

The Mythical Horizon of Every Human Right :

A Tale for Our Time

(published in *Jeevadhara* 21, 1991, p 48-52)

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I am a self-supporting villager with a small farm of my own and have three children. I do not see why I have to pay some strange taxes to maintain, they say, an army and a social infrastructure which make possible my security. Our family has lived for generations without such qualms. My son has also refused to go to what they call the military “service”.

And now I hear grand talk about Human Rights. I am not undermining the power of the State, I am not intending to establish a *new* style of life. My son is not challenging any of the “sacred” principles of democracy. We are not isolated individuals either. We have lively relations with a vast number of people and have an enriching net of exchanges in all senses of the word. We had our own well and animals. Now they have put strange pipelines in and ask us to contribute to the “service” they do to us - which we have neither asked for nor do we see it bringing real advantages. It makes us more dependent on who opens or closes the faucet (which word, incidentally, I am told, comes from “falsifying”). I am ready, just to make a compromise, to pay some compensation for the

alleged “service”. But not for the militarization and industrialization of the country, which they say extends far beyond the limits of the real history of the people who speak our own language, which they call a dialect.

Now, I am fined, punished, and so is my son. Do we not have the *right to be ourselves* ? Do we not have the right to decide about our lives, provided we do not harm others ? Have we *rights* only if we join the train of modernity which has to move on prefabricated tracks ?

They speak about the voice of the voiceless, but it is always their voices - and their languages. They say that feudalism is over, but I fail to see the difference. The only difference is that it is now practically impossible to escape their computerized controls. Before, it was all done as a matter of fact and fate. Now, the attempt they make at justifying and the entire talk about Human Rights, backfires, for we have lost our innocence and are not convinced by their arguments. I wonder if we really have “progressed”.

I am not speaking about “revolutionary” people as those who want, for instance, a separate country or region, or who upset the status quo. What right has a State to declare its proper limits sacred and untouchable when people within those limits seem to question both the sacredness and the inviolability ? My case is milder. It is the query of the Human Rights to a dissent which does not upset anything - except, perhaps, they say, that this will set a precedent and trigger a “domino effect”. If they preach democracy I do not understand their fear of people’s opinions. I am merely asking whether I have the

Right of not playing the game, of abstaining. We are not subversive. We are peace-loving people. And my simple question is about the meaning of Human Rights, of individual human rights - since I hear that the Human Rights are precisely there to protect the right of individuals against coercions from higher powers.

So far the query. Let us listen now to the sociologist, the psychologist, and the philosopher.

The *sociologist* will argue like this :

You do not realize that you are not alone, that you are forming part of a great nation which needs your collaboration precisely to make possible what you are dreaming of. You are living under a democratic constitution which states that we, the sovereign people, have given us that charter in order to live in peace. So you should bow to the will of the majority who through their representatives have decided that the common good demands from you these services.

No need to say that our Man will not be convinced. He has not framed the Constitution nor was he asked anything of what the sociologist is talking about. He even has different ideals. And our Man is sufficiently self-taught so as not to abide by the argument that his abstentionism produces a great evil. He is not tempted to organize a political party in order to fight for his rights. He has neither the means nor the liking, nor the faith that such is the way. He is precisely contesting the very rules of the game of the so-called democratic set-up. They say one Man, one vote. His experience tells him : one

rupee, one vote. His only reaction will be one of resignation, apathy, loss of enthusiasm, and will simply yield to the pressures, and eventually compensate the injustice he feels victim of by “going the way of friends”, which is what others call corruption.

The *psychologist* may take a different route. He will say something like this : your reactions are diachronical. You live in another time, you have not yet evolved and fail to realize that the world today lives on another wavelength - and you have got to play the game. You have the right to dissent only within the limits set up by the Constitution, but meanwhile you have to abide by the rules of society. You have now plenty of rights which you did not have before, let alone that of voicing your discontent. But you should not contest the very foundations of our rights.

To which our Man may answer, taking the hint from the psychological jargon, that perhaps his position is not diachronical, out of time, but diatopical , out of place. Has he to accept psychological homogenization in the same way that they impose agricultural homogeneous programs and monocultures of all types ? Has one not the right to live in a different time and also on a different space ? Are Human Rights only for modern democrats ?

The *philosopher* will ponder within and will feel incapable of talking to the peasant. The problem is not of the *logos* - and thus no rational word will do - but of the *mythos*. That petty landowner lives another world and not just another vision of the (same) world. This is what I call the conflict of *Kosmologies*.

Human Rights have been presented as universal rights, but they are such only within a very particular mythical world. It is, to be sure, the predominant mythical world of the “developed” nations and the “elites” profiteering from the “developing” countries. The “Human Rights” come from the mythos of that predominant culture which sees as mythical the world of the “undeveloped” peoples, but is unable to discover its own myth.

The alternative is not “Human Rights” or nothing, anarchy, the exploitation of the poor and no bridle to the abuses of power, “Human Rights” try precisely to counteract. The alternative is to find the *homeomorphic equivalents* in each culture so that human dignity and the sacredness of reality may be safeguarded - as I have tried to explicate above.

Our philosopher may still ponder how easily under the cloak of “Human Rights” a particular “civilization” may penetrate into others and disrupt the fabric of different cultures. Our philosopher may have sympathy with our peasant, but remain speechless in front of him and his son. The philosophical talk about myth and logos, about cosmology and kosmology, individual and person requires not only theoretical knowledge. Of this the Man of our example is fully capable. The responsible philosophical approach is not a lifeless abstraction in the realm of ideas. A meaningful philosophical reaction to this question requires *praxis*. It has to take into account the *Sitz im Leben* of the discussion. Philosophy cannot abstract from power and politics. And present-day philosophy has been often devitalized because made to function in an ideal world. Philosophy has severed its links with science, on the one hand, and theology on the other. The three now suffer from the split.

Within the concrete context of present-day India our philosopher may still think in serene but melancholic mood : we are in a situation which has yet hardly reflected on the meeting of cultures and encounter of religions in “post-independent” India. We hurried, for political and historical reasons, to imitate the model of Western civilization. It is undoubtedly one of the greatest civilizations of the planet, but certainly neither the only one, nor perhaps the most congenial to the Indian subcontinent. We acted as if our traditional cultures were either dead or inferior, and superimposed a political pattern borrowed from the Anglo-Saxon world. Perhaps there was no other viable alternative. Now the West is having second thoughts, but we are already thrown into the technocratic complex. If we retrieve traditional culture, we may perish. If we do not, we will certainly do so.

The philosopher feels paralyzed to speak. To incite rebellion courts total fiasco. The allure to obey undermines the nerve of sane people. Our philosopher is thankful for the questions of the peasant but is now going to meet the intellectuals and urge them not be satisfied with some amendments here and there. These are urgently necessary. But a thorough transformation is essentially required. If the four millennia of the culture of the Indian subcontinent mean anything, it is taking into account that political and human problems have to be tackled. We can strive for success in international markets, but no people can truly live from a borrowed myth.