CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

"Dialectical Dynamism" of D.P. Chattopadhyaya*

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THERE is a kind of *leitmotif* which goes through all the works written by Professor D.P. Chattopadhyaya. That is his approach to the relationship of tradition and modernity. In the introduction to his book published as the sixth volume in PHISPC series of monographs on history of philosophy, science and culture in India, he acknowledges:

> Many of our chosen ways of shaping the future are unnecessarily foreign. I do not even remotely suggest that all that is foreign is unwelcome. Many ideas and technologies of the foreign origin, because of their rational or beneficial character, are welcome. What I am suggesting is this. Even after the open conflict between our cultural identity and the identity of other culture subsides, the silent conflict (of interests, approaches and values) between the two persists.[1]

This quotation adequately sums up D.P. Chattopadhyaya's well balanced and realistic stand on the subject.

In my view D.P. Chattopadhyaya has laid a solid theoretical foundation under his stand by reflecting on the concept of development and progress as well as by contemplating on the nature, formation and evolution of values. I would like to mention here some of his points which seem to be of great importance.

In D.P. Chattopadhyaya's understanding of "progress" the most essential are the following affirmations. First of

all, though "the concept of progress is kindred to that of development . . . one must take note of the distinction between the two."[2] The main distinction is that "progress is basically cultural and not natural and that there is nothing like natural law of progress." Consequently, "our attention is likely to be focused on the human aspect of progress, on the factors underlying progress."[3]

Just because progress is basically a cultural phenomenon it is usually understood that progress and universal culture as such do not exist. D.P. Chattopadhyaya points out that culture, like language or morality, is universal only as a concept. Cultural, linguistic or moral *universale* are "intellectual constructions," they are "*universale* only by courtesy."[4] He does not deny that there are some generic characteristics which could be designated by terms, like "linguistic universals" (Chomsky), "cultural universals" (Lévi-Strauss), "biological universals" (Lenneberg) or "universal moral law" (Kant). He acknowledges common human roots. However, all those concepts are empty concepts having no objectual exemplifications. On that account, "cultural development or advancement does not necessarily entail universalisation or globalisation of some specific cultural achievements, artistic, legal or religious."[5] Such universalisation is not only wrong, it is dangerous, and possesses "a dark implication." Referring to some examples, D.P. Chattopadhyaya reminds us that in the name of a universal religion "many unholy wars have been fought, resulting in the death of millions of human beings," and in the name of a universal science "pseudosciences have been promoted and different forms of science ignored or even crushed."[6] The point which is stressed upon in many of his writings is: "the recognition of difference between different forms of culture is unavoidable."[7]

D.P. Chattopadhyaya strongly opposes those who claim that "development . . . to be an invariant value of all cultures."[8] He realistically points out that "breakdowns of civilisation and sickness of culture are not accidents of history," they are "integral parts of it."[9] Here, like in many other cases, the student fully shares his teacher's (Karl Popper) observation: progress is not an inherent law of history. D.P. Chattopadhyaya calls to take a circumspect and critical view of history. "The easy option to establish objectivity in terms of linear progress or development," he states, "needs no modification, but rejection."[10]

Are we as human beings capable of preventing those breakdowns of civilisation and sickness of culture? Are we in power to shape our own future? What should be then our means and methods? The answer I have found in D.P. Chattopadhyaya's writings is: "Yes, we can, if the future is not excluded from the present and from the past."[11] To include the present and in particular the past in our future means to take tradition as "a very important thing in the life of a nation."[12] However, it does not mean that tradition should be perpetuated or prolonged beyond a point of time since it would inhibit freedom and creative genius of the people concerned:

> Repetition of history is not the lesson of history. The lesson of history is to change and to enrich it by discoveries, inventions and innovations.[13]

D.P. Chattopadhyaya refers to and shares Gandhi's approach to tradition and modernity which is against a "discontinuous and violent change."[14] Gandhi instead suggested non-violent revolution like *sarvodaya* which literally means all-round development by a peaceful method of social change found in *satyāgraha*. D.P. Chattopadhyaya believes that non-violent *satyāgraha* aims "to maintain the inner continuity between tradition and modernisation."[15] Being truthful to the critical nature of

his mind, D.P. Chattopadhyaya in spite of all his great respect for Gandhi, dares to mark the point of disagreements with Mahatma in this particular case. In his view,

> most of Gandhi's ideas and actions in respect of *satyāgraha* can be satisfactorily explained without using the God-in-Man hypothesis. The question of God has remained a favourite subject of philosophical disputes from the very dawn of human civilisation and culture. The results of human reason and experience accumulated and assimilated over the centuries have left behind enough of norms and forms to minimise conflicts . . . enabling mankind to discover and establish numerous modes of conflict, co-operation and integration. Some of the noblest teachers of mankind like Buddha and Marx who worked so much for human unity and progress were atheists. Some of the most well-known and influential followers of Gandhi like Nehru did not share their master's faith in God. *Satyāgraha* is a noble principle. But its metaphysical foundation seems to be questionable and dispensable."[16]

Thus, changes are inevitable and needed. D.P. Chattopadhyaya tries to develop the general thesis that the main dynamics of social change is man[17] with reference again to the ideas of Gandhi. However, he goes much further beyond the latter in his elaboration on the subject by bringing up his own evolutionary theory of values.

The prime point D.P. Chattopadhyaya states is: "whatever man makes, inherits, or needs — theory, values, or social institutions — is questioned, enriched, or impoverished, and, in the process, changed."[18] The evolutionary character of theory, value, institutions, etc., rightly understood, means the necessity of the human intervention in the process. "Transformation of both nature and culture is brought about by human ideas and actions."[19] Chattopadhyaya joins philosophers like Karl Popper who

argue that values are basically human products and subject to the extremely complex laws of cultural evolution. In that process the role man plays is not of a copyist but of a creator.

> Man can initiate thought and action processes. In other words, he creates values both as a part of nature and a partaker in a cultural process.[20]

In a number of his writings D.P. Chattopadhyaya points out shortcomings of the universalist theories of values with reference to different spheres of art, ethics, religion, sciences, etc. He believes that it is not only unwise but also dangerous to affirm the existence of so-called universal values and to impose, dictate them disregarding differences of culture, time and needs. He strongly insists on "the futility of search for values which are not culture-bound."[21]

To "law-oriented universalism" which goes along with "static structuralism" D.P. Chattopadhyaya opposes what he calls "fact-oriented particularism," "dialectical dynamism." Yet it does not mean that he does not realise that both approaches create certain difficulties. In fact, he is against both extremes:

> Emphasis on laws, whether these are construed in pro-naturalistic or anti-naturalistic ways, tends to berate the importance of the uniqueness of praxiological actions. Denial of laws in order to vindicate not only the unique character of valued actions but also the freedom of man as the author of those actions gives one the impression that values, strictly speaking, are neither objective nor universal.[22]

D.P. Chattopadhyaya looks critically into different efforts of reconciling the two opposite attitudes and in the long run finds out Ernest Cassirer's approach "very promising"[23] referring to his *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* where it is shown how symbolic representations of different forms of experience, despite their ontological regionalism or relativism, have transcendental and intelligible appeal.

However, generally speaking, to reconcile historical or sociological practicalism with transcendentalism does not prove easy. D.P. Chattopadhyaya is of the opinion that different forms of metaphysical essentialism, anthropological structuralism and law-governed historicism which have been resorted to to deal with this disturbing situation retain the basic shortcomings: they are distant from and artificially related with actual practices, wide and disparate variety of practical examples.[24]

Though D.P. Chattopadhyaya straightforwardly affirms that he has not "the slightest sympathy either with any kind of universalism or with historicism of all varieties (Hegelian, Marxian, Spenglerian, Sri Aurobindian, Sorokian)," and he has "full sympathy with those who treat them with contempt,"[25] yet he feels that they indicate some problems which stay unsolved. D.P. Chattopadhyaya indicates one of those unsolved "riddles" in the domain of art.

In his view neither history nor sociology of art forms of different ages and cultures show any uniformity of laws and patterns. The diversity of art forms is boundless and their relativistic character is undeniable. How then to explain that certain works of art appeal to people belonging to widely separated cultures and epochs? In short, how to explain undeniable transcultural or objective appeal of art? Chattopadhyaya is sure that "enlarged and shared world of beautiful is not a matter of a priori or instant achievement," and it cannot result from some transcendental unity. It is the outcome, variable outcome, of experience, of what is experienced, of the will to experience and of the joy borne out of it."[26]

I am very much in agreement with D.P. Chattopadhyaya's general position on the subject. However, that latter solution of "the riddle" does not look to me clear enough. Since he

considers that his basic argument could be extended to the spheres of ethics, religions and sciences, I wish his argumentation concerning how universal principles prove to be true of or establish its applicative credentials in relation to peculiar facts would be more precise and convincing.

One of the most thought-provoking statements of D.P.Chattopadhyaya is made in connection with the problem of conflict in the cultural development. There is no doubt that different and active cultures often prove conflicting. Cultural pluralism implies conflicts as well as conflicts imply cultural pluralism. Chattopadhyaya warns against condemning these elements of conflict without understanding their "functional import."[27] He affirms that "a culture which knows no conflict or does not allow any scientific or ideological controversy within it, slowly degenerates into a totalitarian form, a sort of uncriticisable tribalism."[28] In general, conflict plays a very important role within the evolutionary process:

> Unity of opposites, conflict and harmony and similar other paired concepts bring out the dynamic character of social development. Freedom of man is the root of this social dynamics.[29]

It is because of the latter that D.P.Chattopadhyaya makes his choice. As he acknowledges: "My approach is basically freedom-related."[30]

Now, after all that has been said, I would try to see to which trends of thought in the contemporary East D.P. Chattopadhyaya belongs. The first, in fact superficial, look at his writings may give an impression that he is a typical modernist-Westerniser. Such impression appears at the examination of the list of references he gives, which is commonly full of the names of Western philosophers. Further, the problems he deals with are very much those which are mostly under modern discourse. At least,

Chattopadhyaya does not correspond to the image of a thinker-reformer. The latter generally tends to revise or reconstruct the traditional values and notions in response to the challenges coming from the West. Say, for example, a distinguished poet-philosopher both of India and Pakistan Muhammad Iqbal being aware of Asian and African young generation's demand for a fresh orientation of their faith (as a Muslim, he kept in mind here Islam), had come to the conclusion that it was "necessary to examine, in an independent spirit, what Europe has thought and how far the conclusions reached by her can help . . . in the revision and, if necessary, reconstruction of theological thought in Islam." In Iqbal's view, it was high time to look into the essentials of Islam and therefore he undertook "a philosophical discussion of some basic ideas of Islam"[31] (essentials and basic ideas are also taken as Islamic universals).

In spite of all this Chattopadhyaya is undoubtedly a philosopher-reformer. He uncompromisingly adheres to an evolutionary way of bringing changes, to social dynamism and freedom. He seems to focus his attention not so much on the deliberation and revision or reconstruction of national values and notions as on the critical examination of Western way of thinking, Western ideas and Western world outlook. In doing that he warns his compatriots about the shortcomings (sometimes, even evils) of the Western civilisation and thus prevents them from following wrong directions.

I sincerely believe that Chattopadhyaya's "warnings" are of no less significance for my own compatriots.

The present stage through which Russia nowadays is passing is often called "*Perestroika*," which means "reconstruction." However, it seems it would be more precise to describe it as the condition of being "at the cross-

Author check the word. Should it be Westernises or Westernisers?

roads," since the Russian "architects" and "constructors" do not have a plan of action for the realisation of any particular project. It is true that among them there are those who strongly believe that they need to build a "skyscraper," while others "prefer to construct an *Izba* — a traditional Russian village "log-cabin." As for the majority, they wish for themselves, and especially for their children and grandchildren, just to have a comfortable house where well-being and justice could reside.

In short, the controversy between so-called *zapadniks* **(Westernises)** and *slavophiles* (a kind of Russian fundamentalists) which took place in the second half of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries and was broken by the Russian October revolution of 1917 has been back nowadays. As it was in the past, the public opinion is divided between those who share Peotr Chaadaev's conviction: "it is impossible to become civilised without following a European model,"[32] and those who follow Konstantin Leontiev, who insisted: the main task of Russia is not to submit to Europe but "to preserve its particularity." Only future can give a final response to the question: who is right in this controversy? Yet in order not to repeat the mistakes of the past and to avoid new ones we are to participate in the dialogue of cultures, because "individuals and peoples get self-conscious only through comparing themselves with the others."[33]

While reflecting on the problems which are of vital importance for Russia we are inclined nowadays either to take the West as a certain *beau idéal* which can give us the right direction, or to rely exclusively on our own historical experience. In fact, the experiences of non-Western countries are completely ignored, though many of them have passed or are passing through the same period of "the reconstruction" like us.

Russia might learn a lot not only by taking into account the political experience of non-Western nations, in particular, those who possess a rich cultural heritage of their own. We can and I believe we should be more attentive to the voices of philosophers from those countries, to the voices of those who independently and creatively reflect on the problems of common vital importance. D.P. Chattopadhyaya is undoubtedly one of them. I wish my compatriots could follow his advices in many cases. At least the following statement by D.P. Chattopadhyaya is quite relevant to the modern Russian situation:

> There are certain basic human rights and . . . every civil society must recognise and wherever possible, enforce the same. The main difference arises on the question of practice or determining the enforcement conditions. . . . The principles of the basic human rights should not be formulated in an abstract manner, disregarding the conditions, the social context, of the concerned human beings.[34]

Notes and References

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