

SVARAJ, REVERENCE AND CREATIVITY**RAJENDRA PRASAD**

K. C. Bhattacharya makes an obviously persuasive appeal to his thoughtful contemporaries, or rather to all thoughtful Indians, to realise adequately the great importance of what he calls svaraj in ideas. According to him it is indispensable in all spheres of Indian life and the result of our not having properly cherished it is the sad fact that "Slavery has entered into our very soul" (para 10).

In the process of presenting the case for svaraj in ideas he has said several general things about the role of alien and indigenous traditions and cultures, creativity, inter-cultural understanding and appraisal, etc. Most of the issues he has raised are very broad and basic. They have been, and are still being raised by modern Indian thinkers of a certain persuasion, and some of them have characterised, or attempted to solve them, in ways quite similar to Bhattacharya's. In fact, the prevailing intellectual climate of the country seems to assure us that the class of such thinkers is not going to be extinct in the foreseeable future. Therefore, the issues, current mode of their characterisation and their proposed solutions are likely to be reincarnated again and again, in similar or slightly modified forms, without seeming to be obviously irrelevant, and thereby giving the impression that there is in them an element of eternity.

I shall examine in the present essay the picture of these issues as drawn by Bhattacharya and also the solutions to them he has proposed. But I shall also try not to lose sight of the basic factors which motivate such attempts. Consequently my discussion of Bhattacharya's views has become a little more detailed or prolix than a close examination of an individual thinker's views on a particular topic should be. I hope this loss in respect of conciseness would be compensated for by the relev-

ance of the comments made here even to positions other than Bhattacharya's, advanced by thinkers of a similar orientation to his.

By 'svaraj' Bhattacharya means self-determination, and mentions two kinds of it, svaraj in politics and svaraj in ideas. He does not say much, even enough, about what svaraj positively is, but explains what it is mostly by saying what its opposite, to which he gives the name 'subjection', is. He seems to believe that to say what subjection is is to say what svaraj is not, and to say what it is not is to say what svaraj is. To say what a thing is not is sometimes a good way to suggest what it is, but it is not always an infallible method, since it is possible to draw a wrong conclusion about what it in fact is from a statement saying what it is not. Let us see how Bhattacharya proceeds in this matter.

Political subjection, the opposite of political svaraj, is according to him, domination of man over man or, more precisely, the domination of one people by another. Cultural subjection, the opposite of svaraj in ideas, is on the other hand, "a subtler domination exercised in the sphere of ideas by one culture over another" (para 1). It is more serious and difficult to shake off than the former. "There is cultural subjection only when one's traditional cast of ideas and sentiments is superseded without comparison or competition by a new cast representing an alien culture which possesses one like a ghost. This subjection is slavery of the spirit" (Loc. Cit.). When a person shakes himself free from it, "he experiences a rebirth" and that is what Bhattacharya calls 'svaraj in ideas'. It is, thus, emancipation from domination by an alien culture. This characterisation is, in effect, negative since it only specifies what one should get rid of, and not what positive trait he should have, or cultivate, in order to retain, or be blessed with, svaraj in ideas.

Bhattacharya generally uses the negative characterisation when he wants to highlight the status of svaraj in ideas as an extremely important national virtue. Since this seems to be the major objective, or at least one of the major objectives, of his, references to the negative form of the concept naturally

abound in his discussion. Perhaps the reason for this is its built-in normative force. To say that we ought to shake ourselves free from domination by any alien culture is to say something the normative truth of which is obvious or unquestionable. But this is so because of the built-in normative (and emotive) force of the terms 'shake ourselves free from', 'domination,' and 'alien'. Therefore, the sentence 'we ought to shake ourselves free from domination by an alien culture' may be said to express a normative truism or tautology, or at least to possess some important features of a truism or tautology. This becomes more clearly visible if one tries to imagine the possibility of denying it because, then, he finds that he can deny it only at the risk of appearing to be a perverted person, or at least a person with no national self-dignity. Who would dare to say that we ought not to, or need not, shake ourselves free from ... ? Bhattacharya's call for *svaraj* in ideas derives a large part of its persuasiveness from the truistic character of the form he has given to it.

Bhattacharya thinks that the call is one which needs to be forcefully given and sincerely attended to. He would be justified, however, in so thinking, in spite of its being truistic in character, if and only if he succeeds in elevating it to a position which accords to it some positive, concrete content without making it obviously questionable.

To enable his conception of *svaraj* in ideas, as presented above, to function effectively as a viable and intelligible principle in the world of thought or action, (a) he should have stated clearly which aspect or aspects of the alien culture, in his opinion, have dominated which aspect or aspects of the indigenous culture. To make the statement pointful, (b) he should have first given an objective characterisation of the basic features of the alien and indigenous cultures, and (c) empirically substantiated the claim that the former has dominated the latter. In addition, (d) he should have also explained, or at least stated, what, according to him, constituted the positive content of the concept of *svaraj* in ideas, that is specified which positive traits of character (i) one should have in order to be able to shake off the domination, or (ii) which ones

he should acquire, or is automatically endowed with, after he has shaken off the domination, i.e., after his rebirth. To carry further the message of his metaphor of rebirth, it is not the mere fact that one has been reborn, but the kind of life he leads thereupon, which ensures his mokṣa. But Bhattacharya has not done any thing to fulfil any one of the conditions a to d.

He does not present even the briefest characterisation of the alien culture, nor even mention any aspect of it which, in his opinion, has dominated the indigenous culture. He, however, reminds us of the fact that "we had an indigenous culture of a high degree of development the comparative value of which cannot be said to have yet been sufficiently appraised" (para 2). But in this case as well he does not give any account of what this highly developed indigenous culture is, nor mentions any one of its aspects which has allegedly been dominated or overshadowed and which deserves our immediate attention and respect. He has chosen to speak in terms of extreme generalities, with obviously no care for historical, empirical details or justification. It is extremely difficult, therefore, to have a clear understanding of the nature of his call to protect the identity of the indigenous culture, and consequently it turns out to be equally difficult to give an assessment of his position which may not be easily misunderstood or misjudged.

By the alien culture he admittedly means Western culture and by that, in all likelihood, British culture. By the indigenous culture perhaps he means classical Hindu culture, and not the medieval, or modern, Indian culture. It is very difficult, and in no sense indispensable, to say that every aspect of, or every idea contained in, classical Hindu culture is worth respecting, preserving, or protecting. Bhattacharya would have very greatly helped us in properly understanding him had he said which aspects or ideas of the indigenous culture he considers relevant to modern India, or the India of his time. It is not even a healthy patriotism, far from being objective scholarship (or philosophy), to claim or suggest of a classical or ancient culture that every fibre of it is of unquestionable value.

Immediately after putting forth his basic claim, with which he begins the lecture, that it is the domination by the alien culture which has destroyed or very greatly weakened our svaraj in ideas, he proceeds to complain that western culture "has not generally been assimilated by us in an open eyed way with our old-world Indian mind. That Indian mind has simply lapsed in most cases for our educated men, and subsided below the conscious level of culture" (Loc. Cit.). It is not, however, clear how the fact that the alien culture has remained unassimilated is related to the fact that it has dominated over the indigenous culture. Obviously unassimilatedness and domination are not the same thing, nor is the causal link between them clearly visible.

The seriousness with which he refers to the domination by the alien culture generates the hope that he would say something more concrete and specific about it. But unless we are willing to concede that by it he just means that the alien culture has been accepted without being properly assimilated, he seems to have left it and consequently the nature of svaraj in ideas as well, the very subject of his lecture, almost undiscussed. But to concede this would entail that the way to attain svaraj is to properly assimilate the assimilable elements of the alien culture. Such a position can be maintained only if there are compelling reasons for assimilating an alien culture which "has been simply upon us" (Loc. Cit.). But he does not mention any. In fact, the claim about the unassimilatedness of the alien culture, even if valid, is, as I have already said, another claim, and not the same as the one about its domination or consequent subjection, and therefore even if valid, it cannot by itself validate the latter, nor can it show the path to svaraj in ideas.

According to him, "there can be no vital assimilation" (Loc. Cit.) because the old-world Indian mind, with which the western culture should have been assimilated, has simply lapsed for most of us. But he never says what this old-world Indian mind is, why it has lapsed, and what kind of event its lapsing is. It is, therefore, difficult to understand what he means by

attributing the lack of vital assimilation to its lapse, and almost impossible to make any effort to resuscitate it.

One of the major problems with Bhattacharya's essay is that he has left vague and unexplained almost all of his key-concepts. The unassimilated Western ideas "induce in us", he says, "a shadow mind that functions like a real mind except in the matter of genuine creativeness" (para 4), and leaves one at the mercy of his fancy to guess what 'induce' 'shadow mind', 'real mind', and 'genuine creativeness' mean. These and most of his other key-terms look like very attractive, beautiful, keys, but keys one is not told how to use and on which locks to use. Therefore, he may even doubt if they can open any lock at all.

Following him in using his vague terms vaguely, one can even say that earlier he has attributed the failure to assimilate to the lapse of the old-world Indian mind and now, in saying that the unassimilated, or half-assimilated, Western culture induces in us a shadow mind, he is, in effect, attributing the lapse of the old-world Indian mind to the un- or half-assimilation. What else could the shadow mind be if not the lapsed Indian mind?

Bhattacharya's concept of assimilation is a little puzzling in another way as well. After suggesting that the assimilable western ideas should be assimilated with indigenous ones, he adds that "The ideas embodied in a foreign language are properly understood only when we can express them in our own way" (para 25). Therefore, he pleads for "a genuine translation of foreign ideas into our native ideas before we accept or reject them" (Loc. Cit.). But a little earlier, while arguing against universalism, he has said that "no idea of one cultural language can exactly be translated in another cultural language" (para 12). This means that a genuine translation does not have to be an exact translation. Let us grant that it does not. But then he must say how much of inexactitude is permissible in a genuine translation. Unless he clarifies this issue his plea for a genuine translation of ideas would neither carry any weight, nor would it provide any effective guidance as to how to prepare for a vital assimilation. Even without giving precise criteria for the nations involved, one can retrieve thi

situation by giving appropriate examples, even imaginary or model-type, of vital and non-vital assimilation (i.e. hybridisation), and of genuine but inexact translation. But this is something Bhattacharya is not at all inclined to do.

As against universalism, the theory which believes in the possibility of values or ideals commonly appropriate or valid for all humanity, or for several societies, Bhattacharya argues for the individuality, the distinctive genius, of communities and their cultures. He asserts that "the ideals of a community spring from its past history and from the soil: they have not necessarily a universal application and they are not always self-luminous to other communities" (para 16). Therefore, in assimilating a foreign ideal, we have to see that "the foreign ideal is to be assimilated to our ideal, and not the other way. There is no demand for the surrender of our individuality in any case: *svadharma nidhanam* ' (para 16). Obviously he thinks that one who follows this advice of his would achieve vital assimilation. But to me the truth seems to be the other way round. One who starts his work of assimilation with the assumption (or prejudice) that the foreign ideal is to be assimilated to his, and not his to the foreign, that even destruction is to be preferred while protecting the individuality of his culture, is very unlikely to proceed in an open-eyed, objective, manner. If I am willing to prefer destruction to letting my dharma be modified, how can I be expected to be fair to other cultural ideals? If adjusting our indigenous ideals to foreign ideals is undesirable, then doing the reverse should also be equally undesirable.

His entire approach in the paper may seem to be very patriotic, and perhaps its patriotic appearance is its main charm even to-day. But this patriotism, as will be clear from the paragraph that follows, is of a special brand which on occasions seems to be indistinguishable from traditionalism.

While criticising universalism he makes a distinction between two kinds of rationalism, the right kind and the wrong kind. The right kind of rationalism is "the efflux of reverence, reverence for the traditional institutions through which customary sentiments are deepened into transparent ideals"

(para 18). The wrong kind is one in which "the simplification and generalisation of ideals is effected by unregenerate understanding with its mechanical separation of the essential from the inessential. The essential is judged as such here not through reverence, not through deepened spiritual insight, but through the accidental likes and dislikes of the person" (Loc., Cit.). It seems he cannot approve of reason if it is neutral or objective in its approach to traditional institutions, and would definitely disapprove of its being critical of them. It has to be reverential to them. If it is not, it becomes a slave to the user's likes and dislikes. It is obvious now that what he calls the right kind of rationalism is nothing but a dignified traditionalism. There, in effect according to him, only he can rightly assimilate western ideals with indigenous ones who approaches the former only after having inculcated an attitude of reverence for the latter.

Since even the classical Hindu traditions do not constitute a homogenous mass, nor do they contain only elements of universal or unconditional value, a reverential attitude is no guarantee that the traditions one reveres are all desirable, and therefore the ideals one considers representative of the Indian culture all impeccable. If such a thing actually happens, the resulting assimilation is bound to be a greater evil than the patchwork of ideals, foreign and indigenous, Bhattacharya declares to be evil. In fact, in his scheme of things there is no mechanism which may function as a deterrent to the occurrence of the former evil, nor is there any built-in criterion by which it can be judged to be evil. Rather, the adoption of his frame-work can, with ingenuity, be used to defend traditionalism, regionalism, or sectarianism, which are in no way less dangerous than universalism which he has declared to be "our greatest danger" (para 21).

Bhattacharya's suggestion for having reverence for the indigenous traditions and culture may, however, be construed as filling in an important gap in his theory. It has been pointed out that he has given primarily a negative characterisation of the concept of *svaraj* and therefore needs to provide to it a positive content. It may be said, in his favour, that the above

suggestion has been made with this end in view. That is considered as a positive concept, svaraj in ideas consists in assimilating the alien traditions with the indigenous traditions having first inculcated an attitude of reverence for the latter. Then, in order to have svaraj in ideas, one should shake off the domination by the alien traditions, generate in himself reverence for his indigenous traditions, and assimilate the assimilable elements of the former. This is a positive enough characterisation of svaraj. But one needs to remember that one's reverence may not only create blocks in the way of fair assimilation, it may also lead to his domination or subjection by his own, indigenous, traditions. Any tradition can dominate an individual, and even an indigenous one can dominate him to the extent of destroying, or very greatly weakening, his judgmental, decision-making ability, his ability to think freely, objectively and dispassionately. If such a thing happens, it will be nothing less than the annihilation, or at least the suppression, of svaraj in ideas. Therefore, reverence for the indigenous traditions is not the right kind of material to be fed into the negative characterisation of the latter to give to it a satisfactory positive content.

One's reverence for a tradition is very likely to increase the latter's power to influence and mould his life-style, to make him receptive to the influence, and to weaken his ability to resist it. If the tradition is indigenous, its influencing power will get fortified by his nationalist, patriotic, sentiments, which may act as a shield to protect it and glorify his subjugation to it as the fulfilment of a national duty, his svadharma, his devotion for the cultural heritage of his country, his right response to all that he owes to his forefathers, etc. Besides, the indigenous traditions Bhattacharya wants us to revere are our ancient traditions. Generally the ancientness of a tradition adds to its prestige, sustains it against occasional attacks and increases its hold on our psychology. Therefore, reverence for traditions which are both indigenous and ancient is likely to exercise on us a very tight grip, making it seem almost unnatural or derogatory to question their sanctity.

In a country open to the influence of an alien culture, one's subjugation to his own traditions may be treated by some as a safeguard against his possible subjugation by the former. One may feel tempted to believe that it will not let him be (re-) subjugated by the alien cultures. This may be true, but it is like the belief that a dead man cannot re-die. But it is not to be forgotten that the dead man certainly can stink.

One who enjoys being subjugated by one tradition can be prone to subjugation by another if he finds the latter more enjoyable or convenient. Even in philosophy, one who thinks it is good philosophy to reverentially recount the views of Sankara will very gladly do the same thing with respect to Kant if he finds Kant equally, or more, convenient, or satisfying to his taste, or fashionable. If he is more generous, he would present a comparative study of the two philosophers, recounting with equal reverence, the views of both in the same work!

Bhattacharya makes his conception of assimilation further prone to converge towards a kind of Indian traditionalism by his associated doctrine of the eternality of the spiritual ideals. As he says, "In spiritual life, however, there is no demand for compromising our ideals in order to have a smooth sailing with the times. Here, if possible and so far as lies in our power, the times have to be adapted to our life and not our life to the times" (para 13). Since we have to have reverence for our spiritual ideals and they are not to be adapted to the times, if we come across any spiritual ideal of the west not cohering with them, we have to simply reject it, or adapt it to suit ours. In this region, since the ideals are unalterable, we have only to revere and protect our, Indian, spiritual traditions. Real, meaningful, assimilation, of the Western ideals, is, thus, ruled out in a region which is, on Bhattacharya's own admission, the most important one.

The chances of an indigenous tradition dominating one's thoughts and action-patterns in a much more gripping manner, therefore, would be greater than those of an alien tradition. Since it is indigenous, he may not even feel that he is dominated by it, and even enjoy and take pride in his subjection.

If the domination by an alien culture is "subtler", "ordinarily of an unconscious character", and therefore "implies slavery from the very start" (para 1), domination by an indigenous culture is likely to outdo the latter in all these respects. Bhattacharya does not realise that it is more difficult to emancipate oneself from the domination by an indigenous tradition than from that by an alien one, and that any domination can weaken one's *svaraj*.

He contrasts cultural subjection with political subjection but does not take note of indigenous political subjection and perhaps therefore misses to note the importance of indigenous cultural subjection. A people can be dominated quite severely by a powerful indigenous group or individual, with all the undesirable consequences, or even more, which a foreign domination can bring about. If emancipation from foreign domination, political as well as cultural, is to be prized, emancipation from indigenous domination, political as well as cultural, is not to be less prized.

One may take the stand that an indigenous tradition cannot dominate, but this will be empirically untenable. Or, he may refuse to call its domination domination. Traditionalists quite often seem to take the latter stand. To them bondage is not bondage if it is to an indigenous tradition. Using a satire by Bharatendu Hariścandra, it amounts to declaring that 'Vaidikī Himsā Himsā Na Bhavati'.

In provoking one to resist or shake off cultural domination, whether alien or indigenous, man's reason, or rationality, plays the most important role. It makes him realise the shortcomings of the dominating tradition and prompts him to assert his independence. But this can be done only by a critical, unbiased, objective, reason, by one which has not lost its ability to see both sides of the issue, and not by one which has already lost its objectivity by having become reverential to the dominating (alien or indigenous) tradition. Reason, which is reverential to the indigenous tradition, is the genuine reason for Bhattacharya, and therefore in his ideal world reason cannot contribute to emancipation from indigenous cultural sub-

jection if it ever takes place. But no one can deny that it had taken place even in Bhattacharya's times.

Reverence, whether it is for a person, principle, or practice, may sometimes destroy, distort, or unduly restrain, the use of one's *svaraj* in ideas if he already has it, and if he does not, it may make him incognisant of the latter's worth. It is dispassionate reason which prevents reverence from doing all this. When reason itself becomes reverential, the distance between rationalism and dogmatism (or conservatism) becomes too short.

For Bhattacharya reason is either reverential to the indigenous traditions, or unregenerate understanding working through one's accidental likes and dislikes. It is really surprising that he could not think of the possibility of reason functioning as an objective discriminator, as a neutral agent, which is neither reverential nor arbitrary. If non-reverential reason is only *kutarka*, then to make use of only that sort of reason which is reverential to the (indigenous) traditions is the best thing for the wise to do. As Vidyāraṇya says, "*tasmāt Kutarkaṁ Saṁtyajya mumukṣuḥ śrutiṁ āśrayet*" (Pañcadaśī, Chap. VIII, 68). Bhattacharya's approach to the role of reason is, thus, being in conformity with a dominant strand of classical Indian tradition, not non-traditional. To say that reason can deliver the right kind of goods only if it is reverential to the traditions is only stylistically different from saying that it can only if it is reverential to *śruti*.

He seems to be almost echoing the ancient voice when declares that "progress in the spiritual world is not achieved by a detached reason judging an old god and a new god. The way to know facts is not the way to know values" (para 20). He does not seem to realise that if objective reason is declared incompetent to be employed in the spiritual world, it does not follow that reverential reason is. Nor does he realise that very much depends upon how the spiritual world is conceived and that his way to conceive it is not the only possible one. The way to know facts is definitely not the way to know values, but the knowledge of facts need not be irrelevant to, or may even be necessary for, acquiring a sound knowledge of values.

Here again, to repeat, very much depends upon how facts and values and their relationship are conceived, and Bhattacharya's way to conceive them is not the only plausible one.

That one's reverence for his indigenous traditions can also take away his svaraj in ideas is very vividly illustrated by Prāṇeśācārya, the hero of Ananthamurti's *Sanṣkāra*. He typifies a very sincere, erudite, scholar, steeped in traditional wisdom, reverentially devoted to his traditions. But when he is confronted with the problem what to do with the dead body of Nāraṇappā, the social-moral rebel who flouted the traditions in his life-time, he finds himself in a helpless situation. This happens because the *śāstras*, the repository of the traditions, give him no answer, and his reverence for them has enslaved his mind to the extent of depriving him of man's natural equipment of reason by using which, in an objective manner, he could have found out a solution based on the relevant facts. The question of his having been dominated by the alien, Western, culture does not arise because he is a 'pure' Indian, uncontaminated by any non-Indian culture.

To regain his svaraj in ideas, his ability to exercise his self-determination, what Prāṇeśācārya needs is to shake off the domination by his own traditions, and not by any alien one. He starts realising the need of self-determination and experiencing a little taste of it only after having a new experience, occasioned by his unsolicited, unexpected, physical, amorous, relationship with Caṇḍrī, the low-caste, untouchable, woman, the concubine of late Nāraṇappā, even whose accidental touch was considered to be defiling.

The truth exemplified by Prāṇeśācārya cannot be glossed over on the ground that he is a fictional character, since he exhibits a genuine possibility which no theory about cultural subjection can ignore. Moreover, real examples of his type can be easily located, both among the educated and uneducated, in Indian society even today. I believe they were not more scarce in Bhattacharya's times.

If one's reason becomes habituated to work under the censorship or supervision of reverence for his indigenous traditions,

however ennobled he may feel, it becomes extremely difficult for him to be reborn as a free-thinking, or a free, individual, or for the scales to fall off his eyes. Any such thing may happen to him, if it happens at all, only if he receive a severe jolt, a big shake-up, affecting his whole being.

In case his reason has not completely lost its power of critical reflection, he may get the needed shake-up even if confronted with certain things or events belonging to the external world. He may then start examining, in an independent and objective manner, the strength and weakness of his traditions and their influence on him and other members of his society. Something of this sort seems to have happened to the prince Siddhārtha. His reason had become reverential to his indigenous, the then Vedic, traditions and culture, whose influence on him, consequently, was very great. But his reverence for them had not become powerful enough to make his rationality completely subservient to them. That is why his experience of certain things in the external world — the sight of an old man, a sick man, and a dead body — shook his whole being and provoked him to critically reflect over the merits and demerits of the Vedic way of life, its prescriptions and prohibitions, principles and practices, ideals and utopias. Since he was an extra-ordinary personality, equipped with a mind not satisfiable by an ad hoc solution, what he gave to the world was not a patchwork, but an all-pervasive cultural revolution, installing a new set of traditions. To treat him as the mere founder of a religion is to insult his genius and underestimate his contribution to the history of India. His rejecting the authority of the Vedas which amounted to rejecting the very foundation of the Vedic culture, rejecting the validity of śruti as a pramāṇa and replacing it by Pratyakṣa and Anumāna, questioning the utility of the Varṇa-vyavasthā, including the supremacy of the Brāhmins who were the chief custodians of the Vedic culture, and establishing a casteless society, questioning the existence of God, etc., to mention a few of the things he did, are in no sense less than revolutionary.

It was the later revengeful resurrection of reverence for the Vedic culture and the consequent employment of reason, as

exhibited in the literature of the time, in its service which rubbed out quite a few of the good effects of the Buddhist revolution. The result was the return of the Hindu Society, at least of a large sector of it, to a stage very similar to the one it occupied in its pre-Buddhist existence. It became re-subjugated to the Vedic culture, which, even today, of course with some modifications, by and large, constitutes the Hindu culture.

When one's personality is not very strong and his reason has become so greatly reverential to his traditions that it has become almost impossible for him to entertain any doubt about their (so-called) eternal utility, something happening in the external world is not likely to administer him the shock required to wake him up. If there is any chance of his getting it, it is only from something extraordinary happening to himself.

Prāṇeśācārya is a good example of the above type. His reason is reverential to his traditions to the extent of becoming completely subjugated to them, to the traditions of which he is an acknowledged ācārya. What gives him the required shock, which makes his erstwhile inert reason exhibit some signs of life, is his own, personal, experience of physical relationship of the most intimate kind with the woman he considers too lowly to be associated with. Not the sight of the stinking dead body of Nāraṇappā, nor the problem of its cremation to which the śāstras offer no solution, nor the suffering of the Brāhmins of the village caused by their remaining hungry till the dead body is cremated, nor the sight of the helpless, hated, widowed, Caṇḍrī, nor even the devastating epidemic of plague entering almost every house, whips up his reason to question the competence of the Śāstras, the reverence of his traditions, in respect of such matters as how the dead body of a rebel against the traditions, an outcaste, should be cremated.

He does not find any instruction in the śāstras, but still goes on pondering over them. When his body and mind get completely tired, he goes to the temple of Māruti to seek guidance from the deity. Even after Māruti's not condescending to oblige him, it does not occur to him that it is his reverence for

the so-called traditional wisdom which has befogged his vision, and that therefore it is time to emancipate himself, his reason, from the domination of his mind and soul by his traditions. Only after having the extraordinary experience of enjoying the body of an untouchable woman, only after doing, or having got done by him, what was prohibited by his culture, his reason starts showing some signs of its dogmatic slumber having been disturbed. It is not yet completely awakened and still lacks the ability to function as a fully alive reason ought to. His subjugation to the traditions has become loosened, he has realised the desensitizing effect of his reverence for the traditions on his reason. But he still presents the picture of a man groping with half open eyes, feeling the need of a new, hitherto untrodden path, but not clearly seeing it.

I have discussed the case of Prāṇesācārya in some detail because it very concretely illustrates that the danger of an individual, or a society, getting subjugated by a culture is independent of the latter being alien or indigenous. To lose one's svaraj in ideas by being subjugated to either one is to lose it, and to regain it is extremely difficult in either case. In all probability it is more difficult in the case of subjugation by the indigenous culture. And, in either case, a dispassionate, critical, reason can play quite effectively the role of a prophylactic as well as of a curative agent. Without the reason's prompting, one may not feel the need for svaraj, and with only a feeble one he may feel the need but is not likely to attain it.

It is not maintained here that one ought not to revere his indigenous traditions. The members of a community should respect their traditions, otherwise their cultural survival may become difficult. In fact, they have a natural feeling of respect for them and every community has a distinctive set of traditions evolved in the course of its history to meet the demands of its struggle for existence. But it would not be fair to make one's reason necessarily reverential to the traditions, since that would cripple or curtail reason's freedom, its preparedness and perceptiveness to take note of the dark as well as bright aspects of the traditions in an objective manner. If reason has to be

reverential to anything, it should be to truth, and not to any tradition, and if respect for truth, for the facts and demands of life, requires it to declare that a tradition needs to be changed, or discarded, it must not hesitate to do that. On the other hand, if it finds that another tradition deserves to be strengthened, it must put its weight on its side.

In the course of their life history, some traditions acquire new significance, some outlive their utility but still continue to exist in the culture as dead wood, some need to be modified, some neglected ones have to be given greater prominence, some prominent ones need to be kept in check, some new ones have to be initiated, etc. All this requires a continuous and cautious critique of traditions which only an unprejudiced, objective, reason can give, and not one which has compromised its independence by becoming reverential to some tradition or traditions, alien or indigenous. In case of conflict between tradition and truth, it must take the side of truth. Only then it can function as an important agent of cultural progress or advancement.

Bhattacharya, on the other hand, believes that reason can suggest a new departure only if it is reverential to the old tradition. As he says, "the only way to find a new reverence is to deepen our old reverence" (para 20). But to find a new object of reverence, to initiate a new worthwhile tradition, i.e., one worthy of its reverence, it may have to criticise, lay bare some of the serious weakness of, the old, existing, tradition, and not to deepen its reverence for it. If it has always to remain respectful to the latter, it is very unlikely to help the coming into being of a new one.

In what Bhattacharya says towards the end of the essay, stating almost as his final conclusion, one may read an attempt by him to provide to his concept of *svaraj* in ideas a new content quite different from reverence for the indigenous traditions. While pointing out that in politics educated men have been forced by the logic of facts to realise the importance of carrying the masses with them, in the social sphere and in the sphere of ideas, he says, the importance of the latter has not yet been adequately realised. Since, according to him, "We

can think effectively only when we think in terms of the indigenous ideas that pulsate in the life and mind of the masses." he urges, "let us come back to the cultural stratum of the real Indian people and evolve a culture alongwith them suited to the times and to our native genius. That would be to achieve "svaraj in ideas" (para 26). That is, to attain svaraj in ideas we should evolve a culture by thinking in terms of the ideas pulsating in the life and mind of the masses and this we can do only by going back to the cultural stratum of the real Indian people.

The above is indeed a very positive characterisation and apparently different from the one given in terms of reverence, assimilation, synthesis, etc. Therefore, one may feel extremely grateful to Bhattacharya for not concluding his lecture without giving to his concept of svaraj in ideas an obviously positive, rich, content. This characterisation has also the virtue of a popular appeal, since it involves the notion of going back to the grass-roots, to the real Indian people. But, as in the case of his other descriptions of svaraj, troubles begin when one tries to ascertain what exactly he means by some of the key-terms he has used, e.g., 'thinking effectively', 'ideas pulsating in the life and mind of the masses,' 'the real Indian people', 'native genius', 'evolving a culture', etc. All of these are highly emotive and vague in their denotation as well as connotation. The apparent appeal of the characterisation owes a great deal to their emotivity and vagueness. But to ground the claim of the adequacy of the characterisation on them would not be fair logic. Bhattacharya would have helped us a lot even by giving some examples of what he meant by these terms. But he does not, nor does he say anything even by implication from which we may get any help in understanding him.

We are left even here, thus, to guess and speculate. Evidently the ideas pulsating the masses are not to be ascertained by vote, or induction of any sort, but then in which other way? Are all of the ideas, like those pertaining to caste-discrimination, untouchability, religious dogmatism and fanaticism, sati, child marriage discrimination against women etc., which did pulsate in the mind of the masses in Bhattacharya's times, and

are still alive, to be treated as distinctive of Indian culture and to be retained in the culture to be evolved? Which is the real native genius, the one determined by Vivekananda, M. N. Roy, Nehru, Subhash Chandra Bose or Dange? How should one proceed to think effectively in terms of ideas pulsating the masses or to evolve a culture along with them? Unless these and some other relevant questions are given clear answers, one would not know, even after accepting the above characterisation, how to go ahead to achieve svaraj in ideas, or even to rightly apply the concept.

It seems, then, that in this attempt as well Bhattacharya does not succeed in giving even a workable, let alone a precise, specification of the positive content of his concept of svaraj in ideas. What he has given can at the most be treated as the skeleton of a positive-looking characterisation which cannot do the job of a really positive one unless it is supplied with some flesh and blood. His failure to give, or not caring to give, a satisfactory account of the positive content of his central concept is not of negligible consequence. It makes the concept a poor theoretical tool and an unusable principle of action.

Bhattacharya complains that there is very little of creativity in the works of his (Indian) contemporaries in almost all spheres. The complaint may be genuine, but, as usual, he takes no pains to show that it is. He does not even mention the name, far from examining any work or view, of any one of them. He seems to be satisfied with a summary, or intuitive, judgement. To ignore the works of contemporaries, to complain of their uncreativity without discussing their views, is a delightful pastime of modern Indians, particularly philosophers. Bhattacharya seems to be no exception in spite of his strong plea to revere the indigenous traditions. But his attitude towards his contemporaries need not look strange to us since ours is not different from his. We all follow the same (indigenous) tradition.

He seems to be suggesting that an important cause of the lack of creativity is the lack of vital assimilation of Western ideas. Indians have achieved what he calls assimilation in a fashion, which he contrasts with vital assimilation, though

without explaining the nature of the contrast. Assimilation of the vital ideas of one culture by an alert mind belonging to another culture is likely to be a good promoter of creativity in the latter, and patchwork or hybridisation, if that is what he means by assimilation in a fashion, is not. This is an obvious truth. But that assimilation is neither a necessary, nor a sufficient, condition of creativity is also an equally obvious truth. It is not a necessary condition because there are several thinkers, all over the world, who, without having any contact with an alien culture, have produced what can be called paradigmatic examples of creativity. It is not a sufficient condition because there are also, several scholars, all over the world, who, even after having assimilated ideas from different cultures, have been able to produce only good, descriptive, expository works, since they lacked the required innate abilities to have done something really creative. Therefore, the link between assimilation, or even authentic inter-cultural understanding, and creativity cannot be considered to be very close. To be genuinely creative one needs the ability to make a new departure, and this he may lack even while possessing the ability to assimilate ideas from an alien culture. The assimilative ability may at the most be a helping condition, i.e., one which, in conjunction with some other conditions, helps one to realise his creative potentialities.

Assuming that assimilation can be conducive to the promotion of creativity, it should not be forgotten that it can be conceived in more than one way and it is not that in whichever way it is conceived it is going to promote creativity. It seems to me that the kind of assimilation which Bhattacharya proposes is not the one which we can hope would be an un-failing aid to creativity. Rather, some of its important components seem to be positive hindrances to creativity.

According to Bhattacharya, in order to properly assimilate alien ideas one must have (a) reverence for his 'indigenous traditions and (b) determination to assimilate the foreign to the indigenous ideals. The indigenous is not in any case to be assimilated to the foreign. His reverence may not let him ignore the genius of his traditions or superimpose a foreign

idea or ideal on them, and may therefore be considered to be a very desirable equipment. But it may also not let him see, or, be fair to some of those features of the alien culture which though worthy of his attention in their own right, conflict with some features of the indigenous culture, or notice those features of the indigenous which need to be modified or dropped, or after noticing them have the required courage to make an honest effort to modify or drop them, in the light of his authentic understanding of some alien ideas, or even in the light of his understanding of some pressing realities. These are not mere possibilities; they can be met with in the actual practice of several Indian thinkers.

His determination to assimilate the foreign to the indigenous will also, in all likelihood, take him in the same direction. Since only those foreign ideals can be assimilated to the indigenous ones which cohere or have affinity with the latter, he needs to look only for such ones, and not for those which threaten the validity of any one of the latter. But then he would be very unlikely to get a challenge to his deep-seated convictions even if they were not wholly justifiable or retainable. We cannot, therefore, hope that such a person would be really creative, or make some significantly new departure in thought or action.

Suppose an Indian, who has reverence for his *varṇa-vyavasthā*, comes in contact with the British social structure and is motivated to achieve an assimilation of the Indian and British social ideals. He would, and rather should, then, proceed, if he follows Bhattacharya, to look for such aspects in the British traditions which already cohere, or which may be suitably modified to become coherent, with the Indian *varṇa-vyavasthā*. In case he does not find such aspects in the former, he can rightly declare that the British social structure is against the genius of the Indian culture. Such a thing can happen even in matters concerning intra-cultural assimilation. Some Hindu scholars did try to present Buddhism as a cousin of Hinduism, Buddha as an *avatāra* of God like Rama or Krishna, and the practising priests very gladly provided a place in their temples for the idol of Buddha. The result may be called a vital

assimilation of Buddhism into Hinduism, but is certainly neither a creative development of Hinduism nor of Buddhism. In the world of learning as well such things have happened. Some eminent Indian philosophers, including Bhattacharya himself, who had a reverential attitude towards some kind of Vedantism, turned towards those Western philosophers of their time or of the past who were idealists, or had some affinity with some important aspect or aspects of Vedantism, and then tried to assimilate some Western idealistic ideas with some Vedantic ones. And, quite naturally, what they produced was very seldom creative or predominantly creative. New departures are made by men who subject themselves to some challenging influences to influences which force them to question their most cherished convictions, which force them to have a transvaluation of their old values, and not by those who consider their indigenous traditions or ideals unalterable.

Even if it is admitted that reverence for one's own, or any, tradition may not stifle his creativity, of course, if he is blessed with it, it should also not be forgotten that generally it is not a good stimulus for doing something creative. Similarly, in spite of the difficulties discussed earlier, if it is granted that it can facilitate the assimilation of ideas from different cultures, the outcome of the assimilation may turn out to be a good example of synthesis and not of creativity.

Perhaps by doing something creative Bhattacharya means the same as achieving some synthesis. For example, in connection with his claim that the lack of creativity, in several areas, has resulted from that of vital assimilation, when he comes to philosophy, his own field of work, he complains that "In philosophy hardly anything that has been written by a modern educated Indian shows that he has achieved a synthesis of Indian thought with western thought" (para 9). It seems, then, that he would call an Indian philosopher creative if he has achieved such a synthesis. But to synthesise some ideas or trends of thought is not necessarily to make a new departure, and therefore it need not be genuinely creative. And, in any case, it is not the only form in which one's creativity may be exhibited, and its absence therefore cannot be considered a conclusive

evidence of the absence of creativity. Since one can be creative even without achieving a synthesis of Indian and Western thought, it cannot be obligatory for an Indian philosopher to make it the goal, or even one of the goals, of his philosophising.

Some other Indian philosophers of this century, besides Bhattacharya, have also considered philosophical synthesis as almost the best kind of philosophising. But the surprising thing is that none of them, including Bhattacharya, argues for the necessity or desirability of synthesising some different but synthesisable (classical) Indian trends or thoughts, though diversities in Indian philosophising are in no way less conspicuous, nor are their synthesis, if achieved, bound to be poorer examples of philosophical synthesis.

It seems to me that, behind Bhattacharya's (or anyone else's) insistence on the importance of synthesising Indian (or Eastern) and Western thought, there exists his unavowed or undeclared belief in the superiority of the Western thought and culture, that the latter continues to be his point of reference: Indian thinking has to assimilate and synthesise Western thinking, its *svaraj* has to be judged in terms of its relationship with the latter, it is self-determined if it effects a vital assimilation of some Western ideas, it is creative if it achieves a synthesis of some Indian and Western trends, etc. One can legitimately question why it should do all this. Why cannot it proceed, freely and creatively, by taking its inspiration from indigenous sources alone? Why should it be required to always maintain at least some relationship with the West? It may turn to the West if the need be, or use a cue from the latter when available, but all this should be optional. There is no justification for making assimilating or synthesising Western with Indian ideas its obligation.

While asserting that "the most prominent contribution of ancient India to the culture of the world is in the field of Philosophy," KCB declares that "if the Modern Indian Mind is to philosophise at all to any purpose, *it has* to confront Eastern and Western thought with one another and attempt a synthesis or a reasoned rejection of either, if that were pos-

sible" (para 9, *italics mine*). It must not, thus, ignore, or be indifferent to, Western thought; it must either try to effect a synthesis, or reject some of the latter's ideas after a reasoned examination.

All this Bhattacharya says in the same context in which he says that "It is in philosophy, if anywhere, that the task of discovering the soul of India is imperative for the modern mind; the task of achieving, if possible, the continuity of his old self with his present day self, of realising what is nowadays called the mission of India, if it has any" (para 9). It is unintelligible why to "philosophise at all to any purpose" one "has to confront Eastern thought and Western thought with one another", if philosophising to any purpose has anything to do, which it has to for Bhattacharya, with such noble aims as "discovering the soul of India", "achieving the continuity of his old self with his present day self", or realising "the Mission of India".

For an Indian who suffers from a feeling of some sort of national self-diffidence or inferiority complex, or has been brought up exclusively or largely on an one-sided diet of Western philosophy, it is natural to keep Western thought or philosophy at the centre of his attention. But none of these deficiencies can perhaps be attributed to Bhattacharya, and not definitely a one-sided diet. Therefore, it is puzzling why he gives to Western thought or philosophy so central a place when his main objective is to make his countrymen realise the importance of *svaraj* in ideas.

No Western philosopher or thinker has exhibited any serious concern for assimilation or synthesis, for confronting Western with Eastern thought (or English with German, or French, or Russian thought, or vice versa) in the name of, or as a means to, creativity. If it is considered to be a sign of narrow regionalism, it may be considered to be a sign of intellectual maturity and national self-confidence. On the other hand, the concern for maintaining a close liaison with Western thought, which Bhattacharya and many other Indian thinkers have expressed, may seem to some to be a sign of colonialism in ideas, which is, in a fair sense of the term, a good contrary of *svaraj* in ideas.

Those who argue for synthesis seem to forget that achieving synthesis is parasitic on someone else's having produced the materials to be synthesised. Primary creativity consists in generating new ideas, initiating new methods of thinking, etc. If synthesising some ideas given by some important thinkers, or available in some important Eastern or Western traditions, is to be called creative, it would be creative only in a secondary or watered-down sense. Anyone who synthesises Kant's doctrine of the autonomy, or spontaneous freedom, of the rational will with the witnessing consciousness (*sākṣī caitanya*) of the Advaita Vedānta to get the doctrine of the self, the pure subject, as freedom, has done something creative, but certainly that is not creative in the same sense in which, or to the same extent to which, what the Advaitin philosopher, who gave the idea of the *sākṣī caitanya*, or what Kant, who gave the idea of the autonomy of the rational will, has done is. Bhattacharya seems to have great fascination for synthesis, and his own philosophising exhibits his very serious and sincere efforts to achieve it in respect of some classical Indian, mainly Vedantic, and some Western, philosophical, viewpoints, particularly metaphysical. But my feeling is that has he proceeded in a freer manner, without having been so impressed with the ideal of synthesis, his creativity would have soared to greater heights. Perhaps he would also have become a little more intelligible. An undue regard for the ideal of synthesis has hindered some other, very competent and thorough scholars, like D. M. Datta and P. T. Raju, who had the necessary equipment, from making any significantly new departure in their philosophising. It is still one of the major causes of the lack of, or low creativity in modern Indian philosophy. It is also responsible, when it becomes the obsession of poorer thinkers, for the prevalence of what is called comparative philosophy.

Bhattacharya considers it a lamentable fact that Indians have not been able to have "distinctively Indian estimates of Western literature and thought". No Indian, according to him, "has passed judgements on English literature that reflect his Indian mentality", or on Western philosophical system "from the standpoint of Indian philosophy" (para 7). As in other

cases, here also he does not say what sort of judgement on Western literature or philosophy he will consider as truly reflecting the Indian mentality. Does it mean that one should judge Shakespeare according to the principles laid down in Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Hegelianism in terms of the Advaita, Aristotle's theory of syllogism in terms of Gautama's *Pancāyaya Vākya*, or Wittgenstein's theory of language in terms of Bhāṭṛhari? It does not make much sense to plead for the study of a thinker or system from an Indian or Western standpoint. Any genuine study should be from the student's own point of view, and its worth will depend on the maturity, objectivity, insightfulness, etc., of the standpoint. It would not matter which traditions and thought-systems he studies to acquire his standpoint, or whether or not he had reverence for his indigenous traditions and culture.

Though Bhattacharya considers it extremely desirable for an Indian to approach Western thought and culture from an Indian standpoint, surprisingly enough he also holds that "it is very difficult for a foreigner to understand the mind of a people from whom he is widely removed by tradition and history unless he has intimately participated in their life for a long time." Therefore, "the people in question should receive his judgement about them with a certain amount of mental reserve" (para 22). Concerning our reaction to a foreigner's evaluation of Indian culture from the standpoint of his own culture, he says that "our first impulse here should be one of self-defensive resentment" and also that this would be natural and "need not imply an uncultured self-conceit" (para 24). But if all this is fair for us, why should a foreigner honour an Indian's evaluation of his thought and culture from the Indian point of view? And, how can it be not so difficult for an Indian to understand the mind of a people in whose life he has not intimately participated for a long time? Bhattacharya forgets that if it is sound logic to say that a foreigner would misunderstand Indian culture if he approaches it from the point of view of his culture, it would be no less sound logic to say that an Indian, even a K. C. Bhattacharya, would also misunderstand a non-Indian culture if he approaches it from the point of

view of his (i.e., Indian) culture, since he is also a foreigner in respect of any non-Indian culture. Obviously Bhattacharya's recommendation to appraise or understand Western thought and culture from the Indian standpoint, thus, not only seems to have no good reason in its favour but also to smack of self-inconsistency which no amount of patriotism can wipe off.

It should not be forgotten that the appraisal of Western culture by some Indians also can be said to be unfair or incorrect. Not all of the things which Mahatma Gandhi, for example, says of an institution like the English parliament, or of the Western civilisation in general, in his *Hind Svaraj*, can be considered to be fully justified. It is true that every culture has got, as Bhattacharya says, its own "distinctive physiognomy". But it must be accepted as genuinely possible to transcend the boundaries of one's own culture and take an objective, unbiased, look at a foreign culture. Unless this is done it would be impossible to have any worth-while inter-cultural understanding or appraisal, and not only the appraisal of Indian culture by a non-Indian. It is (almost) a truism to say that the life-style of a people has to be determined by their culture, but from this it does not follow that their inter-cultural understanding (or attempt at it) must also be, in point of logic, determined by their culture.

As regards the possibility of one's indigenous culture-determined standpoint affecting his understanding of a foreign culture is concerned, it is no less existent in the case of intra-cultural understanding. Every culture consists of so many different strands. A person approaching his own culture from the standpoint of a particular strand of it is quite likely to have an unobjective (even unfair or incorrect) understanding of it, or an understanding very different from that of one approaching it from the standpoint of a different strand. This can happen even in one's understanding of the literature, philosophy, etc. of his country. It may be said not without some justification that the conception of the nature of classical Indian philosophy prevalent today is very much due to the fact that almost all of the early writers of the histories or text-books of Indian philosophy (e.g., Radhakrishnan, D. M. Datta, and

S. C. Chatterji, M. Hiriyanna, etc.) approached it from the spiritualist point of view, a point of view they read in the Upaniṣads and saw culminating in the Vedānta. Perhaps that is why some of them even thought the Vedānta to be the culmination of the entire classical Indian philosophy, and interpreted those strands which were not obviously of a piece with the Vedānta as accidental diversions from the main stream. The modern Indian students' understanding of the spirit of classical Indian philosophy is derived very largely from this, the spiritualist, Vedānta-biased, interpretation of it available in the text-books, which has acquired the status of the most popular, or official, conception.

It is only lately that the plausibility of a non-spiritualist interpretation has been given the seriousness it deserved. Perhaps M. N. Roy is the earliest thinker, and definitely one of the early thinkers, who has, in a forceful manner, drawn our attention to it.

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