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K. C. BHATTACHARYA'S SVARAJ IN IDEAS: SOME REFLECTIONS

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Only rarely do we in India ever take other's work any more seriously than passing amusement; given this, I am glad that the guest editors have given me an opportunity to present publicly my response to Krishna Chandra Bhattacharya's *Svaraj in Ideas* (which I shall call KCB's SII). My presentation is organised as follows:

(1) I shall endorse the main thrust of SII concerning colonialism of mind and intellectual slavery that has eroded the autonomy of the colonized soul and which was so eloquently described and castigated in Frantz Fanon's autobiography *Black skins and white masks* in the sixties. Bhattacharya's ideas, though buried in his unpublished papers, and originally delivered to an obscure mofussil college audience, are lucid, clear, and no less perspicacious.

(2) I will examine SII in connection with KCB's theory of ideology, both ideas and ideals. He emphasizes the role of cultural symbols and metaphors in the articulation of concepts, in philosophical analysis, and in ideational criticism. I feel that KCB has not fully worked out, at least in SII, all the implications which may follow from the views he advocates, and that his views end up committing him to some uncomfortable consequences. Of course, SII itself as a text entails no formal contradictions. But KCB often demands that we critically compare, estimate, and appraise (accept or reject) western and Indian ideals (or ideas?); these activities, to my mind, presuppose a background Logic of understanding: rules, norms, and principles which one is sure are not merely culturally determined artifacts of particular traditions. Is Philosophy a product of a cultural milieu alone? Or can it, at least sometimes, hope to liberate us from the bondage of the here

and now, giving us insight into truths that are sub specie aeternitatis? I have to record that wobbly hesitation and tentative inconclusiveness characterize SII on the matter of universality and cultural specificity in the exercise of reason. I think that SII is not representative of KCB's best work about the nature of Philosophy as a critique or as critical inquiry.

(3) I must, reluctantly, point to a few blind spots of KCB leading to his uncritical non-discriminating sleep-walk through the long and hoary spiritual legacy and cultural identity of Indian society and his bland affirmation of its unique spiritual values. KCB obviously had little interest in cultural history or in any kind of social praxis or its understanding. He hardly ever took the trouble of grasping the non-ideational factors of Indian civilization. He is just a little too cocksure of so-called Indian ideals. A clear case of reification. Whose ideals, may I ask? Those of the Vedic Brahmanic orthodoxy of Sanskrit Pandits. Yes, but are these everybody's? If so, how about, pray, those millions of Moslems, tribals, Shudras, and unlettered peasants? I shall conclude by pointing out briefly the role of explanatory concepts like Tradition and how one ought to avoid hypostatizing the very explanatory abstract categories as historical Agents.

I

Much of SII (paras 1, 18, 22) is rife with KCB's remarkable spirit of critical inquiry and commendable freedom from the cant of his class of anglicized Babus that had come to live 'wih an imaginary progressiveness merely imitative of the west' (para 6). He also disapproves of the new caste system of the westernized Bhadralok, who, like the Brahmos of Bengali society in the second half of the nineteenth century, hoped to cure Indian society of its moribund ideals in such domains as caste, family ties, child marriage, dowry, etc. by legislation and administrative measures by the authorities and (para 22) refused to show sufficient humility and understanding of the entire cultural Gestalt that India was. He rightly diagnosed the glibness of these diffident Indians, faced with the denigration of Indian ideals from the west, 'talking of a conflict of

the ideas and ideals of the West with our traditional ideas and ideals' even where there is in fact a confusion that has not yet sharpened into a conflict (para 15).

KCB notes, in this connection, that India's native soul gets twisted and warped by a shadow mind due to our western education: 'Our thought is hybrid through and through and inevitably sterile. Slavery has entered into our very soul (SII, para 10).

Bhattacharya rightly and with insight regrets the fact that western education has not, even after more than a century, produced any original interpretation of western material in history, literature, or philosophy from an Indian standpoint (SII, para 4). He candidly remarks about his own tribe of Bhadralok, "His judgments do not differ materially from the judgment of an English critic and that raises the suspicion whether it is his judgment at all, whether it is not merely the mechanical thinking of the galvanic mind induced in us through our western education" (para 8).

Lest it be thought that KCB is guilty of a form of cultural chauvinism, we must note his awareness of his own inability to deliver such a discourse as SII in his native language (para 11). He realizes (para 3) that many Indians positively accepted westernization as a talisman for the accumulated debris of a wounded Indian civilization. KCB only protests against brusque dismissal of the old ideals of India without humility or even critical examination under the authoritarian denigration mounted by ill-disposed missionaries and champions of imperialism. I salute him for his courage of conviction and transparent dedication to the truth in his matter: KCB reminds himself and other Indians of their 'old immemorial habit of regarding what we are taught as sacred learning, and the habit is not easily altered even though the learning imparted is the mere opinion of others' (para 22). He contends that a negative opinion about our culture on the part of a foreigner 'should be a fillip to which we should react. I remember a remark of Sir John Woodroffe to this purpose. That our first impulse here should be one of self-defensive

resentment is only natural and need not imply an uncultured self-conceit. Docile acceptance without criticism would mean slavery' (para 24). I fully uphold this principle of the dignity of the colonized and am glad to see that an academic philosopher of British India had the vision and courage to voice it. His thought was articulated not out of any morbid dogmatism but as a self-conscious stance of a cultural critique which was capable of remaining unswayed by the prevailing disparagement of our enslaved people and their civilization.

To make sure I do not miss the critical and universalistic element in KCB's search for cultural Ideals I wish to note three points in his response to western ideals in his quest for svaraj in ideas : (a) 'it is wrong not to accept an ideal that is felt to be a simpler and deeper expression of our own ideals simply because it hails from a foreign country'; (b) 'Some foreign ideals have affinity with our own, and are really alternative expressions of them in a foreign idiom'; (c) 'and there are others which have no real application to our conditions' (para 19).

Of course, KCB desires a critical appraisal of all ideals on some supracultural touchstone, but above all he wishes, even here, to protect the rootless educated mind from losing 'the distinctive values evolved through ages of continuous historical life of Indian society' (para 21); on this point, I demur. Or, further, when he speaks of universal reason as involved in delineation of spiritual ideals, he seems to draw on some involuted form of justification of a tradition from the reverence one ought to have for its inner core. I, for one, happen to feel some hesitation in accepting such fetters, even when born of my own reverence towards my own cultural ideals, on any critical reflections. I shall elaborate on such issues in the next section. First let me quote from SII on this crucial point : 'It is sometimes forgotten by the advocates of universalism that the so-called universalism of reason or of religion is only in the making and cannot be appealed to as an actually established code of universal principles. What is universal *is only the spirit, the loyalty to our own ideals and the openness to other ideals, the determination not to reject them if they are found within*

our ideals and not to accept them till they are so found' (para 20, emphasis mine). I am puzzled by this unequivocal assertion of an orthodox position which takes the spiritual ideals of our culture as beyond all scrutiny. I wonder if KCB remembers that he has said in para 9 that 'if the Modern Indian Mind is to philosophize at all to any purpose, it has to confront Eastern thought and Western thought with one another and attempt a synthesis or a reasoned rejection of either, if that were possible. It is in philosophy, if anywhere, that the task of discovering the soul of India is imperative for the modern India'. Careful scrutiny is needed before one can know how KCB visualizes this relation of reason to values and ideals on one hand and philosophical criticism, required to appreciate this ideational effort, on the other hand. I may do that in the following section.

II

KCB insists on the cultural predetermination of all concepts and seems to disapprove of universality of conceptual frameworks even in science. In para 24 he allows mathematics and science to be taken to be value-free and as such free of cultural appraisals as well, and yet in para 25 he enters a caveat about them as well. In contrast, all other ideas, if they happen to be 'vital', must be related to ideals, he claims: 'All vital ideas involve ideals. They embody an entire theory and an insight into life. Thought or reason may be universal, but ideas are carved out of it differently by different cultures according to their respective genius. No idea of one cultural language can exactly be translated in another cultural language. Every culture has its distinctive 'physiognomy' which is reflected in each vital idea and ideal presented by the culture' (para 12). Paragraphs 12 and 24 appear almost mutually contradictory. They are not; yet nothing shows the deep crisis of KCB's theory of cultural concepts better than this awkward hesitation on his part to acknowledge the universal nature of philosophical concepts. He certainly hopes authentically to render ideas from foreign cultures by reincarnation as our own indigenous concepts; and it is only in this way that we can enrich the world's thought.

he strongly maintains in paragraph 25; note especially the exhortation 'Let us everywhere resolutely think in our own concepts.'

A study of para 25 shows how, in the context of his analysis of the cultural predetermination of ideas, KCB shuttles between his several perplexities with regard to what makes up different levels of critical human thought about 'values', their applications, and their expression in particular languages; further, he was confused about the ideational episodes of conception and the core sense or the objective correlative of these acts, the sense-content or concept proper. KCB's discussion does not distinguish clearly enough the inscriptions of a language we employ to think and the concepts. He also confuses verbal tokens with concepts and propositions. In a certain sense no concepts could ever be exclusively mine. Concepts do not share the identity of their carriers (acts, inscriptions, or sounds). I can entertain the proposition that $7^9 > 6^8$. This does not depend on my words. Yet SII continuously dissolves all questions of conceptual validity into episodes from the intellectual biography of persons who think. This is a poor performance by KCB who had a well-earned reputation as a student of Indian espistemology,[1] particularly Abhāva.

This whole disinclination to attend to the universal conceptual order of ideas per se, and this insistence on conditions anterior to their maturation, social nexus, and on their plausible and imaginable remote and proximate consequences on the person who reflects, suffers, to my mind, from a serious

[1] I have discussed some questions concerning philosophy as an expression of culture in one of my papers, 'Is philosophy culture free?' (Anvīkṣisi 4:1-2.50-56, January-April 1971, BHU). I argue there that philosophical thinking could be systematic as well as critical; whereas systematic philosophy could be an ideational expression of cultural attitudes, beliefs, etc., at least the critical reflections on the very groundwork of all conceptualizations could not be so determined by anterior cultural metaphors. By these critical reflections we offer a set of plausible *Analysans* to our ideational matrix which we wish to comprehend as a mere *Analysandum*. How, then, can anybody hope to grasp an Analysans by the help of an Analysandum?

lack of distinction which is sometimes seen as a failure to distinguish the context of discovery and the context of explanation. We know only men think; when they think at all, a vast accretion of accidents related to the socio-cultural mechanism essential to the activity of manipulating inscriptions — say, the presence of light in the library while reading or the supply of electricity for communicating on television sets — has nothing whatever to do with the respective thematic contents represented. The medium cannot and should not be falsely believed to swallow the message (with apologies to Marshall Macluhan for twisting his now famous contrary epigram).

Let us get down to some hard facts of philosophical writing. I am asking KCB and his contemporary admirers to tell me: Did he or did he not recognize the occurrence of a body of basic questions and issues regarding categories, sense, negation, time, identity, prediction, causality, and others in several works of writers as widely differing in their cultural backgrounds as Shankara and B. Bosanquet, or Spinoza; a Vasubandhu and a Protagoras; Heraclitos or a Bishop Berkeley? If not, how can a modern professor of linguistics at MIT today hope to learn and share theoretical implications for the deep grammar of all languages by grasping the rules of basic stems as propounded in Pāṇinī's Ashtādhyāyī? Is its logic truth-functional? A quest for the critical structures of all reflections, particularly concerning the nature of negation, has been carried out in the history of philosophy with various ontological, semantic, and dialectical (?) linguistic beliefs and assumptions. Yet, however much a Platonist, a Hegelian, a Sartre, a Marxist, a modern logician like Russell, or a Nagarjuna or a Gangesha from Mediaeval India may have differed, is it not possible, nevertheless, to decode their varied special idioms into a common theme and delineate the various dimensions of the problems tackled by them, which they can reformulate in disputing each other's work? That only proves that they do share a framework, however inarticulate it may be. I am prone to argue that this coincidence is neither fortuitous nor contingent. Human cognitivity cannot be denied its autonomy, and it is this universal conceptual framework which is very often ignored in the

onrush of more engaging labour such as collecting factual generalizations about abstract and concrete entities. But the articulation of all possible discrete presuppositions of any argument or hypothesis related to a different variety of assorted entities is also an object of critical reflection. It may be the rock-bottom of all other theoretical enterprise. The fact that most scientists and common-sense people do not acknowledge the need for such explorations or do not appreciate the universal validity of the results of such inquiries need not be counted as justification for not recognizing the very field of exploration that is rational discourse itself.

I wish SII had been based on a full appreciation of the multitiered levels of concepts, functions, rules, criteria, and axioms, and had concentrated on lucidly delineating the structures of some selected concept clusters, as well as noting the differing ranges of the applicability of such varied concepts. If this subtle schematic framework is philosophically captured, the gross theory of cultural determinism falls into irrelevance by itself.

III

In this last section, I am going to be somewhat critical of KCB's SII in general and his belief which he states in the following two passeges[2] in particular and I will show how KCB is totally naive about the concept of the 'real Indian people' and our evolving a culture along with them suited to the times and to our native genius, which he would regard as truly achieving 'Svaraj in ideas' (para 26).

But let me quote a line even commented upon earlier in these reflections. The line is from para 16 : 'the foreign ideal is to be assimilated to *our ideal* and not the other way (emphasis mine – DG). There is no demand for the surrender of our individuality in any case : Svadharme nidhanaṃ śreyaḥ paradharmo bhayāvahaḥ."

[2] (The author seems to mean paragraphs 21 and 26. Apparently paragraph 16 is not directly at issue in this section; the author quotes a passage from paragraph 16 by way quot(ing) a line'. . . commented upon earlier in these reflections'. — *Editors.*)

KCB confesses his conservatism and traditionalism while he rejects the universalism of ideals. In the following assertion of his faith in the distinctive values of Indian culture he categorically argues, 'the stress I have laid on the individuality of Indian thought and spirit, on the *conservatism of the distinctive values evolved through ages of continuous historical life of Indian society*' (SII para 21; emphasis mine). I appreciate KCB for his candour, but I think him uninformed of historical truth. As far as his taken for-granted attitude towards an integrated spiritualistic core of Indian culture is concerned, I find his uncritical assumption regarding the continuity, individuality, and distinctiveness of Indian Mind, its thought, spirit, and values, totally untenable. I have to explain here, in the first instance, an interesting conceptual distinction that many working social scientists have also been often misled to ignore (and of course we know how philosophers are too prone to reify abstractions; consequently they mix theoretical explanatory concepts with those that are actual, real social historical agents). Let us scrutinize and reflect on 'Modes of Production', 'Relations of Production', 'Rule of Law' etc. which are being eagerly thought of nowadays as the 'real' objects of the study of civilization.

I know that one must idealize in order to handle the chaotic mass of vast cultural matrices. One must postulate basic principles underlying a multitude of amorphous instances. But one should not take models so proposed to be given entities themselves. That would be subversive of the very intellectual analysis of social reality. While we should not violate methodological good sense as embodied in strictures against 'the fallacy of misplaced concreteness', one should not go to the other extreme of methodological nominalism, either, denying the utility of ideational paradigms in the study of concrete social facts. Without unifying individuating idealizations, we can hardly take any step; we might as well abandon cultural analysis altogether. So, unless the nominalist wishes to leave rational understanding alone, he should allow us to idealize about a large body of dissimilar particular events, beliefs, attitudes related to social phenomena, logically subsuming

them under a few basic ideational paradigms. I will not digress too far into the unceasing debate between holists and individualists in methodology, but I will offer the following example.

Let us, for a moment, forget Indian culture and talk instead of a vast Mango Grove which is very old. Periodically, some of its old trees and plants die, and some new saplings grow; new ground is acquired, and old areas are cleared up and built upon for other purposes. Suppose that, at a particular point of observation, it had most numerously ungrafted simple indigenous mango trees, as well as many other prized fruit trees like, say, Alphonso and Dasheris, well-known for rich texture and flesh flavour in Alphonso's case and unbeatable sweetness in the case of Dasheris, respectively. If, now, a philosophical taxonomist wishes to find out the *real* and *essential* Mango type in this grove, what would be the best bet and the most rationally acceptable 'paradigm' for the entire ongoing life of this grove? The ungrafted variety, since it is the most frequently observed one? Dasheri, because this variety is sweet? Alphonso, on grounds of flavour? Are all three answers wrong? Or is any of them right for a particular purpose, so that we can in effect say that all of them are right, depending on what you mean and why?

In Indian life and society we are faced, as we know, with all the diversity of civilizational levels that we can expect on the globe since the birth of culture in places and periods. In view of the continuous civilizational tremors and vast cultural and social structural fusions and refusions making our successive formations and disintegrations, KCB's naive conservatism, however dear it might appear to the sacred custodians of our sanātana traditions, seems to me to be totally stylized and innocent of vast discontinuities of period, place, mode, and convictions, involving a very large number of successive oral and literate traditions. I have discussed these matters of empirical fact in detail elsewhere.[3] It is not possible to

[3] I have written on the 'Idea of tradition' in the Panjab University Journal of Medieval Studies (1980, pp. 85-89). There I have tried to suggest that one thinks of Tradition only in the following scenarios: (a) seeking one's Ego-Identity; (b) apprehending the

demonstrate the lack of credibility that seems to ring in my reflections when I am unproblematically informed by KCB about the Indian mind, the vernacular mind and its spiritual ideals, being an unequivocally abiding underlying framework of Indian civilization and our real people, with whom KCB (SII, para 26) wishes his educated generation to march in line to Svaraj in Ideas.

I feel that the panorama of India's past, extending for more than five millennia of a quest for culture, cannot be articulated easily within the limited perspective of Sanskrit traditions, even if we add to the Vedas the dharmashastras, epics, poetic classics, theatre, dramaturgy, nitishastras, and attendant social institutions. Even a cursory acquaintance with some of these elements in the sanātana traditions themselves reveals, to my mind, the well-known doctrine of adaptation and accommodation of varied principles and contingencies to each other, sometimes associated with the locality and tribe in the idiom of the universal symbols of Brahmanism, on the one hand, and sometimes even deifying tribal symbols and practices in the total structure of Sanskrit Brahmanic orthodoxy on the other. The Ahimsa of mediaeval Brahmanic Vaishnavism is from

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sense and meaning of a work of art in its period; (c) when a society wishes to undergo a state of radical transformation either as a whole or in one of its major dimensions, it defines its Tradition. Further, I have emphasized that before the western intervention the real interaction between several insulated oral cultures in India was minimal and collective, maybe also fitful. As such, writing was very late to come and to characterize any pan-Indian stereotypes. Afterwards, crazy attempts to document Indian oral traditions bring a lot of distortions (other than those which sacred traditionalists in different ramified branches introduced about each other earlier). The entire corpus of Indian studies is full of these polemics and controversies. Compare a recent paper of mine, 'Contemporary interpretations of Indian culture — a note' (Visvabharati Journal of Philosophy, 1982, vol. 13, p. 65 ff.), where I criticize the Marxist, conservative, and idealist liberal interpretations of Indian life and culture. I very much wish to see the vast cultural matrix of India explored without ideological fixations. The task has not been done, partly because of the orthodox blinkers, some of which KCB applies.

Buddhist and other non-Aryan sources. The sexuality in Tantric Shaktism also very largely derives from primitive oral beliefs and rituals. Tribals had been carrying on Brahmanic texts in their oral myths. Examples are easy to multiply. I find it difficult to maintain, with KCB, that there is a homogeneous and consistent identity of ideas and ideals throughout India's historical experience. To my mind, Indian traditions are highly eclectic and inconsistent. Let us consider one or two symptomatic examples.

Consider the amoral manual on politics written by Kautilya, the Arthashastra. It is incompatible with the usual advocacy of purusharthas and varnashrama principles as in the epics and the enduring dharmashastra texts. What is Dharma, one wonders ? The Yaksha in Mahabharata asks this question, and gets no answer from Yudhishthira. 'Follow great men' — that is all.

We turn to the great grammarian, philosopher, and yogi Bhartrihari of the classical period. Like the great Shankara himself, Bhartrihari frequently wrote evocative erotic lyrics also, while of course he advocates rightly the purity of desire and penance as so much idealized cant in the tradition coming down from the Vedas to the Puranas !

The tantras and eroticism of mediaeval Indian life are a direct slap in the face of that fiction of highly austere and 'incorporeal paradigm' of Indian civilization, suggested by Hindu deifiers of the last one hundred years, led by such great savants as Aurobindo, Coomaraswamy, KCB and others.

Consider also the simultaneous existence of high elite Sanskritic cultures with the folkways of the common Prakrit, Pali, and Apabhransha mind, the pre-English vernaculars of India. How can one ignore the peripheral tribals who had been repelled and attracted by the high tides of refined civilization as found in urban centres like those of ancient Kanyakubja, Kashi, Ujjain, Pataliputra, Nalanda, Kanchi, Taxila, and later Agra, Delhi, Lahore, Pune, Chittor, Lucknow. The vast peasant and working populations lived their small worlds of stereotyped roles and marvellous skills and

motifs unbothered by tremors of political revolutions or artistic and moral upsurges, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Vaishnavism, Saktism, Sufism, the Bhakti cults of Nanak and Kabir, the rise of modern Indian language poetry (Vidyapati, Chandidas, Ilango, Namdev, Tulsidas, Kabir, Rahim, Mira).

Which is representative of the Indian spirit, Professor Bhattacharya? A Pandit Raj Jagannath beating about the old poetic conventions in Sanskrit at the Mughal court? Or new emerging poetry in Punjab by Guru Gobind and in Avadhi-speaking villages by Rahim? Ghalib's Urdu, or the revivalism of Sanskrit karmā-kānda in Sanātana Indian cults of temple prostitutes?

A man of my cultural mix cannot disown one and identify wholly with Valmiki and Bharata. For my personal identity, Agra and Ghalib, Guru Gobind and Amritsar are as much part of my world-idea as Ramayana and Bhagavan Amitabha. It makes no sense for me to disown Ilango and Chandidas or Kamban just because I do not know their beautiful languages Tamil or Bengali. That is my limitation. It is emphasized that I would like to explore and consolidate my own world-view not only from the Sanskrit classics but equally from the rock etchings in central India and Mirzapur; not only from the temples of Kanchi and Bodhgaya or the painting and sculpture of Ajanta, Khajuraho, and Konarak, but also through the modern wonders of Amrita Shergill, M. F. Hussain, Jamini Roy, a Tansen or Ravishankar, Nandalal Bose, and of course Mohandas Gandhi. Examples could be multiplied indefinitely. The religion, sex, and race of these people do not matter to me. For me they are mine; their images and memories have echoed long and me the man I am. I do not know, despite my desire to be representative of the working common people, the peasant as well as the stone carver of modern India, if I have been unconsciously biased in favour of Hindu, Hindi, and North Indian sensibilities. Possibly, likewise, without offence to me, a Maharashtrian or a Bengali, a Kerala Moslem or a Panjabi Sikh, has the right to define his own tradition. The only thing we should jointly try to explore afterwards is how much we converge, without reification. That way lies a *real*

svaraj in ideas for us all. We the poor dehumanized wretched of this earth, who, if fired by the new Science and its inquiry, and moved by the spirit of Neo-Rationalism, are bound to inaugurate a new chapter of vibrant Indianism in the twenty-first century into a yet more glorious future.

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