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## **INTERROGATING THE CIVILIZATIONAL APPROACH OF N. K. BOSE**

Nirmal Kumar Bose figures prominently in any discourse on the development of anthropology and sociology in India, serious or popular (Mukherjee, 1977 and 1979; Uberoi, *et al.*, 2007; Nagla, 2008). Ramkrishna Mukherjee admires that Bose did not confine his attention to only one or two aspects of society or to any ‘fashionable’ approach, although he was gently influenced by the American ‘diffusionists’ and Malinowski (1979 : 69). Bose encouraged the younger generation of the 1950s to undertake a meticulous collection of field data, “albeit in micro situations and on the basis of a simplistic methodology”. He did not appear, to Mukherjee, a rigorous and systematic analyst so that “ultimately most of his studies leaned towards enlightened scientific journalism” (1979 : 69).

In contrast to the above appraisal of Bose by Mukherjee, Surajit Sinha sought to bring into relief the extraordinary range of intellectual interests of Professor Bose and also how he brought an “original and penetrating mind” to the areas of enquiry of his choice. Bose transgressed the boundaries of specific disciplines and “the conventional divide between theoretical thinking and the application of knowledge”, between social sciences and humanities. He was in search of roots of the perennial “*strength of Indian Civilisation*” and the factors that constrained its creativity in modern times (Sinha, 1986 : Foreword). The approach adopted by Bose is termed “civilizational” approach (UGC NET syllabus 2000; Chaudhury, 2007; Nagla 2008; Bhattacharya, 2011). Surajit Sinha is viewed to have continued the tradition of Bose (Chaudhuri, 2007, Nagla, 2008). Chaudhury relies in his analysis a great deal on André Beteille who writes, “Fairly early in his career Bose recognised the enormous scale in both space and time of Hindu civilization to go beyond the approaches followed by the anthropologists in their studies of tribal communities. In this sense we might observe a trend of intellectual kinship of Bose and Kroeber (Beteille (ed.) 1976 : 1-2).

What is most patently evident in Bose’s exploration in diverse fields of knowledge from archaeology and art and architecture through physical anthropology to humanistic disciplines of social and cultural anthropology

and social history is his unwavering interest in unravelling the nature of the millennia-old Indian civilization, its contribution to human society spread over the globe. He made efforts for this purpose to generate an Indian tradition in anthropology, an Indian tradition of field-based enquiry in anthropology and the social sciences” (Sinha, op. cit. : 73).

In order to meet the intellectual challenge which he set for himself, Bose often stepped out of books in search of a proper understanding of the human conditions *in situ* and took the life of “a Parivrajaka – a wanderer field scientist” (Sinha, op. cit.) who wrote in both English and Bengali the results of his observation which were tinged with his personal experience nuanced in varying measures at different layers. Though Bose was eager to maintain a scientific attitude towards the reality, he did not allow every time the formalism and formalities of scientific procedure to hinder his understanding of it and his communication of this understanding to his audience - an audience that lay wide spread beyond the cocoons of the academics.

The nature of this strategy of Bose, displayed in his voluminous writings in Bengali, has been adroitly analysed by Pradip Basu (2011). The small narratives of the scholar-wanderer’s experience of specific instances of the reality, have been masterly woven into a more comprehensive narrative of the social organisation and culture of the Hindus and other ethnic groups of India. Only a hurried reading of Bose’s writings and an uncharitable attitude to Bose would dismiss them as journalistic pieces uninformed by any coherent and consistent theoretical approach. Though influenced by diffusionism and functionalism, Bose became conscious, early in his life, of the multifaceted reality like Indian society which continues through the vicissitudes of time and calls for a theoretical approach which is based on an appreciation of the close connection of history and society. The variegated character of Indian society and culture sheltering most primitive peoples simultaneously with ethnic groups with knowledge of relatively advanced techniques of production and corresponding principles of social organization becomes comprehensible only when one keeps in view how the parts and levels of socio-economic organisation interact with one another as well as with the exogenous forces. The very idea of interaction suggests dynamism which has characterized the successive stages of the growth of Indian civilization. The Indian civilization is for Bose mainly Hindu civilization because of the predominance of the Brahmanical institution of the caste through a long period of its evolution. Caste is based on the principles of a non-competitive system of production and sustenance of a multi-cultural milieu that is largely tolerant of differences in beliefs and ideas of various groups of people that come to embrace the social organisation of caste. An adequate comprehension of the nature of working of caste system demands a knowledge of history which facilitates an appreciation of the specificities of configurations of place, time and people and their interconnections, interaction and transformation. In short, an anthropologist

interested in exploring the nature of Indian society proceeding through the ages has to learn the art of studying social history. As a social historian, Bose came to make the profound observation that “[an] *original kind of civilization was built up here* [i.e., India] in which communities were bound to one another by traditional ties of economic interdependence, while each was encouraged to live by the major cultural values which it had inherited from the past” (Bose, 1964 : 413; emphasis and parentheses added). The preceding statement embodies the quintessence of Bose’s thesis about the working of Indian society and culture. He adopted a “civilizational approach” to arrive at the thesis.

The fact that Bose did have an approach towards the socio-cultural reality of India is admitted by Mukherjee in 2003, though it was anchored “in consensual complementarity in place of resolution of contradictions” (Mukherjee in Sen (ed.) 2003 : xii). Mukherjee hastens to add that Bose was not oblivious to the fallacies of the viewpoint of consensual complementarity. He “*was critical to any dogmatic stand on the viewpoint*. I remember, he told me after he came back from the USA, where his visits were really organized by Robert Redfield, that *he felt uncomfortable at Chicago* : the central place of Robert Redfield” (Ibid.:xiv emphases added). Though, in the beginning Bose was deeply impressed by the idea of consensual complementarity in village life as projected by Redfield, particularly, in his study of Tepoztalan in Mexico.

That Bose developed a theoretical approach and that this approach was based on a consideration of the Indian (Hindu) civilization seems to be accepted by the sociologists and historians (Bhattacharya 2011). But, what did he mean by ‘civilization’? It has not been, so far, made sufficiently clear. Chaudhury (2007) accepts, following Beteille (ed., 1976) Bose’s notion of ‘civilization’ as synonymous with ‘social organisation.’

A more precise articulation by Bose of what is meant by civilization, of the depth and expanse of civilization seems desirable. It must be admitted that Bose did not, earlier in his career, offer any precise formulation of what is conveyed by the term, civilization. He once observed, “... (1) culture and civilization are terms synonymously used in anthropology. ... (2) cultures have certain things in common, but each shows some characteristics by means of which it can be distinguished from others. If we choose a set of values, then cultures can be compared and ranked as high and low. It is good to remember that their relative position changes if we choose another set of values as our standard. And, then there has been no agreement about any universally acceptable value system for purposes of comparison or evaluation. (Bose, 1960).

This use of ‘culture’ as a synonym for ‘civilization’ and vice versa is patent in each of the three essays by him which contain the word, civilization, in its respective titles (Bose 1960, 1971, 1971a). Thus, he writes in 1971 essay, “it is usual in anthropology to regard Culture as the totality of the behaviour of human communities along with the material objects, social institutions,

*value-systems and world-views which men build up in course of collective living.* I admit this is a rather clumsy definition of the term Culture, but it would be possible to render the idea somewhat clearer if we take up some specific examples from the *culture – history of our land*” (1971 : 2, emphases added). Then, through a rapid survey of manifestations of the caste system and traits of material culture and the belief systems in different parts and segments of Indian society, Bose comes to show the presence of Indian unity in the pyramidal structure of Indian society. One comes to witness an increasing measure of unity at the succeeding higher levels of existence – from material arts to social structure to beliefs and sentiments enshrined in values and the value system. “We can consider that, at the apex lay the *highest forms of worldview* which accepted multiplicity of forms, so long as there was unity in the central core, namely, that the phenomenal aspects of life were built round fragmentary views of Truth – made up of Truth and non-Truth - ; and that when the highest point of Truth was reached, phenomenal distinctions became completely obliterated..... This is how we may view Indian civilization (Ibid.: 8; emphases added). The above statements do not, it is patent, clearly differentiate between Indian culture and Indian civilization.

The difference and interconnection between what is implied by culture and what is meant by civilization seem to be implied in his 1960 article though he did not consistently work out the implications in his later writings. Bose wrote, “India has a vast population which comprises about one-sixth of the total human race. Its ancient history extends to about five hundred years from now, and there have lived within its boundaries *different peoples who have been responsible for several distinct civilizations.* These civilizations have not generally tried to oust one another; but on the whole, they have succeeded in living side by side after some amount of mutual readjustment. Within India’s social structure also, we do not find any effort to fuse the different peoples into one undistinguishable whole. On the other hand, there has always been a conscious endeavour to form like *a confederation of peoples professing various cultures,* if only they acknowledged certain broad principles in common. Indian society therefore, has always presented a more or less stratified appearance, the various elements of which have been more distinctly defined than in case of composite societies in other parts of the world” (1960 : 2; emphasis added.) One might infer from the preceding statement the following equation : *different peoples practise different cultures, and a confederation of peoples professing different cultures but subscribing to certain common principles or ‘core values’ constitutes a civilization.*

The foregoing equation, gleaned from several writings by Bose, seems to be legitimized by his analysis of the very concept of ‘civilization’, which he presented on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of the Anthropological Survey of India in 1970 (Bose, 1976). No doubt, this analysis too reflects a certain degree of indeterminacy of the denotation (as well as connotation) of what is

indicated by civilization : “The term civilization is being used here in a *rather broad sense*. A civilization like the European or Hindu, may include within it several cultures like the French or German, Dravidian or Bengali, for instance. Each of these cultures is marked by several distinctive qualities; yet there are a number of *common elements* which they share between themselves, and *which mark them off from members of another family or civilization*” (Bose, 1976 : 129; emphasis added). There is an apparent mismatch between the categories of “Hindu” and “European” (the latter is geographical or territorial but the former is not necessarily territorial only). Bose and, for that matter, many other scholars espousing the logic of comprehending and comparing relatively comprehensive socio-cultural systems or civilizations, seem to be ill-at-ease with the task of identifying comparable civilizational units. Bose tries to grapple with the problem by giving several other examples from the contemporary society and history. His biography reveals that Bose has had very deep acquaintance with both Bengali and Odissi cultures. On the basis of that experience he avers that in the history of India, there has always been noteworthy difference between the *Hindu Cultures of Bengali*, Tamil Nadu or Orissa. Yet, in so far as central ideas or organisations are concerned, *they share a number of common elements, which have given them a distinctness, marking them off from, say, the urban Islamic civilization* which was introduced and fostered under the care of the Muslim rulers of North India” (1976 : 129; emphases added). While the preceding observation by Bose is an attempt to lay bare the character of Hindu civilization of India, it raises difficulty for those who would like to comprehend the composite nature of Indian civilization which seems to embrace both Hindu and Islamic ways of life.

Discussion of the apparent mismatch between the categories of “Hindu” and “European” or the problem of integration of Hindu and Islamic values under the rubric of Indian civilization may be postponed for a while. In the mean time, one may examine Bose’s proposed method for studying civilization. What Bose suggested was something akin to the wisdom contained in the popular statement referring to the problem that ‘they can’t see the wood for the trees’. Anthropology, as it crystallized during the mature years of his life, appeared to Bose dependent mainly on what was followed in the study of cells or cytology, “in which the morphological question was subordinated or disregarded. A cell can certainly be studied on its own; but it is also necessary, on other grounds, to know where a cell comes from : from a bone or muscle, or from the blood or the nervous system. Parallel questions seem to have been under-rated in the enthusiasm for the study of micro-cultures or micro-phenomena in anthropology” (1976 : 132).

The above stated appreciation of the conditions in anthropology of Bose’s times underlay, no doubt, Bose’s study of *Hindu Samajer Gadan (Garhan)* which was his first cogent statement of the approach to be adopted towards the understanding of a society comprising a good number of

communities and cultures. It was located in the milieu of the opening years of Independent India. The ties of solidarity of diverse communities of the country were, as a matter of course, sought to be emphasized. The initial optimism for national unity, however, waned in subsequent decades which witnessed strongly fissiparous tendencies of varied kinds. Strifes and conflicts between religious communities, castes, tribes, regions, linguistic groups, and between tribes and non-tribes seriously tested the veracity of much vaunted and cliché-like statement of “unity in diversity” of Indian culture and society. In those circumstances, Bose felt that anthropology in India “cannot afford to miss the over-all view of things” (1970 :2; emphasis added). He expresses the hope that the design of researches in cultural anthropology will be made in a way which eventually leads “to the formation of composite picture for the whole civilization of India” (1976 : 132).

Bose was a freedom-fighter during the colonial period. In independent India he worked in several positions which were important in the new polity, e.g., as Director of Anthropological Survey of India and Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. In the General Review : 1970 -71, by him as the Commissioner of SCs and STs, Bose writes : “In accordance with the traditions of Indian Civilization, it has been also our consistent policy not to try and impose one uniform culture by force upon all the constituent elements of the Indian nation, so much so that in some portions of India where the tribal communities are in considerable majority, the cultural or social authority of those communities is preserved by the Fifth and Sixth Schedules of the Constitution. We may also draw attention to the freedom enjoyed hitherto by certain sects of all parts of India in regard to their personal law.... Whatever might be the arrangement in the political and economic spheres, the cultural freedom of various communities has thus been safeguarded in India, as hardly anywhere else in the world..... All that *the national leadership* insists upon is that the bonds of political and economic interdependence must be made more and more firm. Cultural diversity will grow in a creative manner on the basis of that underlying unity, just as beautiful flowers do in a well-tended garden where the soil has been well taken care of. *We do not want the flowering of culture to take place as in a jungle*” (1972 : 218; emphases added).

The words emphasized in the citation above seem to indicate how Bose, a social scientist, assumes the role of a protagonist of his country’s integration into the world market or comity of nations and identifies himself in the process with the rulers, democratically elected political leaders and the bureaucrats, providing ‘national leadership’ in Independent India. Bose does not find fault with this role of a social scientist. He is rather impatient if social scientists fail to play this role. Bose writes, “If the politicians or our administrators in Delhi [confronted with the demands of the Nagas for a separate nation-state for the Nagas] come to the question whether the Nagas should be treated as a Nation or many different communities who are becoming welded into a Nation,

what shall be our answer? Shall we say that at the moment we are involved in trying to find out the social structure of the Ao Nagas, or the Angamis or of their linguistics and later on by about a hundred years' time we will be able to say exactly what is going to happen to the Nagas? In the meantime, many things will happen which shall be beyond our expectation. Now, therefore, I do believe that anthropology cannot afford to miss the overall view of things ..." (1970 : 2).

Thus, civilizational approach to the society and culture in India is aimed at discovering and highlighting the threads of unity binding the plethora of ethnic groups encompassed by it, which practise at a certain level a great diversity of cultures – beliefs and faiths and values and also material objects and practices - and still interact with one another in such a way as a sense of interdependence and unity grows among them and distinguishes their family or cluster from another family or cluster of cultures practiced by a different set of communities. Two most important features of a civilization are : (a) unity amongst its component units; and (b) its distinctiveness from other civilizations. Search for these features of a civilization involves not only a synchronic study of the nature of the parts of the civilization and their interaction at a particular time but a diachronic study of their interaction through time. In other words, the vision has to be extended through history originating in the past and culminating through the present to the future. As Bose observes, "I have something [sic] drawn greater inspiration in my anthropological studies from readings of history, than by reading conventional anthropological reports" (1970 : 5).

Which kind of inspiration was received by Bose through delving into the history of Indian civilization and why did he require it? The relevance of Bose's "civilizational approach" for sociological studies today may be found in the probable answer to these questions. The 'inspiration' and the need for it was prompted by the milieu of nationalistic fervour during the freedom struggle in which Bose participated directly and actively. At the ideational level the "nationalists" felt a strong need for rebuttal of that kind of orientalism which painted the past of India with the black tar of all-pervading incapacity and pessimism. There was not one India, there was no single Indian people with a common Indian heritage. The 'Indians' were a motley collection of groups and communities divided one against another. They would never be a nation. The alien rulers obstructing the attainment of political freedom by the Indians so strongly succeeded in their propaganda as it beguiled even a sociologist of the stature of Max Weber. Weber had grave doubts as to whether India would remain one and united after the withdrawal of *Pax Britannica* from India (Weber, 1958; see also Bhattacharyya 1990). The pioneers in Indian sociology such as B. K. Sarkar or G. S. Ghurye, along with great social thinkers such as Rammohan Roy, Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore and Anand K. Coomaraswamy, tried to fight away the pernicious shibboleths spread by the

western rulers and scholars that the Indians were peoples without a civilization enabling them to thrive materially and spiritually and were therefore, incompetent for gaining and sustaining self-rule (cf. Bhattacharya, 2011, and also Bhattacharyya, 1990). Under the circumstances, the search for the existence and continuance of a *civilizational basis* of the life of the Indians divided into many castes and ethnic communities was a desideratum.

How does one account for Bose's consistent advocacy for having the perspective of Indian civilization as a whole in the post-independence era also? The answer has only been adumbrated above. For an elaboration of it one may listen to Bose in his own words : "Today we are passing through a transition period where various forces of fission are operative on the Indian social body. If we look upon the whole of India as one big social body, as it is certainly a political system, the most distressing is that the differences are showing up much more now that the power has come to the people whether in Nagaland or rest of the country. Shortly before Gandhiji died he wrote a memorable, a very short editorial in Hindi in the *Harijan* in which he said today Assam belongs to the Assamese, Bihar to Biharis then to whom does India belong. The question seems to have been forgotten as soon as we attained power. Now in the same manner things are happening in frontier tribal tracts." (1970 : 5).

When he hastens to add that he is not unhappy about this, Bose probably means that he has not been against any genuine attempt on the part of a certain community or communities to assert its (their) ethnic identity and right of self-determination, i.e., when the attempt has a genuine basis. But, he does not find any such authentic attempt. What he finds instead in his immediate surroundings is a series of activities which are subversive of the newly born Indian nation-state that has got its foundation in the spirit of millennia-old Indian civilization. Bose's identification of the Indian nation with Indian nation-state and the identification of the two with Indian civilization may raise the eyebrow of many. Bose could not pay attention to this aspect of his attempt at theorising about the nature of Indian civilization forming the basis of Indian nation-state probably because of the pressing political problems that threatened the unified existence of the people of India during the last phase of his life.

Bose does not object to the cultivation of local cultural traits by various ethnic groups and at different levels. The point is if they come in conflict with one another or if they come in conflict with unified action at the political and the economic level then it is a sign of danger. "Any amount of cultural proliferation can go on but must not hamper the collective life of the people." (*Ibid.* : 4, emphasis added). The collective life of the people of India is, according to this view, ensured only through the continuance of the Indian polity born in and sustained through the parameters of the Constitution of India. The basic assumption of Bose, a nationalist, has been the unity and continuity of

life of the peoples encompassed by the newly born Indian polity through its undisturbed functioning. The unity of this Indian polity is neither imaginary nor artificially constructed by the political leaders but has its roots in the underlying Indian civilization that is nurtured by a spirit of what is called today multiculturalism and interdependence of multiple communities. The role of the nation state lies in balancing the countervailing claims of contesting groups on the economic and political fronts. Failure in achieving consensus among the groups over the sharing of economic resources and power will exacerbate divisions of castes, provinces and political parties, “which will ultimately lead not to a stabilization of India but to a disintegration of Indian civilization. *Indian civilization will vaporise into a thousand different sub-civilizations which will appear as bubbles only for historical purposes ..... we cannot ignore the overall climate*” (1976 : 5; emphasis added).

Separatist movements are a threat to the integrity of the Indian civilization supporting the Indian state. The question is: How to discern the factors that originate and sustain this integrity of Indian civilization? One goes back to square one: what is a civilization and what distinguishes a civilization from another and what binds its component elements?

It is not easy to find answers to the preceding questions. A civilization must, Redfield thinks, have identity and also delimitation, unity and form. The unity of civilization is its identity as defined by its substantial qualities. “A civilization, like other cultures, may be thought of, not as a congeries of perfectly heterogeneous elements, but rather as having a oneness from attributes that refer to very much or even all of it” (Redfield, 1962 : 373). A civilization such as the Chinese civilization is or was *a characterizing set of kinds of social relationships* or, *perhaps a persisting, prevailing set of views* as to the nature of what is and ought to be. “In making any such attribution the thing, *the civilization, is given not merely identity, but unity*” (Idem; emphasis added). A. L. Kroeber puts emphasis on the “style” of a civilization. But, Pitirim Sorokin thinks, our philosophers of history somewhat exaggerate the non-transmissibility of a given “civilizational” or cultural phenomenon to another culture, and the impossibility of an adequate understanding of one civilization by persons and groups belonging to a different civilization. It appears to Sorokin only partially true. He has examined the theories of civilization propounded by scholars like Danilevsky, Spengler, Toynbee, Schubert, Bardyaev, Northrop, Kroeber, Schweitzer and Sorokin himself. He has made quite a few interesting deductions about the areas of agreement of these philosophers of history on the nature and content of civilization. For example, civilization is regarded as *cultural super system*. In the boundless ocean of socio-cultural phenomena there exists a kind of vast cultural entity, or cultural system, or civilization which lives and functions as a real unity. Then, the total number of the vast cultural entities called civilizations has in the whole history of human culture been very small. Thirdly, each of these basic types of cultural prototypes is

different from the others. Each of the vast cultural system is, in the fourth place, based upon some major premise or philosophical ‘presupposition’ or prime symbol or ultimate value which the supersystem or civilization articulates, develops, and realizes in all its main compartments or parts, in the process of its life-career. Fifthly, each of these supersystems grounded in empirical reality is a *meaningful-causal* unity (Sorokin, 1963).

The general characteristics of a supersystem or civilization are its (a) reality, it is different from that of its parts, (b) individuality, (c) general and differential dependence of its parts upon one another, upon the whole, and of the whole upon its parts, (d) preservation of its individuality or its sameness in spite of a change of its parts (e) change in togetherness, (f) self-directing (immanent) change and self-determinations of its life-career with external forces, (g) selectivity of the supersystem, which takes in what is congenial to it and rejects what is uncongenial and, finally, (h) variability of each supersystem.

Though Sorokin’s inventory of the traits of civilization leaves many questions about the precise nature of what constitutes civilization unanswered, two features of civilization prove to be prominent: *identity* of a civilization differentiating it or its component units from other civilizations and their respective components, and its *unity* through time. Both these features are highlighted in Bose’s notion of civilization. Certain *core-ideas* lie, for him, at the base of “each civilization (there may be a similar bunch of ideas behind specific cultures also)” and if one looks for them by means of empirical studies, there is nothing substantially wrong in it. Scholars like Leach and Dumont have sought to identify “*a constellation of core-ideas*” underlying caste. They have, however, been accused of trying to oversimplify a complex case. Such an accusation is unjustified. For when one tries to locate “*a number of core-ideas which seem to underlie a range of cultures which apparently lie within the broad spectrum of civilization,*” one does not claim thereby to describe the totality in each of these cultures. “One is attempting to locate *the central ideas which give a particular range of cultures distinctiveness from another range*” (Bose, 1976 : 129; emphasis added).

Bose is perspicacious enough to notice that the core-elements or core-ideas may not be very clearly definable or even permanent in character. “The aspirations (and also institutions) which were centrally operative in Hindu civilization were sharply distinguishable from those which operated in the making and preservation of Islamic civilization” (Ibid., 1300). Is not the preceding statement problematical for those who use the expressions “Indian civilization” and “Hindu civilization” interchangeably? Bose has done it almost, as if, by habit. For he himself talks of difference between Hindu and Islamic civilizations both of which have come to be subsumed by the Indian civilization. He mentioned on a different occasion that when a Hindu is converted to Islam in India, “he discards his old name and takes on an Arabic one. He eats his

food differently, dresses in a new manner, and on the whole tries to leave his past entirely behind” (Bose, 1967 : 222). How does one, then, explain the act of combining the Hindus and the Mahommedans within the ambit of one Indian civilization? How far amicable could be the relationship between two peoples nourished by two civilizations, Hindu and Islamic, representing sharply distinguishable aspirations and institutions? Their existence in the same society might be at best one of juxtaposition. Otherwise, how could the relationship between the Hindus and Muslims prove so fragile on the eve of withdrawal of *Pax Britannica*? Bose sighs, “Now the ‘Nation’ is breaking up. So long as the Indian people fought against the British, the Hindus and Muslims were more or less united. There was hardly any difference between the Hindu nationalist and the Muslim nationalist.... There is no doubt about the fact that we acted as a Nation against the British. But the moment political power was in the offing, immediately questions began to arise as to who should participate and who should obtain the larger share of the power. It leads to a kind of crystallization of the whole of the Indian nation into two Nations. One was the Muslim and the other the non-Muslim” (1970 :3). With great anguish and anxiety, Bose remarks, “My own belief is that after independence the Hindu has become more Hindu and the Moslem of India has become more Moslem than he was before 1947” (Idem.).

Bose sadly watches that the process of fractionation continues unabated among the non-Muslims as well. After independence when political power has virtually come to everybody through the promulgation of a democratic, republican constitution, one witnesses a large tussle between one state and another in regard to the sharing of the amount of political authority which each state will have. Bose feels intrigued that the Nagas declare that they are a Nation as against the Indian Nation, though the All India Radio Station in Kohima in Nagaland broadcasts in 13 different languages which came under the group of the Naga family of languages. The Nagas claim that the Naga culture is an “antithesis of Indian culture”. The Mizos, comprised of “at least 3 or 4 different tribes or communities”, claim that Mizoram is a region which falls outside of the sphere of cultural influence of India.

To combat the working of centrifugal forces and fissiparous tendencies caused thereby among the parts of the Union of India, Bose has had to discover and revamp the bonds of cooperation and tolerance provided by the Indian civilization which is for Bose a “federation of cultures”, upheld by Hinduism. Hinduism has operated over time through the institution of caste guaranteeing economic security and cultural autonomy to different jati-groups enjoying the monopoly of respective hereditary occupations or means of livelihood simultaneously with the scope and opportunity for practising the values and beliefs, rites and rituals specific to different jati-groups. Socio-cultural inequalities of the jati-groups within the Brahmanical hierarchy were somehow compensated for and mitigated by the economic security of a non-competitive

and interdependent economic arrangement and mutual tolerance of cultural differences of various groups. Because of these two important features the caste (*varna-jati*) system seemed attractive to countless tribal groups which have earlier been pursuing much less productive means of livelihood like hunting-gathering, pastoralism, shifting cultivation or swidden agriculture.

Several questions may be raised about the neatness of this thesis of Hindu method of tribal absorption. If the Hindu social organization based on caste absorbed the tribals embracing it, how far do and could the specific identities of tribal groups remain intact? And, how is the cultural autonomy of a tribal group sustained if it becomes a part of the Hindu caste society? Here a comment of Tarak Chandra Das who was famous for his study of the Purum may be recalled : Hindu civilization is “a slow-moving python with a wide open mouth into which *tribal groups are drawn slowly without their being fully aware of the fate or assimilation*” (cited in India, 1981 : 8; emphasis added).

S. C. Sinha, a pupil of both T. C. Das and N. K. Bose, doubts if the picture of smooth absorption or assimilation of the tribals into the Hindu social organisation hides the exploitative interests of the non-tribals encroaching upon the territory and life of the tribals in facilitating the process of the latter's integration into the caste society. Interested in more and more of good cultivable land and cheap agricultural labour of the tribals, they usually assigned a low caste status to the tribals. “In the cases where tribal chieftains were able to maintain their control over land, the Hindu sacerdotal castes were interested in imbuing the chiefs with high status drives and providing them status symbols in exchange of land-grants” (Sinha, 1981 : 9). Thirdly, if the appeal of the caste-peasant society were so strong as Bose thought it to be, how is it that numerous tribal groups continue to maintain their strict tribal identity through present times? The Santals, for example, have accepted settled agriculture for a long time and have succeeded in maintaining their distinct identity. To that extent do they partake of the spirit and quality of the Indian civilization which is equated with Hindu civilization?

It may be said in favour of Bose that he sought to delineate the thesis which generally held good of the nature of interaction of varied communities or ethnic groups which essayed the tradition of Indian civilization through the bonds of interdependence and mutual tolerance and understanding lending to *Indian civilization its overall peaceable characters differentiated from the warlike disposition of the western civilization*. And, there may be exceptions to this general picture. Even it is admitted, the problem of irreconcilability of two peoples belonging to two different civilizations, viz., Hindu and Islamic, remains.

Bose discovered the solution in the unique institution of caste. He notes that Islam operated in India for nearly a thousand years with its message

of human equality in cities as well as in villages. But the success of caste's economic substructure was so marked that even Muslim converts in rural India continued to pay homage to it by virtual allegiance to the hereditary pattern of endogamous rules" (1967 : 261). In the penultimate chapter of *The Structure of Hindu Society*, opinions of an educated Muslim author and a newspaper are cited in order to show the changes desired by a section of Muslims in their social organization in Bengal by doing away with caste-like distinctions among the Muslims. These undesirable distinctions are attributed to the influence of the Hindus or infidels. Does not the imagination of the Indian civilization embracing both the Hindus and Muslims go overboard if such an attitude is displayed by the Muslims? Bose, like many other nationalists of his times, seems to have been captured by the popular propaganda that the "powerful divisive moments which drew sustenance from British rule" frustrated movements for removal of caste distinctions and Hindu-Muslim divide (Ibid. ; 160). Bose seems to disregard or overlook the feelings of a section of Muslims whose view is reflected in the following statements cited by him : The "foundations of Islam have been built by destroying unequal divisions in society. There has not been much deviation from this Islamic principle in the Islamic countries. But Muslim society in India is a case apart. Here the influence of their Hindu neighbours is strong; as a result in imitation of the Hindus, the distinctions of caste have entered Muslim society also" (cited in Bose 1975 (1976) : 160).

The spirit of the comment cited above by Bose from the paper *Saogat* is reinforced by Mohammad Yakub Ali when he writes : "If the un-islamic practice of caste discrimination [because of Hindu influence] is introduced into the egalitarian Muslim society, the Muslims will become involved in *strife and mutual hostility* .....in their present stage of decline, *the Muslims* occupy a very low position in Indian body politic, and, although deprived of political power for only a hundred and fifty years, they are regarded by their *former subjects as being worthless and contemptible*. If in these circumstances there is social disunity among them, they will, [be] rendered utterly helpless, ..... degraded and persecuted ....." (cited by Bose, op.cit. 161 – 162, emphases added).

Bose, a truly secular mind, ignores the communal overture in the comments he cites and welcomes the efforts towards eradication of invidious caste-distinctions from life both by the Muslims and by the Hindus. But, he does not adequately explain how and how far the mutual good will was created and nurtured between the Hindus and the Muslims.

He did not, it seems, examine the following questions: Is Islam best understood as a foreign intrusion in South Asia? Or, over the course of more than twelve centuries, had Muslims and Islamic traditions become indigenized as natural elements of India's cultural landscape? (Eaton, 2008). M.A. Jinnah's two-nation theory, it appears, seriously disturbed Bose. As the ideological

justification for a separate Islamic state in post-colonial South Asia, this theory represented the political incarnation of scholarly conceptions of Islam as an autonomous civilization fundamentally separate from Indian civilizations (*Ibid*: 12). Bose, a Gandhian Freedom Fighter, who could never countenance the two-nation theory was paradoxically caught in the mire of conceit of the advocates of two-nation theory when he spoke of differences between Hindu civilization and Islamic civilization both of which were brought together in India by historical forces to interact with each other. That this interaction could not do away with what Yogendra Singh describes as “politico-cultural insularity between the two great traditions in India which still continues” is a different but very complex story (Singh, 2007 : 72). It is, of course, true that the two communities lived side by side and interacted with each other, sometimes competing and conflicting, at other times cooperating, through a millennium, and developed a certain kind of mutual sympathy. To explain the process one might take a cue from the nineteenth century Bengali thinker, Bhudev Chandra Mukhopadhyay whom Sudipta Kaviraj described as the First Indian Social Theorist (Kaviraj, 1995). Bhattacharyya (2012) followed the suit. Bhudev discerns the elements of similarity between the Hindus and the Muslims emerging from their sharing the same territory and its accompanying socio-cultural milieu and, of course, economic organization for a millennium and thus experiencing *samasukhadukhata* or a commonality of happiness and suffering in their day to day life at different layers of their existence through centuries. Herein lies the resilience of the spirit of tolerance and accommodation of the Indian civilization which is somewhat larger than the Hindu civilization and which has grown composite in its nature (cf. Bhattacharyya, 2012; Kaviraj, 1995 and Mukhopadhyay, [1892] 2010).

Bose’s civilizational approach helps the students of history in getting themselves sensitized to the roots of Indian civilization, which properly understood and interpreted, may give clues to the ways of overcoming the series of strifes plaguing life within the Indian nation. A different set of problems awaits, however, those which adhere to Bose’s civilizational approach that highlights the spirit of tolerance and cooperation as the hallmark of Indian civilization and try simultaneously to make sense of the plight of peoples like those who suffer development-induced displacement in the Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic Republic of India. Dams may be the temples of modern India for those who are interested in rapid economic development of the country. Similarly, founding of gigantic industrial plants, massive plants for producing nuclear power to be utilized for the country’s material progress may be tantalizing. But one beholden to this macro-view may lose sight of, if not and deliberately, knowingly, the costs to be paid by the common people who live with very little power in thousands of locations at the micro-level. Their struggles may be suppressed in the name of ensuring the forward strides of the nation. But, they appear and reappear (for only one example cf. Pattnaik, 2011).

Bose did not live long enough to witness these problems and to think over probable solutions to them. However, he did not fail to emphasize the importance of studies at the micro-level though he was insistent on not losing the civilizational view of India of the past as well as present times.

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