought such a precious person will leave us empty so early.

I remember during the morning walks we used talk and share love stories which were very, very precious moments.

I am happy to know that in his memory a special Foundation will be formed to spread his views, beliefs

and visions through Composite Heritage values and philosophy. This will remind us to cherish his incomplete task to spread peace and harmony and create linkage of brotherhood relationship in the sub continent. I will love to be part of the Foundation to



contribute and share my feelings. I thank South Asian Composite Heritage (SACH) for taking this noble task for greater interest of the society and countries.

—Pabon Ritchil
Manager, CCDB-HOPE Foundation
BANGLADESH

It was a nice morning. Ajit da was taking breakfast. Suddenly he took his cell phone and showed me a nice photograph, "his son kissing his wife" and he said to me that "This is regular practice of my house. Every morning starts with this scene and it would be a norm." I just wondered what love and affection he had for his family. A lot of regards to his departed soul.

—Dr. Kamrunnaher
CCDB, BANGLADESH

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