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'It was best of times, it was worst of times, it was epoch of belief, it was epoch of incredulity, it was season of light, it was season of Darkness, it was spring of hope, it was winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way.' Charles Dickens.

Dickens wrote these lines in 19th Century but they appear to be more appropriate in the context of contemporary world. Paradox is today's reality. Wars are fought to bring peace. Fire and smoke of nuclear bombs are supposed to bring light in the world. Killings of helpless civilian, women and children are meant to end despair. Faiths and beliefs are to be established through bombs and guns. Torch bearers of peace run the biggest business of weapons. Champions of human rights force their way into other nations, destroy them and rule by proxy.

They are the ones who run the systems and governments all over the globe. It is obvious that they would strive to create a culture of suspicion, mistrust, hatred, bomb, guns, conflicts and war. And all in the name of establishing peace.

We in South Asia, have experienced this earlier and continue to experience the same still. Ever since the sub-continent won freedom from British colonizers, and atmosphere of mistrust, hatred and even wars have been witnessed all over the region. Till 1971 India and Pakistan were engaged in fighting each other. The process did not remain a political one in nature. It could not be limited to two nations confronting each other. The consequences were far more serious. This invariably resulted into communal conflicts in India and Pakistan with same degree of intensity. The year 1971 added yet another dimension to this ongoing conflict. Instead of two nations the region now consisted of three nations. Bangladesh found its place on the South Asian and the world map. The war of 1971 left deep wounds among people of all the three nations. So much so that those who hated war, sometimes, cynically, though felt that war is the only way to salvation. This poem of Shamsur Rehaman, a renowned poet from Bangladesh says it all :

**Salvation**

—Shamsur Rahman

At times  
 From my porch  
 I used to see  
 The beautiful full-grown rose,  
 I used to watch  
 The shadows  
 Softening the summer's heat,

I used to stare at the Buddha  
 Sculpted in wood  
 Sitting on my self.  
 And I thought  
 How All my years I have  
 Hated war  
 And yearned for peace.

When my little girl  
 Sits in a corner,  
 And with great care  
 Dresses her dolls,  
 And seeing the toy-bear dance  
 Bursts into peals of laughter,  
 Drives the dinky little cars,  
 The puffing locomotive  
 All over the room,  
 I am persuaded that  
 I am against war  
 And have always been  
 For peace.  
 At the end of the long day  
 After her endless chores  
 The lady of the house  
 Lies down beside me  
 Overcome by fatigue,  
 Her very presence revives  
 Without exchange of any words  
 A shared past of ineffable charm.  
 And I am once again convinced  
 That I am against war  
 And have prized peace  
 All my life.

War I have abhorred  
 All my life,  
 The rattle of the sword  
 Has never sent  
 Blood coursing  
 Madly through my veins.  
 My father was a skilled hunter  
 And yet I have never shot  
 A single bird  
 With an eager gun.  
 No, not on the river banks  
 Not on the lake  
 Teeming with wild ducks.  
 From the prow of a boat  
 Or standing neck-deep  
 In the ice cold water,  
 Truly speaking  
 I've never handled  
 A live cartridge.  
 I am not Gandhiiite  
 But have always  
 Dreaded violence.  
 Whenever war breaks out

I am plunged into despair.  
 All my life  
 I have detested war-  
 For, as they say,  
 Famine and pestilence,  
 Like the mythical horseman  
 Follow in the wake of war.  
 The young, the old,  
 The hapless women  
 Tumble down the precipice  
 Into the canyon of death.  
 The tree of eternal values  
 Is uprooted by its ancient roots.  
 Doom blows its ramp's horn  
 Throughout the blighted land:  
 How I have hated war  
 All my life!

Yet in this stricken city  
 Under alien occupation  
 Ask any old man  
 Who has lost his son,  
 Ask any young maiden  
 Raped by the soldiery,  
 Ask the newly-widowed  
 Worn out by her endless tears,  
 Ask the poet  
 Struck dumb  
 By unbearable agony,  
 Ask him,  
 Who, beholding  
 The heap of Bengalee dead,  
 Mutter to himself constantly  
 Now bursting into demented laughter  
 Now into unprovoked tears,  
 Or, finally  
 Ask the loney child  
 Of our desolate,  
 Silenced neighborhood  
 Who lost its mother  
 In a hail of bullets,  
 And now wander aimlessly  
 Hither and thither.  
 Alas, ask all the peaceable  
 Gentlefolk,  
 And today  
 They will all declare  
 With one voice-  
 "In war alone lies salvation."

*Translated by Syed Najmuddin Hashim*

## Introduction for a Book : Four Chapters of Culture by Dinkar

**Jawahar Lal Nehru**

*New Delhi*

*30th September, 1955*

*Ramdhari Singh Dinkar was one of the most renowned cultural historian of India. Though he was equally great poet and writer in the area of literature but his book 'Sanskriti ke Char Adhyay' (Four Chapters of Culture) made him immortal in the cultural historiography of the whole subcontinent. He was a close friend of India's first Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru—a prolific writer himself on a variety of subjects. 'Discovery of India' and 'Glimpses of World History' are still considered to be milestones in Indian historiography. Nehru not only understood and appreciated Dinkar's mind but also had a shared understanding of past and vision for future. He agreed to write the introduction of Dinkar's book. This introduction itself became an outline of cultural history of the subcontinent. Following is the introduction that he wrote for Dinkar's book.*

The subject taken up for his book by my friend and colleague Dinkar is quite enticing and interesting. It is a subject which has often enthralled me, and has automatically influenced my writings. I, often, accost myself with the question, after all what is India? What is her true element? Which are the forces that collaborated to build India and what kind of relationship they enjoyed with the leading tendencies influencing the world in the past as well as in the present? The subject is very wide and encompasses several humanitarian activities taking place beyond the boundaries of India. And it is my belief that it is just not possible for anybody to do justice to the entire subject on his own. Still some of its specific aspects can be picked up and effort can be made towards understanding them. At least we can make efforts to understand our own India, though in the absence of the global perspective, the India-specific knowledge, which we will get, will remain incomplete.

What is culture? Flipping through the dictionary, you will come across many definitions. An eminent writer has this to say—"Culture is to make yourself familiar with all that has been known or called best in the world". Another definition says that culture is training, sharpening or developing the physical or mental faculties or a stage emerging out of it is "refinement or purification of heart, behaviour or interests". It is "enlightenment of a civilization." In this sense, culture becomes a thing which is fundamental and international. Besides, culture does have some national aspects too. And there is no doubt that many nations have developed their own personalities and specific kind of basic traits within.

In such a scenario, where does India stand? Some have talked about Hindu-culture, Islamic-culture

and Christian-culture. These nomenclatures defy my comprehension, though it is that large-scale religious movements did have their bearing on the castes and culture of the nations. When I look towards India, I feel that, as has been stressed by Dinkar also, the nature of culture of Indian people has been periodic and has developed gradually. On the one hand, its roots are found, much before the advent of Aryans, to the civilisation of Mohanjodaro and the great Dravidian civilisation. On the other, the culture of the Indian people was deeply impacted by the Aryans, who came to India from Central Asia. Later on, this culture was repeatedly influenced by those descending from north-west and from west through sea-routes. Thus, our national culture took shape gradually. This culture had surprising capability to synthesize and incorporate the new instruments. Till the time this feature of our culture survived, it remained lively and dynamic. But, later on, its dynamism was lost, thereby this culture became static and all of its aspects got weakened. We find two mutually opposed and competitive forces operating through the entire history of India. One is that force which, after digesting the external instruments, tries to make adjustment, and the other force is that which encourages division; which promotes the tendency of segregating the one from the other. Even today we are facing, in a different context, the same problem. Today, there are a number of strong forces trying for not only political but also cultural unity. But, there also exist such forces which sow the seeds of bitterness and hatred in life, which promote discrimination among human beings.

Therefore, the question confronting us, today, is not merely theoretical in nature, it is related to the

whole process of our life and our future depends on resolving it properly. Generally, the lead in resolving such problems is taken up by thinkers. But, they failed us. Some of them are ignorant of the form of the problem. Rest have simply accepted the defeat. They suffer from a sense of defeat and guilty conscience and they know not which direction to turn the life.

Many thinkers got attracted to Marxism and its branches, and there is no doubt that, by presenting an analysis of historical materialism, Marxism did help us in our endeavour to think about and comprehend these problems. But, in the end, it too turned into a narrow ideology and whatever importance it may have in the form of economic system of life, it has also failed in resolving our fundamental doubts. It is fine to think that economic development is the foundation of life and progress, but the life does not have a full stop there. It is much higher than the economic development. We find two principles working within the history. One is the principle of continuity and other is of change. These two principles look somewhat contradictory but they are not mutually opposed. Within the continuity, there is an element of change. Similarly, the change also contains some elements of continuity within it. In fact, we take notice of only those changes which blast suddenly in the form of violent revolutions or earthquakes. Yet, every geologist knows it that major changes taking place at the base of earth have a very slow speed and in comparison to them the changes brought about by earthquakes are considered very superficial. Similarly, revolutions, too, are external manifestations or proofs of a very long process of gradual change and subtle transformation. Looking this way, the change, itself, is such a process which keeps working under the guise of tradition. Even externally immobile looking traditions, if have not fully succumbed to inertia and death, then, they also gradually change.

A time comes in history when the process of change and its pace become more direct. But, generally, this pace is not visible externally. The external form of the change, often, appears listless. When castes remain in a state of inertia, their strength keeps depleting day-by-day, their weaknesses keep on accelerating. It results in the loss of their creative arts and tendencies. And, often, they also become slave politically.

The possibility is that the stronger instruments of culture in India were generated through the intermingling of Aryans and pre-Aryan Indians, particularly Dravidians. Out of this inter-mingling, mixture or adjustment, was born a great culture, which

is represented by our ancient-language Sanskrit. Sanskrit and Pali, both these languages were born in Central Asia, from a single womb, but when they arrived in India, only Sanskrit survived and became the national language. Both north and south contributed towards the development of Sanskrit here. The truth is that in the later stages the contribution of south Indians towards the promotion of Sanskrit was substantial. Sanskrit not only became the symbol of our people's thought and religion, but India's cultural unity also took shape through that language. From the time of Buddha till today, Sanskrit has never been the spoken language of people here, nevertheless, it has kept on greatly impacting the whole of India. Few other influences also reached India and they too, provided new directions to our thoughts and expressions.

Over a very long period of history, the geography gave India the shape which made it such a country whose doors were locked from outside. As it is surrounded by sea and mighty Himalaya, it was not easy for any outsider to enter into this country. During the course of many millenniums, large herds of outsiders came to India, but since the arrival of Aryans in India, it hardly happened that outsiders, in large numbers, came to India. In contrast to this, across Asia and Europe, people kept arriving and departing; one caste kept on displacing the other caste and occupying its home and hearth and, thus a massive change kept taking place in the profile of the population. After the advent of Aryans, the arrivals, of outsiders, in India had very limited circles. They, certainly, had some impact, but it did not bring any major change in the basic form of the population. But, still, it should be remembered that a few such changes have occurred in India also. After coming to India, Cythians and Huns and people from some other castes joined the branches of Rajputs and started claiming that they were also the descendants of ancient Indians. For remaining cut-off from the rest of the world for a long time, India's nature too became different from those of other countries. We turned into such species which remain self-bounded. We have started practicing certain traditions whom the outsiders neither know nor understand. Innumerable forms of caste-system are the examples of this peculiar nature and character of India. People of no other country know what untouchability is or why one should have caste-based objection in eating together or marrying among each other. We became narrow minded on these things. Even today people from one caste find it difficult to meet the people belonging to other castes

with open heart. Not only this, even when Indians go abroad, people belonging to one caste prefer to stay segregated from other caste people. Many of us consider these things self-explanatory and we are unable to understand this that people from other countries look at these things with great surprise and how these things hurt their feelings.

In India, things progressed at both the levels. On the one hand, we claimed to be more and more liberal and tolerant. On the other hand, our social behaviour got increasingly narrowed. This dubious personality, this contradiction in principle and practice is still stuck to us and even today we are struggling to get rid of them. How strange is it that we want to ignore the narrowness of our thought, weaknesses of our customs and nature by saying that our ancestors were great men and we have inherited their noble thoughts from them? But, this is a serious contradiction between what we have inherited and what we apply in practice and until we remove this state of contradiction, our personality will remain split.

When the life was comparatively undynamic, this contradiction between principles and practices was not too vocal. But, as the pace of political and economic reforms picked up, the ferocity of the conflict has also been more and more direct. Today we are at the door-steps of the Nuclear Age. The pressure generated by the situations prevailing in this Age is so intense that we have got to shun our internal conflict. And if by chance, we fail in this, then this failure will be that of entire Nation's and, at the same time, we will be losing those qualities we are still proud of.

We must face this spiritual crisis of India in the same way as we are facing our major political and economic problems. The Industrial Revolution is approaching India very fast and we are witnessing various forms of changes in us. Social upheavals are the essential product of the changes brought in at the political and economic levels; had it not been so then the adjustment would not have become the part of either our life or the life of the Nation. It can never happen like this that political change and industrial

progress should keep happening, but we remain sit idle by simply thinking that we need not bring any change in the social sector. The refusal to change society as per the political and economic changes will put tremendous pressure on us, which we shall be unable to bear; we will just succumb to it.

The image of India which we find, during 1000 BC and even earlier than that, is much different from the image that emerges later on. The Indians, during that period, were very ecstatic, very lively, very courageous and were full of encouragement towards life and would carry their messages abroad far and wide. In the field of ideas, they scaled greater heights and touched the sky. They created a glorious language and in the field of fine arts they turned out to be great

creative talents. During those days, neither Indian-life was encircled, nor Indian society was in the state of inertia or

lacking in dynamism. At that time, from one corner to the other, in the whole of India, the cultural spirit was at its zenith. During this time, the south Indians went towards South-East Asia and establish their colony over there. It was from South only that the message of Buddhism traveled to China. In expressing this life of courage, both North and South were one and they also used to nourish each other.

After this, comes the time of last centuries, when the process of decay sets in. Artificiality in the language and excessive ornamentalism in architecture are proof of this decadence. During this time, our thoughts became a repeat of the older ones and creative powers got started depleting day by day. We started fearing both physical and emotional valour and the caste system got further propped-up and all the doors to the society were completely shut. We though still keep on talking about noble and higher goals but our conduct differs from our beliefs.

In comparison to our conduct, our thoughts and sentiments are so high that they mystify us. We talk about peace and non-violence but our actions denote something else. We eulogize the principle of tolerance,

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but behind this our real sentiment remains that everybody should think the way we think, and whenever someone thinks differently we get intolerant towards him. We declare that to remain detached to our actions is our ideal, but our actions are carried on at very mean level and growing indiscipline is taking us to the lowest depths, in both the individual and social sectors.

When people from the West came here via sea route, the doors of India were opened up in a particular direction. The modern industrial civilization, thus, entered silently in this country. New emotions and new ideas attacked us and our intellectuals started the practice of thinking a la British intellectuals. This intellectual churning, this sentiment to look towards West, was good in its own way, because through this we started comprehending, a bit, the modern world. But, this also generated a vice in the sense that our these intellectuals got cut off from the masses, since masses were untouched by this new tide of ideas. Thus, the traditional Indian system of thinking got disrupted. Even then, a few people remained stuck to it in a way which neither had the scope of progress, nor new imagination for creativity and which was fully unconnected to the new situation.

The faith, which India had reposed in western ideas, that too is shaking now. The result is that neither we have old ideals, nor new ones; and we are letting us sail through without knowing where or to which direction we are going, the new generation neither

has any criterion, or any other such thing, by which it could regulate its thinking or action.

This is a dangerous situation. If it is not blocked or rectified then it can have dangerous repercussions. We are passing through a transition in the economic, political and social sectors. Maybe, this is an essential result of that situation. But, in Atomic Age no country will be given very many opportunities to reform itself. And to miss even a single opportunity can mean annihilation too.

Maybe we could not fully comprehend the major forces working in the world, but, at least, this much we should understand that what is India and how this Nation has been able to develop its periodic personality; what are the various aspects of her personality and where does lie her strong unity. No caste, residing in India, can claim that it has a monopoly over what India feels and thinks. Every section of the Indian people has contributed towards making India what she is today. If we are unable to understand this fundamental thing then we shall also be unable to understand India. And if we could not understand what India is then our feelings, thoughts and actions, all shall remain incomplete and we shall be unable to render such service to the Nation which is solid and effective.

I think Dinkar's book will be helpful, to an extent, in understanding these things. Therefore, I appreciate it and hope that scores of people will be benefited by reading it.

## Time

—Khalil Gibran

And an astronomer said, 'Master, what of Time?'

And he answered:

You would measure time the measureless and the immeasurable.

You would adjust your conduct and even direct the course of your spirit according to hours and seasons.

Of time you would make a stream upon whose bank you would sit and watch its flowing.

Yet the timeless in you is aware of life's timelessness,

And knows that yesterday is but today's memory and tomorrow is today's dream.

And that that which sings and contemplates in you is still dwelling within the bounds of that first moment

which scattered the stars into space.

Who among you does not feel that his power to love is boundless?

And yet who does not feel that very love, though boundless, encompassed within the centre of his being, and moving not from love thought to love thought, nor from love deeds to other love deeds?

And is not time even as love is, undivided and paceless?

But if in you thought you must measure time into seasons, let each season encircle all the other seasons,

And let today embrace the past with remembrance and the future with longing.

“From corporate abuses to domestic violence, from global international policy to disciplinary micro-techniques of power, from “ethnic cleansing” to genetic engineering, from hunger to development, from nuclear war to psychological torture, from institutionalised racism to popular justice, from artificial conception to medicalised dying, from mutilation to rape, from private property to economic pillage, from language to law, from sexual discrimination to the punishment and institutionalisation of “deviance,” human rights considerations are deeply embedded in every area of human action. Offsprings of a liberal western ideology (at least in their hegemonic form), human rights are the stuff of conflict. One possible way of assessing these controversies is through the careful exploration of the deep divide between universalist and cultural relativist perspectives.”<sup>1</sup>

Culture is defined as a way of life in which people live together according to their norms, values, and beliefs. Every culture/society inherits in itself a rich blend of norms, values, beliefs and code of conduct, which play a vital role in shaping our lives. It is a common observation that weak, poor and marginalised groups are the ones labeled with low moral standards and they are the ones whose rights are denied. Values and traditions which are part of a social fabric are treated more sacredly and in some cases those norms are not in line with religious teachings but due to selective approach these norms are given preference.

The people with power i.e. with authority and resources misuse *Right to culture* and for their own survival framed them as *rights vs. culture*. By accepting the fact that rights are indivisible and inalienable, based on the fundamental principle of equality, the powerful groups feel threatened. They highlight the fact that these rights if given to all will destroy the societal norms which are in place for a number of years. In reality if everyone is allowed to enjoy their rights it is the way of empowering the marginalised groups which results in endangering the power of the powerful. The society in most of the South Asian cultures does not allow the low casts to be educated, not because they don't have the Right to Education but it will have major economic blowback for the powerful.

Cultures are dynamic and fluid but at one particular point in time they seem to be static as the process of change is always very gradual. Societies can be termed static, as some traditions followed by our ancient ancestors are still in practice even in the 21st century. In Pakistan girls are to be married by their parents and majority of girls are not allowed to see their groom to be. If, she dares to marry without

the permission of her parents she will suffer from social exclusion from her family for the rest of her life. The suffering does not end here; it can lead to honour killing as seen in the recent case of Sajida Bibi, killed on her wedding day by her cousins. She was lucky in a way that she was killed in UK as compared to girls killed in Pakistan. The killers in Pakistan are freed if they can prove in the court that it was their honour at stake and the girl was bringing shame to them or their families. In majority of the cases the girls are raped and then killed. These cultural values are benefiting one segment of the society i.e. the *powerful*.

The international laws need to filter into the domestic legal system to universalise the basic human rights. Will it affect the sovereignty of the state? No. Will it affect the power of the powerful? Yes. Humans are same everywhere, cultural relativism can not justify that a person living in north have the right to enjoy rights and the people living in south are denied these rights. Every human being is entitled to enjoy rights because he/ she is born human. Individual or local cultures play a pivotal role in shaping, transforming, implementing, and resisting the rights accepted by their respective governments. Though the movement of universalising the rights is gaining momentum but the local political structure within a state determines the success or failure of the movement. In Asian culture, society is always given preference than individual.

The precedent set by the economically dominant countries like Malaysia, Singapore, China, South Korea and Indonesia have actually regressed the process of universalism. Not because there is any danger to their national defence but if the people are given civil and political rights their self-produced political system will collapse. The political determination of the groups working in the North is weakened when the implications are interpreted in terms of dollars. China used its political and economic power to stop all the resolutions forwarded against it in the Human Rights Commission.

Almost fifty years have passed since the universal document of human rights was agreed. Till today the horrendous game between power and politics has been successful in denying majority of the world population their basic human rights. The powerful groups realise that “*human rights are universal*” because they represent the rights of powerless, thus leading them to campaign more about cultural relativism. When the odds are so high then the struggle for universalising and obtaining of human rights should be furious. The reason is rightly stated by *Daniel Patrick Moynihan*, “*Human rights has nothing to do with our innocence or guilt as civilisation. It has to do with our survival.*”

1. <http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/AIUSA-syl/ranck-spring97.html>

### *Continued from the previous issue*

Singing ballads, hymns, hero-lauds, odes, songs and incantations within a ritualistic frame or independent of it is a very ancient tradition. In fact, it has a bearing on the origin and development of theatre. Indian folk theatre's origins could be traced back to distant antiquity. The aboriginal cave paintings, ancient Vedic literature and Buddhist literature have recorded the vibrant functioning of Indian folk theatre. The 'Natyashastra' (sometimes also called Fifth Veda) probably composed between the second century B.C. and the second century A.D. by Bharat Muni also records the grandeur of Indian folk theatre. There are signs of the impact of the folk theatre on the classical

Sanskrit theatre.

However, it was during the 15-16th centuries that folk theatre received a boost and became a forceful medium in different regions.

Naturally, folk theatre used different languages of the various regions in which it emerged and prospered. The themes encompassed stories from Sanskrit epics and the Puranas, historical tales, folk stories of romance and valour and biographical accounts of local heroes. The narrator or the *Sutradhar* tells the story through mime, music and dance, puppetry, picture scrolls and even shadows on the screen. Mime was used with great finesse to impersonate the characters of the story. Indian folk theatre can be broadly divided into two categories – secular and 'theatre of entertainment' and 'theatre of religion.' Though the religio-mythological oriented forms developed since antiquity they were reinforced during the *Bhakti* movement in medieval India. The secular folk theatre form can be traced to the Swang tradition and focused mainly on entertainment. Both the forms functioned together and influenced each other. In various states in India many of the language theatre forms which emerged have been stylised as total theatres blending elements of music, dance and poetry deftly and have all the attributes of a classical theatre.

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Some of the region-specific theatres, briefly described, are as follows—

### **Ras Leela**

*Ras Leela* is a generic term that encompasses in its ambit several dances and dance dramas throughout the length and breadth of India based on the Krishna cult. The antiquity of the Krishna theatre, like the Krishna cult predates the *Vedas*. It must be noted that in the oldest Indian dramas, the *samvadas* (or colloquies) were composed in *Prakrit* (a colloquial form of Sanskrit) and not in *Sanskrit*. *Ras* refers to young Krishna's joyous, circular dance with the *Gopis* – the maids and the wives of cowherds of the Braj

region – on the bank of river Yamuna on full-moon night. While *Leela* connotes play, both literally as well as God's playful interaction with humans and other earthly beings. In the Krishna cult, *Ras Leela* has special mystical and ritualistic significance.

From time immemorial, *Ras* and other *Leelas* have been part of the living tradition in various regions of the country in different forms. However, *Ras Leela* of Vrindavan (Uttar Pradesh) is widely popular which developed in the 16th century due to the influence of *Bhakti* wave then sweeping the country.

*Ras Leela* portrays the incidents from Krishna's early life and the miraculous experiences of female friends (*sakhis*) and young women who came into contact with him. The performance begins with the *jhanki* (tableau) of Krishna enthroned with his consort Radha seated beside him. *Sakhis* are seated on the right side of Krishna. Singers and musicians pay their respect to the central figures – Radha and Krishna. Then a series of dances known as *nitya ras* follow. The performance lasts for 2-3 hours till midnight.

### **Geet Govinda**

Poet Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda* – a musical opera of unparalleled lyrical beauty occupies a premier place in the tradition of Krishna theatre. *Gita Govinda* written at the end of the 12th century inspired 35 dramatists who composed more than 100 plays

between 1600 and 1850. In Vidyapati and Chandidas's devotional songs one can find the influence of *Gita Govinda*. The performance consisting of dialogues among two or more actors accompanied by songs became popular in Orissa, Mithila (northern Bihar), Bengal, Assam, Bundelkhand and Nepal. Even today, highly acclaimed classical Indian dances like *Odissi* and *Bharatanatyam* use the rich lyrical repertoire of *Gita Govinda* in their performances. Deep emotional involvement with the love-mysticism of Krishna cult forms the hub of the poet's compositions.

### **Keertan**

*Keertan* is one of the most popular narratives throughout the country. It is also known as *Kalakshepam*, *Katha*, *Harikatha* etc. in different regions. Keerta stands for fame, reputation and its derivative *Keertan* means to laud, extol, worshipping the deity by chanting his praises with music and singing.

### **Picture Showmen**

In ancient India, the picture showman was known as *mankha* and the art of narrating the story through pictures was known as *Mankha Vidha*. This art dates back to 6th century B.C.

### **Koottu (Chakyar Koottu)**

*Chakyar*, a community of performing artistes in Kerala well known for their theatrical skills since long, performed *Koottu*. In the ancient period, the *Chakyars* used to narrate stories from mythological sources like epics and *Puranas* where elaborate dance and *abhinaya* was employed. With eloquent declarations and suggestive facial expressions and hand gestures, the stories are recited in a quasi-dramatic style accompanied by musical instruments like cymbals and *mizhavu* (drum) made of copper with a narrow mouth on which is stretched a piece of parchment. The narrator *Chakyar* singly acts the roles of various characters while narrating the story. This narrative form later evolved into the now famous *Koodiyattam*.

### **Tal-maddale**

*Tal-maddale* is a narrative drama of Karnataka which later evolved into *Yakashagana* - a colourful dance drama of the region. The name derives from *tal*, a kind of cymbal, and *maddale*, a kind of drum. The main narrator is known as *bhagavata* and his teammates are called *arthadharis*. It is a play which does not use costumes, make-up, dance or acting and is performed in sitting position.

### **Burra Katha**

*Burra Katha* - a popular narrative form of Andhra Pradesh - is narrated to the beats of *burra* drum. The traditional performers of this form believe

that they are descendants of Valmiki, the composer of the *Valmiki Ramayana*.

### **Villu Pattu**

*Villu Pattu* literally means bow-song. This form of narration (using bow-shaped musical instrument) was developed in the 15th century in Tamil Nadu. A bow-song party usually consists of eight members who form part of the chorus to support the main singer-narrator. Performed with ballad style songs, the stories from *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas* are narrated.

### **Krishna Attam**

In Kerala, around the mid-seventeenth century, emerged a colourful dramatic form known as *Krishna Attam*, based on the life of Krishna. *Krishna Attam* had a strong influence on *Koodiyattam theatre* and *Kathakali*. *Krishna Attam* is a compendium of 8 plays performed for 8 consecutive nights to unfold the entire story of Lord Krishna.

### **Gondhal**

A dramatic narration of mythological stories and folk legends in Maharashtra forms a part of a ritual dedicated to various deities. *Gondhal* has deeply influenced the dramatic and narrative traditions in Maharashtra and its neighbouring regions.

### **Powada**

The narrative hero-laud is called *powada* in Maharashtra. The first available *powada* in Marathi was based on Shivaji killing his enemy Afzal Khan. *Gondhali's* and *Shahirs*, the folk singers of Maharashtra, kept the tradition of *powada* singing alive. A high pitched melodramatic singing marks *powada*.

### **Garodas**

The members of the *Garoda* community in Gujarat practice the art of narrating stories through painted pictures. It is performed with a paper scroll with pictures painted in water colour one below the other and separated by a thick black line.

### **Pandavani**

The tribals of Chattisgarh region developed *pandavani* to amuse and instruct the people in the form of story telling. The story telling revolves around the five *Pandavas* brothers of *Mahabharata* fame. A team of *pandavani* performers includes one narrator-singer, one or two co-singers who also play on musical instruments like *tabla* and harmonium. The main narrator-singer holds a stringed musical instrument called *tambura* which is decorated with small jingling bells and peacock feathers in one hand and a pair of cymbals known as *kartal* on the other.

### **Daskathia and Chaiti Ghoda**

*Daskathia* is one of the several narrative forms

that evolved in Orissa. It consists of two performers – *gayaka* (main singer) narrates the stories to the accompaniment of two small rectangular wooden pieces to produce various beats and *palia* who is the co-narrator. The stories are usually taken from *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Puranas* and folk literature. The performance also satirizes and makes social commentaries on the contemporary situation.

*Chaiti Ghoda* which too evolved in Orissa consists of a troupe of performers made up of two players on *dhol* and *mahuri* musical instruments and three characters. A dummy horse is crafted with bamboo and cloth and the dancer enters into the hollow body and dances, while the main singer and co-singer narrate mythological stories.

### **Kala**

In the picturesque region of Gomantaka situated between the Sahyadri ranges and the Arabian Sea - known for its theatrical arts and music - various forms of theatre based on Krishna legend have survived through the ages. *Kala* in its earlier theatrical form, in fact, laid the basis for later Krishna theatre, which branched out in the form of *Dashavatar Kala*, *Gopal Kala* and *Gaulan Kala*.

### **Oja-Pali**

This art form of Assam uses a host of dramatic techniques to illustrate the narrative and enhance its visual impact. *Oja-Pali* is associated with the worship of deity *Manasa* (the serpent goddess in Assam). The performers spend many days to narrate the story which is divided into three parts – *Deva Khanda*, *Baniya Khanda* and *Bhatiyali Khanda*. The main narrator-singer is *oja* and *palis* are the members of his chorus.

### **Ankia Nat**

*Ankia Nat* arose in the 16th century in Assam in the wake of neo-Vaishnavite movement. This one-act play - an opera delineating the splendour of Krishna legend – is structurally a synthesis of classical and folk traditions of the region.

### **Khayal**

It is a folk art form popular in Rajasthan. Though the origins of khayal remains a highly debatable issue, yet it is known that Agra was an important centre. *Khayal* has various styles, each going by the name of the city, acting style, the community or the author, e.g., *Jaipuri Khayal*, *Abhinaya Khayal*, *Gadhaspa Khayal*, and *Alibaksh Khayal*. Each style is marked by nuances and subtle variations.

Acting space is divided into two areas: one is a three to four feet high platform where one side is covered with white sheets to form a lower stage. In some styles of *khayal*, a lower stage known as *Laghu* is also built. The second structure is between twelve and twenty feet high, which is erected behind the platform. This makeshift 'balcony' can be reached by ladders. In the four corners, banana tree trunks with colourful flags strung between them are installed.

Though *khayal* creates a festive atmosphere yet the performance is not free from religious undertones. Before the stage is set up, a ceremonial pole is installed at the site and the actual performances begin with hymns to deities. The plays are mythological, historical or creative in content and are marked by romance, brave deeds and sentiments. Festive music is created by *nakkara* or *dholak* drums, cymbals and the harmonium. The all-male cast is directed on stage by the *ustaad* or the director producer. Every performance has a clown as a prominent character.

### **Ram Lila**

The life of epic hero Rama - believed to be an *avatar* (reincarnation) of Lord Vishnu (the preserver) - have been portrayed in the theatrical form in various languages across regions. However, in north India, *Ram Lila* is performed every year for days together during the festival of *Dussehra* celebrating the annihilation of Ravana. *Ram Lila* of northern India is based on Tulsidas's narrative of Ram's adventures, the *Ramcharitmanas*, an epic poem composed in *Awadhi*. Passages are chanted from *Ramcharitmanas* interspersed with song, drama and pageantry to unfold the story. According to legend, after the death of Tulsidas in 1624, one of his disciples, Megha Bhagat enacted *Ram Lila* for the first time. However, in the 19th century the royal house of Banaras undertook the sponsorship of the *Ram Lila* at Ramnagar on a massive scale.

The theme mainly revolves around the interaction between Rama, his wife Sita and brother Lakshmana (who accompanied Rama in the 14 year exile) and Bharat and Shatrughan. *Ram Lila* concludes on *Vijayadashmi* day when he vanquished Ravana, and the stage actors performing the main roles shoot down the effigies of Ravana and his brother with burning arrows. Hundreds and thousands of spectators who watch *Ram Lila* then proceed with the entire cast of the performance in a procession to witness the burning of effigies.

## Adivasi Alternatives for Peace & Development

A. R. Khan (Asad)  
Dhaka, Bangladesh

1. For the peace activists, one of the challenges is to identify the forces and institutions acting as local actors for peace, to enhance their capacity and ensure peace. It is recognised that there are people, places and occasions that play role as connectors between conflicting communities.

In Bangladesh, there are individuals who follow a certain religious practice, non ritualistic, non institutional and living very poor life. One may call them “sufi” or “Baul” but they don’t have any self identity and may not fit in any of these category. They are not concerned with any formal identity, neither claiming one. They are not preying five times or fasting but known as Muslim. They listen spiritual songs and talk about spirituality, not only from one religion but several religions. They can talk about prophets, goddesses and saints from different religion. As they can talk about several religions, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, they are entertaining and interesting for people from any religion. Nevertheless, the fundamentalists may not like them but as they are not institutionalised, so they are not considered political threats.

These people enjoy music and in cases spiritual singers join in his/her place and use it as a space for spiritual music. In such occasions members of different religious community also joins. These spiritualists are acting as local actors for peace and harmony.

There are examples, not only in Bengal but also in other parts of South Asia. In India, in Punjab region I have learnt similar story that there are “Khankah” where people from all religions join for celebration.

It is interesting to note that the spiritual practice these people have could be labeled as Sufi, Baul, Marefati etc, but the source of their ideas are not from any organised religion. The individuals who are having such spiritual practices that contribute to connecting communities and building peace are not academicians, rather having indigenous way of education. Some are not even literate.

When we look at the cultural context and sources of popular knowledge about spirituality, it is the Adivasi culture and knowledge that are functions as background for such non institutional spiritual practice. The discourse of such present day spiritualists are from organised religion but interpretation is from a

totally different perspective than monotheism. It is one of Garo women (Adivasi in Bangladesh) who told me that her religion is “Manob Dharma” (human religion). Perhaps, people born and grow within organised religion but gather life perspective from the broader cultural context, inherited from Adivasi past.

While Peace activists are looking for connectors and local capacities for peace, one of the factors is identified as ‘composite heritage’. One may question the roots of such composite heritage. It is also important to identify that who is explaining our heritage. Dominant explanation of anything could be generated in the universities and marketed by publishing house. It may be useful to ask whether our heritage is only external or it has indigenous roots.

South Asian Cultural Heritage that are connecting people, promoting values of caring, sharing and cooperation, building peace – all that are still among Adivasi communities. We may need to look carefully at the values and culture of our indigenous people; Santal, Munda, Garo, Oraon, and that’s the way look our own past, so that we could discover the tremendous cultural resources we have for the peace.

2. For development activists, the concept of Adivasi development may provide some food for thinking.

The concept of ‘Adivasi Development’ emerged from a decade of praxis, mainly by Adivasi social activists and development practitioners in South Asia. The process was initiated by questioning the dominant perception of ‘Adivasi’ (Indigenous People) and development paradigm followed by NGOs for Adivasis. It was considered necessary to redefine the dominant perception about Adivasi as well as re-examine the development paradigm to retain cultural identity, land-water-forests rights and self governance.

In dominant perception, Adivasi is synonym of ‘backward’, ‘poor’, ‘primitive’, ‘lazy’, and ‘anti-developmental’ etc. In South Asia the term ‘backward’ is officially endorsed and it is a common media discourse, portrait ‘Adivasi’ with negative connotation. The economic poverty of majority of Adivasis due to several thousand years of deprivation and marginalisation is a fact. The negative perception about Adivasis by what Adivasis called ‘Dikus’ (outsiders, exploiters) is nothing but a dominant

discourse of ideological justification for continued deprivation and legitimisation of injustice by 'blaming the victim'.

The dominant perception is based on a 'snap shot' view of present day condition of poor Adivasis with a castiest and classiest notion. Adivasis has to be seen in a historical context and Adivasi culture could be understood better by explaining its value premise. Historically, Adivasis are the people who initiated early civilisations and continued with their identity and social systems of collective ownership, caring and sharing, symbiotic relation with nature and secular spirituality. While the slavery, feudalism and capitalism evolved with class, cast, race and patriarchal systems, the Adivasis didn't join such inhuman social practice in the name of civilisation and modernisation. No doubt that some Adivasis have influenced by dominant values, nevertheless, the majority of the Adivasis are still continuing their ethnic identity, egalitarian culture and anti patriarchal relations.

The dominant development interventions are trying to 'modernise' Adivasis by imposing economic practice based on competition, deprivation and greed. Adivasis are resistant to such 'development' as it is

against their values and cultural practice. Adivasis have defined their own development paradigm as 'Adivasi Development'.

The core values of Adivasi Development are similar to the values, Adivasis have had over the millennium; caring, sharing, collectiveness, cooperation, equality and love for nature. The strategy of Adivasi Development is to strengthen the democratic self governance system and institutions

The challenges posed by the 'globalisation' to community vulnerability, human security and environment both in North and South, the vision oriented approach of Adivasi Development could provide humane solutions to many of economic, political, cultural and environmental problems.

and plan for their economic and human development. Therefore, with the logic of human development that needs long time (20 years), the self

governance institution having long term vision plan.

Adivasi Development is a vision oriented approach (opposite to economic empowerment or right based approach, but address the issues of both needs and rights), that could be applicable to any community who would like to live in equality, freedom, justice and peace.

The challenges posed by the 'globalisation' to community vulnerability, human security and environment both in North and South, the vision oriented approach of Adivasi Development could provide humane solutions to many of economic, political, cultural and environmental problems.

## Your are Prayer

**Fr.Sohail Bhatti**

*Taangh Wasaib Organisation  
Sargodha, Pakistan*

Some people read prayer  
Some recite prayer  
Many pray for themselves  
Few pray for others  
Only chosen one!  
Themselves are prayers  
Because,  
Whoever meets them  
See them  
And think of them  
Goes in prayer  
Remains in prayer  
And becomes prayer

## My Eternity

**Fr.Sohail Bhatti**

*Taangh Wasaib Organisation  
Sargodha, Pakistan*

When I think of you!  
my mind touches the boundaries of unknown reality !  
When I feel you!  
My soul sings the sweetest song of love  
When I see you!  
My heart starts dancing  
When I touch you  
The spirit of eternal life runs in my whole body.

## CONFLUENCE

Telugu story

Volga

Asmita Resource Centre for Women  
Secunderabad, India

The sun was setting. The forest glowing red in the rays of the setting sun and enveloped with swirls of smoky darkness looked like a huge fire belching smoke. The forest echoed to the sound of birds flocking to their nests. Herds of deer shaking off the fatigue of the day set out to frolic in the moonlight. The hermitage stood peaceful and unreal in its beauty as if it were the creation of some skilled painter.

The evening rituals have begun at the hermitage. The holy fires are lit and the melody of the religious chants fill the ashram. Women rest after watering the flower and fruit trees while some weave garlands for the evening worship. Children return from their forest wanderings to the eager laps of waiting mothers. Some mothers hurry children to get ready for the evening rituals. In a small cottage there, a mother waits for her children to return from the forest. Her eyes reveal how her very life revolves around those children. Her eyes, normally eager, affectionate, and kind are filled with anxiety.

That is Seeta waiting for her two sons.

They usually return from the forest at this time. They would gather wild flowers from the woods and beg their mother to use them for her worship. Seeta would refuse to use nameless flowers for a sacred ritual. The children would then give them names. She would tease them, and they would pout. She would comfort them and offer the flowers to the gods. By evening, the whole forest listened in rapture to the brothers voices raised in song.

Lûva and Kusä haven't returned yet. Seeta doesn't fear that they are in any danger. For the boys, the forest is a beaten path. They were born here. Children of the forest. But, why were they so late? Not knowing the reasons rises of fear and doubt. Seeta has been anxious from the time the children visited Ayodhya. An unknown apprehension. It's the same now, fear - not of the jungle, but of the city.

The darkness deepens. Seeta's eyes are like lamps in that darkness.

Into that light arrive the two boys. Seeta breathes a sigh of relief and asks why they are late. "Mother. look here", said Lûva, as he emptied a pile of flowers into a plate. Their delicious fragrance instantly filled the cottage.

Flowers. Red, white, yellow, flowers that she had never seen before smiled out of the plate. A fragrance

that she had never known before. Lûva and Kusä looked at their mother proud of their floral treasure.

"Where are these from? They are so beautiful!" inquired Seeta, gently touching the flowers with her fingertips.

"Mother, today we've discovered a new garden in the forest. We haven't seen another like this before. Even the Nandanavanam that grandfather Valmiki<sup>2</sup> describes cannot hold a candle to this one.

Lûva nodded his assent.

"Whose garden is it, Kusä?" asked Seeta.

"Mother, the garden is beautiful but its owner is so ugly. She came there as we were picking flowers. We were afraid. Brother somehow collected his composure and said, "We are the children of the hermitage. We're collecting flowers for worship." And we hurried back. Oh what a fearful face! So ugly," said Lûva, with disgust in his expression.

"No, child. One should never judge people by their appearance. Didn't she grow that beautiful garden?" suggested Seeta.

"She doesn't have nose or ears. As if someone cut them off", Kusä said, making a face.

Seeta started as if she had been whipped. "No nose and ears?"

"Well, may be they were there. Someone cut them off. Didn't it look like that to you too?" said Lûva, seeking support from his brother.

Seeta was certain now.

Soorpanakha! definitely Soorpanakha!

It was eighteen years since she came desiring Rama. How beautiful she had been!

Disfigured by the vicious mockery of Rama and Lakshmana. Was Soorpanakha living in this forest now? How time had passed!

Rama humiliated Soorpanakha and Ravana avenged her humiliation by abducting me.

Are women there only so that men can settle their scores?

Had Soorpanakha not been the sister of Ravana, they would not have humiliated her thus. Rama's intended to provoke Ravana to war. Soorpanakha provided the cause for a battle with Ravana.

It was politics.

Poor Soorpanakha, she came to him longing for love. Who would love her now?

Disfigured without nose and ears?

Did she lead a loveless life all these years?  
Did she pour her love into that garden of flowers?  
Was that garden a manifestation of her desire  
for beauty?

Were these flowers the results of her tender  
heartedness?

Poor Soorpanakha!

Lûva and Kusä saw the tears in Seeta's eyes.

"What's this, mother? Why do you grieve on  
hearing about the deformity of a stranger?"

Seeta wiped her tears and smiled.

"Will you take me to that garden tomorrow?"

Lûva and Kusä looked at each other in disbelief!

"I will really come with you. Will you take me  
there? Do you remember the way?"

Seeta's words thrilled the brothers':

They were ecstatic at the thought of taking their  
mother through the forest. They had always wanted  
to show her all their favourite haunts in the forest.  
But, Seeta never went with them. When she went to  
the forest, it was with the other women of the  
hermitage. The children couldn't contain their  
excitement at the thought of holding her  
hand, leading her through the forest,  
reassuring her when she was afraid, and  
showing her all the wonders of the forest.

They couldn't wait for the night to  
pass.

Seeta spent the night with a heavy  
heart. However much she tried  
memories of the distant past  
wouldn't go away.

Those were happy days in the forest with Rama.  
Soorpanakha's arrival - how beautifully she  
walked! White jasmines twined in her hair, garlands  
of yellow oleander around her neck, lilac bluebells

around her arms;

She came like a flowering vine. She gazed at my  
jewelry with wonder as if, she were wondering why  
I was carrying those ornaments without grace or  
fragrance?" She looked at me, but said nothing. She  
went straight to Rama. Listening their conversation,  
I continued with my chores. Soon, there was bloodshed  
at the cottage.

The heart-rending grief of a woman.

Cursing their brutality.

A curse that has not left me yet.

No man loves her.

The one that loved me, left me.

Are both the tales the same in the end?

What will Soorpanakha say to me?

Perhaps, she will not talk to me nursing her old  
anger. I must see. I must see Soorpanakha.

\*\*\*\*\*

The next morning, after completing all the morning  
chores, Lûva and Kusä started their journey to the

forest with their  
mother along.

"Mother, I will show  
you my raja today"  
said Lûva.

Lûva had captured  
a wild elephant of  
the forest and  
tamed it. The  
brothers rode that  
elephant.

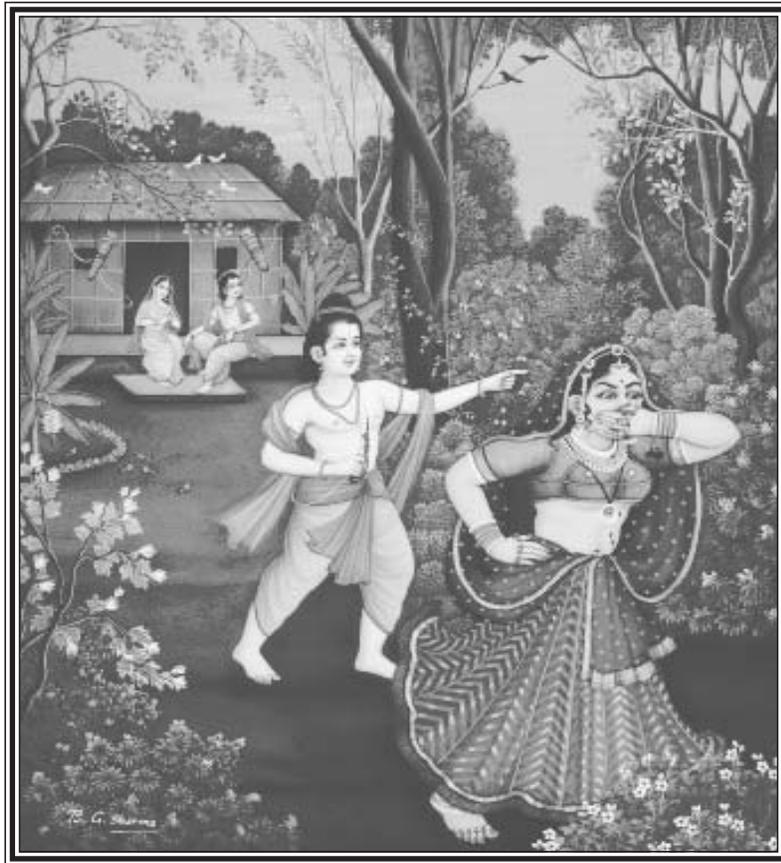
"Mother, will you  
ride raja, please"  
intoned Lûva.

"No, child. I would  
prefer to walk,"  
said Seeta,  
remembering the  
ceremonial  
processions on the  
backs of royal  
elephants.

The boys thought  
that Seeta was  
afraid of elephant  
rides.

"How can mother  
ride elephants? Besides she might be afraid." Kusä  
admonished Lûva.

The boys continued their journey through the  
forest introducing all the animals to her. She never



tired as she walked, listening to the kids.

“Mother, this is the garden.”

Seeta stood still. Dumbfounded she looked at the garden. It was like a smile of nature itself! Ashokavanam<sup>3</sup> was far inferior in beauty to this garden.

“What an accomplishment Soorpanakha!” mused Seeta.

“Come on, mother. Let’s go in.”

“I’ll go alone. Why don’t you two wander around the forest until evening and come back here? We’ll return to the hermitage together.” She sent the children away.

She went close by and called softly, “Soorpanakha!”

Soorpanakha turned around. She didn’t recognise Seeta.

“Who are you? Have you lost your way? How do you know my name?”

“I didn’t lose my way, Soorpanakha. In fact, I came looking for you. I’m Seeta.”

Soorpanakha was dumbfounded. Seeta...? This was Seeta? How she had changed!

All she remembered was the Seeta wearing heavy jewelry. Of course, she hadn’t looked at her for long.

Was this the same Seeta, the queen of the all-sustaining emperor Sree<sup>4</sup> Ramachandra<sup>5</sup> who killed Ravana and established the Aryan empire in the entire South?

Soorpanakha couldn’t believe it.

Why these cotton clothes? Why these garlands as jewelry? Why the sunburn on her golden skin? This is Seeta? Sree Rama’s wife Seeta?

“Seeta? You mean.... Sree Ramachandra’s...”

“I’m Seeta. Janaka’s daughter, Jaanaki<sup>6</sup>. Daughter of the Earth<sup>7</sup>,” said Seeta with pride, interrupting Soorpanakha.

“Then ..... Sree Rama .....?” asked a confused Soorpanakha.

“Sree Rama abandoned me. I’m living in Vaalmeekei’s hermitage now.”

Soorpanakha couldn’t utter a word. Sree Rama abandoned Seeta? No one knew the strength of the love between Rama and Seeta better than she. The price she paid for it Couldn’t the women in love with Sree Rama escape this agony?

Soorpanakha saw no signs of agony in Seeta, only a profound peace. “How much she has matured,” mused Soorpanakha.

“My children saw your garden yesterday. They saw you too. It’s they who brought me here today. Your garden is so pleasant and beautiful,” said Seeta,

with a smile.

“Those boys are your sons? How adorable they are!”

The flash of pride in Seeta’s face didn’t escape Soorpanakha.

“The plants, vines, and trees in this garden are all my children too,” She said.

“Yes. That’s why they are so beautiful,” agreed Seeta.

Soorpanakha’s pride was evident in her eyes.

“Tell me Soorpanakha, how is your life?”

“It is as beautiful and pleasant as this garden.”

“I am really happy for you Soorpanakha. I was worried about what would happen to you after that humiliation. I know your love for beauty. Could you live with your disfigured face? Every time I thought of you, I always wondered if you had committed suicide unable to bear the disfigurement.”

The love and kindness in her eyes melted Soorpanakha’s heart.

As a friendship sprang to life between the two women they were caressed by its warmth.

“You are brave and courageous,” said Seeta.

“Seeta, looking at me now, don’t assume that it was easy. I’ve grown tough through my struggles and discovered happiness in understanding the true meaning of beauty.

Life was unbearable in the early days of my mutilation. Looking at me, men, the handsome men I was infatuated with, used to hate me.

‘Why should I live’, I thought. Those were the hellish days for me. My mind was raging with pain and anger. How much I cursed Sree Rama, his brother, and you. My thoughts were venomous against you three. There was not even an iota of love in my heart while sheer hatred settled in. I, who worshipped beauty, started hating everything that was beautiful. My quest for beauty was transformed into jealousy towards everyone beautiful.

I became a walking volcano. A raging sorrow.”

Soorpanakha’s memories grew heavy on their hearts.

“How did you come out of all that pain, Soorpanakha?”

“It was very difficult. It was indeed difficult to discover the real meaning of beauty. I was proud of my great beauty. How ecstatic I used to feel looking at my nose. Your long Aryan noses seemed strange to me. A strange beauty of course, My nose was neither too long nor too short. I always felt that my nose was how God conceived a nose at the time of creation. I used to decorate my nose with yellow and white grass flowers as jewelry. They used to twinkle

like two stars on the nostrils. I was rapturous when my lovers gently kissed my nose.

No one can understand what it meant to lose that nose. I endured all that. I carried the weight of all the strange thoughts the disfigurement and ugliness brought on me. At times, I wanted to disfigure everything and everyone.

I had battled myself to come out of that anger, to love beauty again, and to find the essence of form and deformity.

This infinite beauty of nature helped me in that battle.

I labored hard to realise the oneness of form and deformity in nature. I've observed all forms of life. I've observed the uniformity in their stillness and their movement. I've discovered the secret of colors. I had no teacher to guide me. I searched myself. I searched every inch of nature. That transformed my very eyes. Suddenly everything appeared beautiful.

I, who had hated everything including myself, started loving everything even myself.

It took an extraordinary effort to realise that my emotion on seeing a wounded bird flutter was filled with love and a great sense of beauty.

I slowly learned to love these hands. I've learned to labor, create, and serve with these hands. It took more than ten years for this transformation. After those ten fruitful years of incessant focus and perseverance, I started raising this garden." She laid out the true beauty of her life's journey before Seeta.

"How beautiful you are Soorpanakha! No man may be able to recognise your beauty, but ...," Seeta choked.

Soorpanakha's trial was no less than her own trial by fire. Seeta was moved to tears when she realised this.

Soorpanakha's laughter rang out pleasantly.

"Don't men also have eyes and heart? I am not talking about men who only know hatred and mutilation."

"You mean..." though Seeta asked, she knew what Soorpanakha meant.

"You are right Seeta. I found the companionship of a man. There is a fortunate man who for a short

I labored hard to realise the oneness of form and deformity in nature. I've observed all forms of life. I've observed the uniformity in their stillness and their movement. I've discovered the secret of colors. I had no teacher to guide me. I searched myself. I searched every inch of nature. That transformed my very eyes. Suddenly everything appeared beautiful. I, who had hated everything including myself, started loving everything even myself.

while enjoys the beauty that flows from my hands into nature and gives himself up for me." She turned around and called out, "Sudheera."

A well-built man, well suited to his name, came there.

"Sudheera, this is Seeta."

Sudheera bowed respectfully.

"I called just to introduce you to Seeta."

Smiling Sudheera turned and left. With that simple act, Seeta gleaned a unique relationship between them that she hadn't seen between any other woman and man.

"So, you found fulfillment in your life."

"I've realised that the meaning of fulfillment is not only in the companionship of a man. I found true companionship only after learning that".

Seeta was listening to Soorpanakha attentively. There was depth and wisdom in her words. She felt like listening to her endlessly.

"How about you Seeta."

"My life finds its fulfillment in raising my sons."

"Is that the ideal for your life?"

"Yes. I am Rama's wife. I could not fulfill my duties as the queen. Don't I? I have to provide heirs to Rama's kingdom".

"How your life is entwined with that kingdom, though you never lived there."

"Can you escape from it once you become the wife of the king?" laughed Seeta.

"For some reason I was afraid of the kingdom from the very beginning. However much my brother tried to convince me, I couldn't stay in Lanka. Nowhere else will you find the happiness that comes with wandering in the forest."

"I too like the forest life. Though Rama abandoned me, this forest life lessened my anguish."

Much time had passed in their conversation without them realising it.

"My children don't know that they are sons of Sree Rama. I have not told them.

They'll know when the time comes."

"Will they stay in the forest even for a moment once they know?" asked Soorpanakha, looking sadly at Seeta.

"They too like living in the forest," replied Seeta,

feebly.

“May be. But, how much does the kingdom care for the forest anyway? Perhaps it is inevitable for the children of the forest to migrate for the development of the cities and to protect civilised folks.”

Seeta too was aware of inevitability.

“What will you do then? Will you stay alone in Vaalmeeeki’s hermitage?”

“No Soorpanakha. I’ll take refuge with my mother earth.”

“Seeta, where is it that your mother is not present? But, I think that nowhere else is she more beautiful than she is here.” Soorpanakha looked around the garden with pride.

Seeta smiled, acknowledging Soorpanakha’s invitation. She was deeply moved. Sisterly feelings filled her heart.

“I’ll certainly come Soorpanakha. When my children leave me for the city, I’ll once again become the daughter of this earth. I’ll find a new meaning for my life resting under these cool shady trees.”

The conversation stopped with the arrival of the children.

Soorpanakha served them delicious fruits. The children promptly devoured them.

“Who is that lady mother” the children queried, on their way back.

“She is a close friend, very dear to me.”

“How come you never told us about her?”

“When the time comes, you’ll know everything. But, you should never forget the way to this garden in the forest. No matter where you go or whatever you do, don’t forget this way. Promise?”

“We promise” replied Lûva and Kusä, in chorus.

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### **Footnotes :**

1. For those not familiar with the Indian epic Raamaayana, here is a brief background relevant to the story: Rama was exiled to the forest due to internal family politics just as he was ready to be enthroned in Ayodhya, the capital of Kosala. His wife Seeta and halfbrother Lakshmana accompanied him to the forest. In exile, they ended up staying in a forest that belonged to the ‘demon’ kingdom Lanka, ruled by its mighty king Ravana.

Ravana’s sister Soorpanakha made the forest her home and roamed freely. When she saw Rama, she was infatuated with him and wanted him to make love to her. He refused saying that he took a vow to be loyal to his wife Seeta and suggested that she approach his half-brother Lakshmana. When she approached Lakshmana, he made fun of her, teased her, and eventually cut off her nose and ears as punishment for her advances. On learning about this, Ravana abducted Seeta to retaliate for the mutilation of his sister.

Rama eventually killed Ravana in battle and got Seeta back. However, Seeta had to walk through fire and come out unscathed to prove that she had remained chaste during the abduction period before Rama accepted her as his wife again. Rama returned to Ayodhya and assumed the throne. Shortly thereafter, Rama abandoned the now pregnant Seeta in the forest citing rumors among the populace about her infidelity during abduction by Ravana. There she was sheltered in the hermitage of the sage Vaalmeeeki, the author of the epic.

2. Both Lûva and Kusä refer to the sage Vaalmeeeki as grandfather.
3. The heavenly beautiful garden in Lanka (Ravana’s capital) where Seeta spent her year of abduction.
4. Prefix to names indicating respect.
5. Rama is also called Ramachandra.
6. Another name for Seeta indicating that she is the daughter of the king Janaka.
7. Seeta was found as an infant in a box in the ground. The box was unearthed when Janaka was ploughing the farm and hence she is also referred to as the daughter of the earth.

## Composite Traditions in Fractured Regions

Institute for Social Democracy

New Delhi, India

How is one to understand the co-existence of multiple layers of identities (national, regional, religious, territorial, ethnic or any other) in a curious mix? Is it possible to decide before hand which of these plays a major role in the general process of identity formation? National identities are generally a modern phenomenon the world over and do not go back in time prior to 19th century. Religious (or ethnic) identities, on the other hand, are much older though the nature and character of these identities have undergone a profound transformation in modern times. In particular, the consolidation of religious solidarities across geographical territories and the social and political manipulation of these solidarities is undisputedly a modern phenomenon.

This problem becomes more acute in the case of regions that are fractured today but constituted organic cultural wholes in the past. The case of Punjab and Bengal readily comes to mind. Few would dispute that these two regions, situated on the northern and the eastern corners of the sub-continent, enjoyed a cultural compositeness that was rooted, among other things, in territorial integrity. Both the regions were multi-religious since medieval times. According to the census of 1931, in Bengal Muslims and Hindus constituted 54 and 43 percent, respectively, of the total population. In Punjab, another religion, Sikhism, added to religious plurality of the region where Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs constituted 55, 31, and 11 percent of the total population, respectively. These figures may give the impression of culture in these areas being divided along religious lines, but this was far from being the case. For one, religions here (Punjab and Bengal) for most of the period were far from being undifferentiated and monolithic entities. Hinduism in particular remained remarkably plural, allowing for multiple sects *within* its fold. It may be

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The question of plurality of identities is not the same for all the regions. Some regions (or some groups and communities) are likely to be affected by it in a much more decisive manner than some others.

This problem is particularly acute in the case of Bengal. Let us observe it more concretely. A Muslim living in western pocket of Bengal today faces a question about his primary identity: Is he a part of the *religious* Muslim community (*Ummah* or universal Muslim brotherhood); or a *regional* Bengali community; or a *national* Indian community? In other words his national, religious, and regional identities are not likely to converge together and are more likely to place him into different groups making different, sometimes conflicting, demands on his loyalty and allegiance. There may of course be other identities (based on gender, locality, profession, sect) available to him. But in the context of Bengal, the regional, religious and national identities have been historically crucial.

At this stage it may be important to point out that the question of multiple identities has generally accompanied the history of mankind without creating or constituting a problem, *till the arrival of modernity*. Man (the term 'man' is used here as a generic specie term rather than a specific gender term) has lived in various groups and has been able to identify with each of those groups (based on clan, caste, religion or territory) without experiencing any pressures on his conscience or loyalty. The existence of multiple identities has been a general feature of the history of mankind; it has not been a *problem* or a dilemma. Much of it however changes with the

arrival of modernity, which, for a variety of reasons, insists on a *hierarchy* of identities along with a *plurality* of identities. In other words, the modern man is confronted with a situation in which he is expected to pick out one of his multiple identities as the most important or the central identity. He is expected to choose one identity as the basic, all-encompassing, overarching identity. Quite often it is the national identity that takes precedence over other, or it might be a national identity disguised as religious or vice-versa. Whatever be the case, the multiplicity of identities which is a feature of human condition, when carried into the modern conditions, has to put up with a hierarchization of identities.

This insistence on the hierarchy of identities creates a problem in the context of Bengal (also Punjab to an extent). The area of Bengal enjoyed a geographical and cultural compactness for a long time but in the 20th century, underwent as many as three partitions. First partition (1905) was soon revoked (in 1912)

but the second partition (in 1947) proved to be decisive. One part of Bengal was reconstituted as East Pakistan and part of the newly created nation-state of Pakistan with its headquarters in Punjab. The other part, called West Bengal remained with India as one of its states. This division of Bengal was based on religion, with eastern and western parts constituting Muslim and Hindu majorities, respectively. It was hoped in the newly created Pakistan that religion, or more specifically the ideology of Islam, would provide the necessary cement to hold together culturally and geographically diverse areas. But the geographical and cultural identity asserted itself in 1971 and this area was reconstituted as Bangla Desh, as a sovereign nation-state. Cultural and geographical factors have kept Bangla Desh separate from Pakistan. But what has kept the two Bengals separate from each other? The two areas enjoy cultural and linguistic similarities. The national anthem of Bangla Desh is written by Rabindra Nath Tagore who may have the unique distinction of having his poems as the national anthem in two separate nation-states. So what keeps the two Bengals apart? Is it religion? Or is it the logic of nation-state which, once formed, cannot be dissolved easily?

The interesting thing about Bengal is that in spite of being a Muslim majority area, it never had an exclusively Islamic flavour. This was because the Islam that triumphed and flourished in Bengal was not the high, doctrinal and classical form of Islam, but the low, Sufi, ritualistic and the unorthodox variety of Islam. This created openings for syncretic and composite culture that dominated Bengal's cultural landscape till the 19th century.

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practices of Bengal as he thought they were 'un-Islamic'. These supposed deviations from Islamic practices continued to be commented upon in the 17th and 18th centuries also. A late 19th century British resident in Bengal, Dr. James

Wise, noted the "corrupt Hinduised rites" of Bengal Muslims. At the beginning of the 20th century, Syed Amir Ali, a distinguished Muslim intellectual, looked down upon the Bengali Muslims who were "chiefly converts from Hinduism" and still observed many "Hindu customs and institutions." A little later, William Crooke, a British scholar of popular religions in India, regarded the Bengali Muslims as those who "assimilated Islam only in an *imperfect way*". Malik Feroz Khan Noon, the Governor of East Pakistan in 1952, regarded Bengali Muslims as only "half-Muslims."

Quite apart from contemporary commentators and politicians, many historians have also commented on this phenomenon. Mohammad Mujeeb called them only "partly converted" and Peter Hardy referred to them as "census Muslims" He wrote: "... the real challenge to purity of belief and practice in Islam in medieval India was to be found ... in the convert's countryside – in the ignorance of new Muslims of the requirements of Islam and in the insidious infiltrations of 'creeping Hinduism' into the daily life of the convert." Another Bengali historian commented that the religious lives of Bengali Muslims were dominated

by a kind of *folk Islam* “having hardly any connection with the dogmas of religion.” Yet another Bengali historian with high Islamic leanings lamented this tendency and wrote: “Thus long years of association with non-Muslims who far outnumbered them, cut off from the original home of Islam, and living with half-converts from Hinduism, the Muslims had greatly deviated from the original faith and had become Indianised.”

All these comments need to be understood in a proper perspective. The dominant form of Islam that was practised in Bengal through the medieval times and till the 19th century, contained strong syncretic elements. This syncretism was the result of very tentative and superficial penetration of values of high Islam from Arabia into Bengali Islam that was richly endowed with many Hindu/non-Islamic practices. The literature of high Islam, written in Arabic and Persian, found it difficult to reach the common Muslims. So, if the

Islamic traditions codified in the Arabic and Persian languages were not accessible to the lower classes of Bengali Muslims, but the many non-Islamic indigenous traditions were; it inevitably followed that the poor Muslims would be guided more by the local traditions than by classical Islam. One Syed Sultan wrote: “There is no dearth of *kitab*s in Arabic and Persian [which were] for the learned alone and not for the ignorant folk [who were] unable to grasp a single precept of their religion [and remained] immersed in stories and fictions of local origin. Hindus and Muslims in every home took themselves with avid interest to the Hindu epic, the *Mahabharata*, rendered into Bengali by Kavindra-Parameswara ... and nobody thought about *Khoda* and *Rasul*.” The other Hindu epic *Ramayana* were equally popular with the Muslims of Bengal. “The story of Rama was heard respectfully even by the yavanas [Muslims] and they were in tears to hear about the predicament of Rama at the loss of Sita”, noted another commentator.

The prophet-based tradition of Islam was combined with the incarnation (*avataar*)-based tradition of Hinduism in order to present a version of Islam that would be intelligible to the poor Muslims of Bengal. All this was done because Rama and Krishna had already reached the Bengali Muslim households through local cultural routes. It was for these reasons that syncretic traditions registered a strong presence into the social and psychic universe of the people of Bengal. It was a similar story with Punjab where the strong Sufi movement introduced syncretic elements in to popular culture.

This linguistic divide fed into the already existing social and cultural divide between the *Ashraf* (noble or from pure lineage) and the *Ajlaf* (local converts from lower groups). One Sharif lamented this inaccessibility of high Islam to local Muslims: “The refusal or inability of the higher Mosalmans to adopt the Bengali has already affected the relation between them and the lower Mosalmans. We do not learn the Bengali – whilst our lower orders cannot learn the Persian ... There are thus no means of fellow-feeling or of acting together.” Language did not just mean access to sacred texts. It was also a medium of cultural communication, idioms, symbols and imageries. When all of these were inaccessible to common

Bengali Muslims, they held on to what was available for them – the traditional Bengali ballads and folklore and local mythological traditions of diverse kinds.

When the Islamic mediators tried to make high Islam intelligible and meaningful to Bengali Muslims,

they could only do it by deviating from the high Islamic norms. Therefore *Nabi* and *Rasul* were projected not so much as prophets but rather as *avataars* (incarnation). And so God was depicted as having created Mohammad out of “his own self”; *Krishna*, the Hindu god was depicted as God’s messenger. Rama was also portrayed as a prophet. Thus the prophet-based tradition of Islam was combined with the incarnation (*avataar*)-based tradition of Hinduism in order to present a version of Islam that would be intelligible to the poor Muslims of Bengal. All this was done because Rama and Krishna had already reached the Bengali Muslim households through local cultural routes. It was for these reasons that syncretic traditions registered a strong presence into the social and psychic universe of the people of Bengal. It was a similar story with Punjab where the strong Sufi movement introduced syncretic elements in to popular culture.

## Other Side of Culture

There can be no People without a Culture. There Culture may be too simple, or complexly un-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 liesure loving. They take the form of begging, enforcing fees and levies, collection of toles 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 with out 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 jointly. This in stark contrast to the DCH somen indulging in make-ups, artificial beautification, and the like! Wherever the DCHs have intruded like a thorn, they have become a problem. Onside 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 s u r r e p t i o u s exploitative activities of the DCHs. The Productive Work Culture of Dalits was slowly transformed

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!

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 Inter-National 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](http://www.dalitindia.com)*

## Searching Peace – through Composite Heritage

Pervaiz Mohabbat

*Cathe Foundation, Lahore, Pakistan*

The motherland Sub-continent Indo-Pak has deep routes in religiously influenced Sufism, Shrines, cultural traditions and values. Sufi teaching is generally accepted by people from all walks of life. Thus, scientific and modern society has been divided into sub-sectors and religions in sub-groups or denominations, which has scattered the true spirit of composite heritage associated with true human values that GOD likes and accepts. The more man is going far from the nature, the more conflict conditions have arisen. Searching for PEACE demands to recollect people from all religions, faiths and cultures to adopt the generally accepted socio-religious life where needs, priorities and values are common.

Cathe Foundation in this regard organized an exposure visit to a Sikh Temple at Bebey Nankey (the birthplace of Elder Sister of Guru Nanak) here in Lahore on 29<sup>th</sup> of June 2006 in which 32 people from four major religions namely Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism were present from different areas and communities. Purpose of this exposure visit was to learn deeply about the religious values and teachings of Guru Nanak deepening the common teachings of other religions too.

Rajinder Singh (Giani) thoroughly briefed the participants about basics of Sikhism, and common teachings related to the other existing religions, on which the number of questions were raised and

quenched. Christians, Muslims and Hindu have also witnessed the commonalities in the said four religions. It was very much clear that besides the major differences in religious teachings, there are number of commonalities, which can become a source of inspiration and unity. Members from all religions were inspired with the spirit of God's uniqueness and plan to bring humanity together.

Haji Mohammad Yousaf witnessed, "I had never thought beyond my Islamic point of view, this visit has deeply exposed my learning and openness towards other living religions. I've read Guru Nanak but today have really got inspiration from his teachings, we must keep visiting such places as they are meant for us".

Neena Naureen said, "Sikhism is closely associated with Christianity, I feel it is one as it also contains the message of true humanity and love. To be very close to the nature is another one's learning. I am deeply touched spiritually and morally".

Amernath Randhawa expressed, "In today's world, composite living is the only key to successful living because, the world is reducing day by day and we have to live in a small village where we have common needs, common problems and common solutions to them. This visit is an eye opener for me and others because it practically gives energy to accept and honors hours point of view and values".

## Initiative by ISD on Composite Heritage (CH)

Institute for Social Democracy

*New Delhi, India*

Institute for Social Democracy (ISD) organised a six day workshop on Composite Heritage from 15<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> April 2006, in Nainital with the organisations working in Uttaranchal state. There were 18 people who participated in the workshop. The workshop was intended towards sensitizing the people towards their Composite Heritage and how they can use the composite culture to further strengthen their activities.

Uttaranchal is a hilly region with tough geographic and weather conditions that make the lives of people full of everyday hardship. People living here depend

on the water, forest and land (jal, jungle, zamin) resources. The state has gradually taken away all rights of the people on these natural resources. As a result there is a huge unemployment problem here. This further leads to the migration of people from hills to the plains, so that they can support their families. All these have been feeding into the conflict in this area.

These conditions affect the women who bear the brunt of all these. To intervene in these situations identifying the composite heritage and using them as a tool was the focus of the workshop.

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