

## DIMENSIONS OF MAN'S ENCOUNTER WITH THE OTHER

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Encounter with the other implies face to face direct, immediate relationship in contrast with indirect, impersonal kind of relationship through books, artifacts, journals, newspapers, media etc. The former kind of relationship is a living experience which involves practical engagement whereas in the latter case, one acquires encapsuled, verbal or descriptive knowledge about the other. In the following pages, I propose to reflect on the various dimensions of man's encounter with the other. The significance of encounter will be revealed not only in the context of human relationships but also with all types of others which affect personal identity.

Why does one distinguish encounter from simple awareness? Why is not knowledge sufficient? Knowledge is impersonal, detached and presupposes subject-object division - I know the other as separate from me. The encounter on the other hand touches me personally and brings the latter closer to the former.

The encounter is not just a physical proximity but to uphold full-blown conscious attitude towards the other which may lead to transformation of one's identity (wherein the relationship is onesided) or of both (in cases of mutual reciprocal relationships). It is this function of the encounter towards the constitution of the self which needs appreciation.

The exploration of self into the other makes the individual realise that the quest for total control is illusory. It emancipates him from narrow egoism and thus broadens his attitude to envision his presence in finite living beings, nature and the plenitude without getting lost in them. It is this promise of self-identity which is the agenda of authentic encounters. The quest for self-identity avoids egocentricism as well as complete absorption of oneself into the other. It implies -- I be myself and let others be, thus opening the realms

of freedom, creativity and values. It binds the individual with his peers of different languages, races, cultures and nations. Such a relationship is interminably dialogical and transformative.

The authentic person is open and realizes the inevitable difference of perspectives with what he encounters. While those who claim to assert only their own narrow moorings, and are votaries of collective identity invariably commodify culture into stereotypes leading to the malaise of depersonalisation and blight the possibility of genuine encounters. The commercial manipulative 'stereotypes' are dehumanising means of shutting ourselves to the other's authentic identity.

One's attitude towards the other can be of various kinds:

1. Manipulative-mechanical handling leading to pragmatic encounters.
2. Emotional-merging oneself into the other.
3. Understanding based on love leading to an open dialogue.
4. Faith - It takes one from the level of finitude to that of infinitude bridging all the communication-gaps.

The other in the broader sense includes the following :

1. Fellow-beings
2. Animate objects - life-forms other than full-blown persons.
3. Inanimate objects - Nature
4. Infinitude

Man's encounter with his fellow beings constitutes crucial and complex problems. In distinction to his relationship with things and other life-forms, the confrontation with his fellow-beings is more satisfying but it can be very frustrating too. The very being of man is as Heidegger calls it - 'Being-with'. Heidegger holds,

'With' ... to be understood *existentially*, not categorially. By reason of this with like (mithaften). Being-in- the-world, the world is always the one that I share with others. The world of Dasein is a with-world (*Mitwelt*). Being-in is Being-with others.<sup>1</sup>

Heidegger's concept of Being-in-the-world eliminates the dualism of thinking man and the world constituted of things and other human beings. The

individual (*Dasein*) for him does not encounter the world from outside but is in it - he dwells in it and belongs to it. The others are with him, they are not discovered later. For Heidegger, being-alone is also being with others. He says,

Even *Dasein*'s Being-alone is Being-with in the world. The other can be missing only in and for a Being-with.<sup>2</sup>

Heidegger's analysis of the world is not to be understood ontically (scientifically as an assembly of finitary close entities) but ontologically - how the individual (*Dasein*) encounters it existentially reflecting on its significance i.e. worldhood. Heidegger states,

'Worldhood' is an ontological concept and stands for the structure of one of the constitutive items of Being-in-the- world ...'World' is used as an ontical concept, and signifies the totality of those entities which can be present-at-hand within the world.<sup>3</sup>

The entities of the world can be explained only in abstraction scientifically in terms of categories but these cannot exhaust the meaning of the world. Heidegger distinguishes man's being-in- the-world and his being in the midst of the world. Man is present in the world not in the way two inert things are next to each other, his presence reveals the hidden layers of the world as well as of his own being.

Heidegger's notion of care explicates man's direct involvement in the world and through which the individual forms different ties with the others. he is concerned with the objects and is solicitous towards his fellow-beings. Heidegger affirms that the individual only in and through his relationship with the objects and his fellow-beings, quests for self-identity.

Heidegger holds that our everyday dealings with the world are in terms of "a web of functional relationships" wherein others are encountered in terms of their roles and functions. The things are seen in their interactive relationships. He calls man as a "tool maker" who uses things as well as his fellow-beings for his self-interests. No doubt the functional relationships are important but these make only one dimension of man's being in the world.

Heidegger argues that the individual is not fully satisfied with these kinds of functional relationships. Unlike other living creatures, he wants to rise to a personal kind of relationship - identifying himself with the others and seeing

them in their "otherness" without falling captive to them and becoming a mass-man listening to the dictates of mass-culture. The mass-man drifts with the crowd and merges himself in the anonymous "one" or "they", thus forms what Heidegger calls *dasMan*.<sup>4</sup> *DasMan* does not have its own self and is incapable of projecting its own possibilities, leading to absorption in the public world. This is "authentic encounter". The difference between authentic and inauthentic dimension is not that the former is in seclusion and the latter is involved. The difference lies in the individual's way of relating himself to the others. In the authentic dimension, he is fully conscious of his own self as well as of others whereas in the inauthentic dimension, he loses his self-identity.

From the foregoing discussion of Heidegger's concept of Being-in-the-world, it emerges that although man is necessarily rooted in the world yet he should not become its victim. He need not develop master-servant relationship with his fellow-beings - neither controlling them completely nor getting himself enslaved by them. This type of relationship will lead to exploitation alienation and dehumanisation.

Most of our situations and everyday matters remain at the level of reducing the other to the level of an 'I-It' (treating the other person as an object), manipulating him and seeing him only in terms of functional relationships. The individual not only treats the other as an object, most of the time he treats himself also as an object determined by roles and functions, conforming to the stereotypes. Both the cases - whether one determines the other and gets oneself determined by the other, are instances of inauthentic encounters. Is authentic communication possible? Can there be progressive feed-back chain of cumulative intentional transformations?

The authentic relationship is possible only in "I-Thou" confrontation wherein I treat myself as a free being and treat the other also as an autonomous subjective being. The gulf between myself and the other is bridged by intimacy. There is mutual resonance leading to perpetual transformation and awakening of the dormant potentialities. Successive responses redefine the relationships on a higher level. This sort of communication brings about revelation of oneself and that of the other. One comes to grasp one's historicity through the other. The existential encounter cannot be achieved once for all but involves an endless process. It involves active process of inter-personal sharing which is possible

through "dialogical relationships". It is this sort of rippling cascade of enriching being that is to be contrasted with sheer togetherness or mechanical juxtaposition of persons. The dialogical relationships are grounded on love and understanding. Love is the origin of the desire to communicate but it is not whimsical but rather guided by reason. The communication based on whim is bound to break down at some moment or the other. To be adamant, blind, and fanatical possibly can paralyze the "dialogical relationships".

However, even authentic communication is not totally free from conflicts. Jaspers calls communication as "loving struggle". There is a conflict between two selves in which each has a radical viewpoint of other's contentions. Each individual wants to be independent but he knows that it is only through the other he can realise himself. The other is not a perceptual object but he also experiences me. Love must be strong enough so as to promote mutual frankness in the interpersonal communion. It should have reverence for the difference and celebrate it.

We have seen that the individual's relationship with his fellow-beings forms a very significant dimension of his being-in-the-world. But the world is also constituted by animate and inanimate objects and the individual cannot help noticing them.

These days the ecologists emphasise care for all beings. They hold that nature and other myriad life-forms should not be taken as merely of instrumental value to our narrow chauvinistic impulses. Interestingly Heidegger's concept of freedom as "letting be" has impressed the ecologists. The point of view of the ecologists is welcome for human welfare. But in the final analysis, it turns out to be scientific for maintaining the ecological balance. It does not existentially encounter the entities *per se*, but rather views them from the third person perspective of controlling and manipulating them to seek our long time perceived interests.

Man's attitude towards animals is usually manipulative. He uses them to serve his own self-interests. But he also develops emotional attitude towards them. The animals also reciprocate by being faithful or becoming hostile. The role of pets can often be fetish like fixations. Possibility of curiosity, tenderness, fear, love, desire, hatred or their combinations are markedly enhanced in the

encounter with animals and this affects the constitutive mechanism of man's identity.

Besides animals, one also develops friendly attitude towards plants. Animals at times go hostile but trees have always been good friends. The awareness about the need of trees for supporting human existence is scientific. A closer relation with trees and plants could be seen in the old mythologies and fables of many cultures. Personification of trees may be fictional but one cannot fail to appreciate this idolization of the living relationship with plants. The heart of the great poet Wordsworth dances with the Daffodils deepening his state of consciousness. Nature derives its celestial messages to the poet only through suspension of petrified views. The individual thus is inextricably linked with nature. Normally we are not aware of this vital relationship. It needs a poet's heart and a scientist's investigating eyes to understand nature which forms an important dimension of our encounter with the other. It enables us to understand the meaning of being in the richer new light.

There are different ways of looking at nature. The individual manipulates nature to serve his civilizationally rutted purposes. The scientist exploits nature in order to control it. He attempts to counter the negative effects of nature as well. The poet idolises it, ponders over it and gets inspired to be more creative and transforms images of the passive, dumb, laid-back attributes of things and events, and ennobles our sensibilities, in form, texture, and expression.

Nature has tremendous effects on the personality of the individual both in the positive and negative ways. It can inject within the individual the feeling of sublime - the natural beauty fills his heart with joy. The negative role in the form of natural catastrophies can render man completely helpless or frustrate him by obstructing his praxis. One often falls in the limbo of despair and realises the meaninglessness of our whole enterprise. Sometimes this type of realisation impels him to take the leap of transcendence and changes his whole attitude towards life, and deliver oneself to freedom and creativity.

This takes us to an encompassing dimension of man's encounter with infinitude personified wherein all the above mentioned dimensions of man's encounter with the others are converged and harmonised. The immanent and transcendent dimensions of man get synthesised in this encounter. Objects, events

and persons are experienced in terms of ultimate meaning. This encompassing encounter frees man from all the conflicts and transfigures him completely. The temporality and finitudes of man puts him in the face of inevitable situations. One realises that the so-called world is not everything. The encounter with infinitude is the comprehension of the spirit that elevates the finitude into plenitude, a self-transformative upthrust leading to ecstasy and ushering in the revelation of multi-splendoured plenitude. Such an experience brings inward transformation and regulates the life of the individual.

The encounter with infinitude is possible through faith which enables the individual to realise all his possibilities and instil within him the courage to stand against dissolution, obscurantism, importunities which daily confrontations impose on the person. Faith implies subjective certainty and live through all the risks of life. It overcomes despairing rejection of oneself and issues in profound self-affirmation and realisation of supreme worth. It makes one rise from evanescence to plenitude of freedom. The individual dissatisfied with contingency yearns for infinitude which makes him rise above humdrum existence. To have a relationship with infinitude is to attain self-mastery - beyond egocentricity and takes one to the dimension of the sacred - the fusion of horizons. This sort of encounter puts man into a new dimension and discloses the depth of one's being.

The above dynamics of faith (the dialogical bridge) is to be radically distinguished from familiar gory history of dogmatic religious belief which everywhere unthinkingly glorifies stereotyped religious symbols leading to conflicts and fanaticism breaching human communication, vitiating encounters, and ensuing decrepitude of possible human presence.

The quest for transcendence is not an escape from the reality of the world. It rather implants within man the courage and freedom to face the latter with constructive attitude making his life worthwhile. It kindles the flame of humanism within man to embrace the entire mankind. This kind of attitude is very much needed today as the world is divided on the basis of languages, races, religions, nations and cultures. Due to fast strides of information technology, the world has already virtually shrunk into a "global village". The talk of

cross-cultural communication is not merely a theoretical need but a pressing demand of our contemporary existence. Therefore an inter-cultural dialogue is needed in the contemporary scenario. To understand the “culturally other” despite the cultural diversities be the global agenda for human solidarity.

### NOTES

1. M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1973, pp. 154-155.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 156-157.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 164.