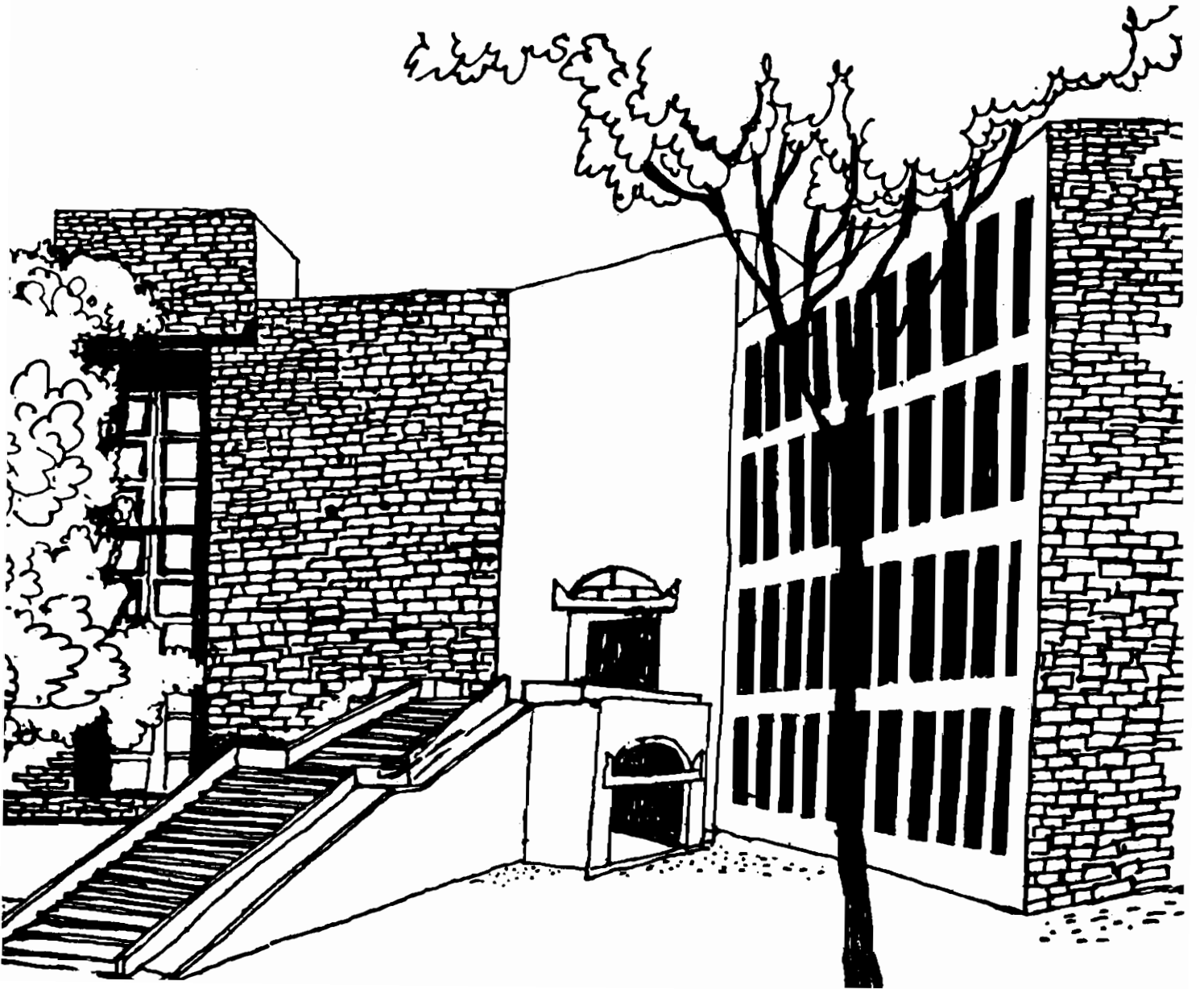





Working Paper



TRANSITION IN INDIAN SOCIETY - PART-I
THE EMOTIVE MAPS FROM THE AGRARIAN ETHOS

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RELIVING OF INDIAN REALITY

THE EMOTIVE MAPS FROM THE AGRARIAN ETHOS

A Content Perspective From Outside

Each one of us carries our heritage in its unique pattern. From the cultural, societal, historical and family sagas each one of us internalizes and structures the experience of the culture, society, history and family in our own maps. In our attempts to put together a map the explorations with adolescents, youth, managers, housewives and men and women from diverse sectors flooded us with a whole panorama of data and perspectives. The data had many strands and many beginnings. Sometimes the enormity of data appeared confusing and in disarray. When individuals walked down their memory lane and recalled conversations, experiences and interactions with their parents it reminded us of our childhood memories of flying kites. Climbing onto the roof tops; letting the kite go high in the sky; getting it cut and loosing it; getting anxious to retrieve as much of the string; pulling it as fast as possible, only to drop it in loops and then sitting down to wrap it onto the 'firki'. In the process one discovered multiple knots, twists and turns, entanglements and in general got lost in tracing the continuity of the strand.

Our attempts to explore the Indian reality as experienced and held by a diverse set of individuals was like holding a whole set of strands with many knots. In this attempt the first set of knots led us to ask the basic question. What is this country Bharat? What is this society India? Who are the people who call themselves Indian? The answers to these questions were as varied as the data.

India is an experience - kaleidoscopic, profound, cataclysmic. Few respond to this experience with indifference. The country, its society, its people, its environment, and its ethos evoke both praise - varying from mild to rapturous - and disgust varying from contempt to condemnation. To some, India is a feeling, splendid and glorious past; and a country steeped in concern for the spiritual well-being of man. It is a model of organismic society, and a tradition with search for harmony in the midst of turmoil. Such visitors and travellers to India tend to look upon India as a teacher, wise and experienced, who with four thousand years of survival experience stands as a symbol for the indomitable spirit of man. They come for a pilgrimage as seekers after the human spirit. Some lose themselves in their search and ignore the harsh and living social reality. Others get caught up with the harshness and give up their search.

To yet others, India was and is a dream to get excited about, the land of the golden bird, the land of prosperity and beauty, of riches in wealth and in people and of dignified and elegant men

and women. A land of rich variety, evoking dreams of heavenly sensuousness and material gain - the Alkspuri of Kuber. They came to India to plunder, to conquer, to subjugate, to exploit and to consume.

To still others, India with its tropical climate was, and is, a country of colourful panorama, a slow and slumberous countryside traversed by rivers, topped by mountains and filled with colourful birds and people. To them, India was a fare to be delicately savoured and dwelt upon in slow sweetness. Their dreams evoked the image of swaying bodies with dancing feet across the land. They heard the haunting sounds at Gaudnuli; ponderous chants and the reverberations of the gongs from the temples, mixed with the call to the faithful, from the minarets of the mosque, the chimes of bells from the returning cows, the chorus of the calls and the fluttering of the wings of the thousands of birds settling down for the night. They talked of a whole way of life in perfect tune and harmony with nature. They came to the exotic and picturesque land as spectators and wanderers.

In all these images it seems that India was perceived as a source of fulfillment - be it sensuous, spiritual, or material. In the early stages of the arrival of the European many of these images survived. However, since the 1820s another set of experiences of India as a country, society and people began to emerge. They were products of two processes viz., one the political eradication of the infrastructures of society which provided India her strength and cultural cohesion in the midst of confusion and uncertainties. The second was the writings by the new European writers after 1820 which painted India in its dysfunctionalities. According to them, India was a land of perpetual famines, rampant sickness, and dire poverty. It was full of eyesores, hovels, heaps of dung and dirt, open gutters, beggars, cripples and lepers. "India" became synonymous with squalor. It was also peopled by a few ostentatiously rich maharajas, thugs and criminals, dishonest businessmen, corrupt officials; all in all, an epitome of a lack of human decency. It became a country of illiterate and superstitious people, steeped in the prejudices of caste and religion, perpetuating discrimination, deprivation and exploitation.

It became a country of people who clung to their traditions and refused to change; who, besides being fatalistic and averse to change, refused to act for themselves; and who cried like helpless children pleading to be saved; clamouring for control from outside. It became the country as experienced and written by Katherine Mayo, Nirad Choudhary, and V.S. Naipauls seeing nothing but distortion of human existence in the Indian ethos.

Between these two extremes - uplifting rapture and scathing condemnation - we suspect that the reality of India has been lost. What is this reality which bewitches and bewilders? What is the reality of a culture and ethos which holds together such diverse facets? What is the reality of the people who have survived over centuries undaunted, unashamed, exploited, invaded and

yet, treading their own path and desperately clinging to something intangible? Perhaps it is an identity yet to be understood. The current generation has carried the burden of these images of Indian reality imperceptibly. The individuals were acutely aware of the vast variety and diversity in India and found that most of these images were reflections of reality, but they could not identify the strength which held multifaced India together. They were divided among themselves. Some thought the positive images they held was the correct one, others the negative. To accept the simultaneity of living contradictions in the environment was quite destabilizing. They were helpless in dealing with the multiplicity. When pushed to the extreme they took recourse either to logic which led them to skepticism, or fatalistic acceptance. This led them to disengage themselves from the system. It is tragic that in their long years of education, they remained ignorant of a vast literature about India's culture, its dynamics and its identity. In order to initiate the search for this unknown identity of India we brought together our own understanding of this literature.

A systematic research to understand India's culture, its dynamics and its identity only began during the last two hundred years. Attempts prior to this were largely descriptive and subjective accounts of individuals who tried to make sense of their experiences as individual. These are not accounts of researchers following a discipline. Their primary data were the manifest kaleidoscopic social behaviour and physical setting to which they tried to give a meaning through collecting folklore or through their perspectives of events. This is the traditions of Greek, Chinese, Persians, French travellers such as Marcopolo, Burnier and Huensang. From fourteenth century onwards this tradition was joined by Christian missionaries and later many other Christian missionaries followed from European countries. Most of their writings perpetuate bad and negative images of the Indian living reality. Very few of the writings of genuine travellers portray negative images. This tradition continues till today in many writings.

The segment of systematic research was a rather narrow stream to begin with. It started to expand gradually around 1930s to become a vast river by 1980s. The following broad trends can be discerned in the research.

(1) Macro-analysis of the ethos and culture

This is the tradition of Max Muller, Radhakrishnan, Lord Basham, Radha Kamaal Mukherjee, Nannu, Rahul Sanskritayan, Vasudev Sharan Agarwal and Bhagvat Sharan Upadhyaya and many others who wrote in the diverse languages of India. These writers delve into India's past, reconstructing it in terms of its spiritual continuity of ethos; metaphysical consistency of values and life orientations; and historical stability of India's social organization and institutional design. These writings go into a detailed and elaborate appraisal of India's past in its various aspects. This reconstruction provides for a positive pattern of the past reali-

ty of India. It confirms the idealism of the Hindu ethos, provides a succinct backdrop and also clears the cobwebs. They impel the reader to study the strengths and continuities of the Indian ethos and make him evaluate its relevance for human life in general. However, these writings hardly help in understanding the complexities of India today, or in dealing with today's realities.

(2) Macro-analysis of the Institutions

This is the tradition of Nirmal Kumar Bose, Bittu, Ghuriye, Inavati Karve and other who began systematic studies of institutions such as family, caste and marriage. Many disciples of these stalwarts themselves, Srinivas, I.P. Desai, Dube and others moved towards unit studies of villages and communities, to blend with the trend that emerged after the Second World War when the American social scientists arrived. They too made their mark.

This macro-institutional approach deals with the hard core data of Indian life and systematizes them to generate interpretations of the nature and dynamics of Indian social reality. However, the approach is concerned mainly with the academic issues of definition and classification of Indian reality. Occasionally, one can glimpse a comparative framework whose roots lie in the universal social theories. These authors have done work that is valuable, creating categories which are viable. Their work has also been geared to examining whether Indian society is changing or not. It also attempts to assess the macro-dynamics of societal development - where development goals are hypothetically set in terms of the model of western, consumer-oriented, industrial society, wrapped in the values of the Renaissance.

We wondered how real this was. In this tradition one can observe the social phenomenology, describe, and diagnose it within the frame of a chosen ideology. The solutions can then be prescribed accordingly to redefine the Indian society. If experience is any indicator, the efforts in this direction have not contributed to create the dynamics of change in any significant manner. The work has provided post-fact explanations for failure, and created divergent opinions about what should be done to change the Indian Society.

(3) Micro-analysis of individuals and unit communities

This is the third trend which began largely with the arrival of American social scientists after the Second World War. It runs parallel to the work of the students of the pioneers of the second trend. The unit of study is either on individuals or communities. Overtly, and often covertly, it is anchored in a comparative framework. It also establishes a tradition of drawing its perspective from the Western scholars like Opler, Erickson, Shield, and Carstairs. They, having looked at a mole hill, speculated about the nature of the mountain and claimed to have understood it. Much of this work tends to cloud the understanding of the Indian reality. These researchers seem to hold a preformulat-

ed model of society and a theoretical framework to explain it. Their analysis and generalization reflect an implicitly evaluative stand, related to the hypothesized goals and directions. The overall tendency of the Western scholars to interpret all secular social phenomena of the Third World in religious terms is displayed by them also.

In our attempt to understand Indian reality and identity we explored extensively these three trends. We tried to relate the messages of these studies to our explorations which looked at the generation of today, as children of two cultures. The three strands were inadequate to understand the living reality of these participants. Like us, these three strands left the youth also with the inevitable diagnosis of identifying seven disfunctionalities viz. population, poverty, illiteracy, superstitions, hygiene, health and casteism of Indian culture. It created many feelings of evaluation and deprivation. It generated an experience of lacuna and discomfort. It generated shame and as consequence hate for the self, system, society and culture. And finally, it led to the need of wanting to reform and change keeping in mind the western models as the ultimate goals. In the survey to explore the Indian roots and identity there were only the literary portrayals by Indian authors which reflected some congruence and coherence with the experienced reality of India. For the literary writings reflected and articulated the process of growing up and the dilemmas of growing up within the social-cultural context of transition. The living and feeling realities and the resultant themes which emerged as portrayed by the characters made some sense to the current generation.

The Indian reality reconstructed by the social science research reflected the event-structure of the life, but had very little congruence with the experimental interpretation of reality. The individuals agreed with the analysis as available from the research scholars but had many additions and butts to it. They also had many disagreements. This divergence was both intriguing and enlightening. For us, it reestablished the phoenix-like quality of India -- inscrutable and multi-faced -- a juxtaposed collage of diverse unmatched pieces which hung together but could be seen in fragments also. It made us recognize the macro-cosmic quality of the Indian scene which is open to as many interpretations as there were people and perspectives. Each could, and many did claim, "This is it, this is India". However, as we processed most of these accounts against the backdrop of the personal experience of growth, of diverse sets people in many personal growth programmes we could only repeat, "May be it is, but is it really?" Very often in our reflections, the sutra "neti, neti" (not this, not this) came back to us as we sat reflecting about Indian identity and Indian reality.

Our attempts to explore the Indian reality and its linkage to the Indian identity left us in a dilemma. While the manifest contents of the spectator-commentator exposition could not be denied, it appeared that their emotive biases prevailed. These interpretations fell into two groups; those which glorified Indian reality

and those which denied and condemned it.

Our exploration of the writings of the Indian ethos and the scripture-centered explanations of Indian society, made us happy and proud of being related to that glorious era. However, our sense of mystery about the past increased but not our understanding. The contemporary Indian society and its ethos which we did understand based on the living experience seemed to be a highly distorted version. What came through as being stated what India and Indians were had little experiential relevance to what Indian identity was. It seemed that the onslaught of overwhelming wave like interpretations only created shame and guilt for what Indians ought to be which was like the westerners which they were not. And against this onslaught and alternative comparative model there was only the option to accept evaluations of Indian identity to be that which it was not.

The parallel reconstruction evolved by the historians and Indologists of life as was lived and its expression, added some understanding of the ways in which our forefathers approached life. We now know where all their shoulds and oughts -- articulated values and beliefs -- came from. It also became clear that the parents of the current generation have been squarely caught in the dilemmas of shoulds and oughts of the traditional agrarian society and the emergent flux and transition within the culture and society. This dilemma has generated incongruence between their actions and beliefs. This incongruence emerges due to the conflict between role-orientation and self-orientation, between feelings actually experienced and those that should have been experienced, and between social identity and work identity. This understanding helped us and the participants resolve some of the emotional issues with our parents. But it did not provide us with a choice for action.

Our exploration of the writings centered around macro-analysis of institutions helped us to some extent. In fact, it pushed us back into ambivalence toward the Indian society. The micro-analysis of unit, individual and communities sensitized us to happenings outside, but gave almost no clues to link them to our own identity-themes. Thus the exploration of different versions of Indian reality made us fall back on our own resources. However, the glimpse of the vast panorama of India's past and present, renewed our dedication to look for that quality which is India today and which contributes to our being ourselves.

The Sthita Pragya : A Process Perspective From Within

In living through the Indian reality in search of anchors of identity, we became aware that India, a surviving culture and civilization, is a vast melting pot. From the beginning of recorded history, ethnic groups with their unique political, socio-economic, and technological forms and processes, beliefs and values trickled in and sometimes poured into the Indian subcontinent. Nowhere else in the world in the past has an admixture of ethnic identities and juxtaposition of life styles ever been

woven into a dynamic living society. Each group preserved its ethnic identity and life style. The United States of America in modern times can claim a similar privilege of being a vast melting pot. However, there is a difference. The process of Indianization is the unique characteristic of the melting pot that is India. The process created a unity of psycho-cultural identity, and preserved simultaneously the specific identity of the origin of each group by encouraging diversity of myths, social forms, and behaviour. The diversity in language and religious rituals was retained through its unique social design. The Indian society has never in the past attempted to forge a standard, or uniform societal forms of manifest behaviour and life orientation, as has been done in the process of Americanization in the United States of America.

It is worth-while to understand this sensitive approach to assimilation, integration and transformation of diverse streams of people, ethos, technology and life-orientations to create a viable society which has survived through the ups and downs. The source of this approach is in some of the fundamental characteristic process of the ethos, and value assumptions of social design and structure.

The Processes of the Ethos

The Quality of Indian Ethos The Indian ethos as available from the Vedas, Upanishads and the Brahmanas is organismic in nature. It can be recast in strong and rigid ritualistic religion and made to prescribe a fixed world view. It can be made to anchor in faith and the supernatural, like the one that emerges from the Judeo-Christian tradition. It can view life linearly and sequentially by establishing cause-effect relationships between events. It can also be interpreted in a philosophical, secular, non-ritualistic mould of Upanishads and go away with the supernatural and faith. It can be made to anchor in logic and conceptual pattern of phenomenology of life. It can encourage thoughts as diverse as Buddhism and Jainism on the one side, and as sensuous a philosophy as that of Charvak on the other.

The resilience of such an organismic ethos has allowed the Indian society to retain its core while it absorbed many alien strands and converted them into the fabric of social phenomenology. With changing social phenomenology people of each era have picked out elements from the same ethos and woven them into a pattern to anchor themselves in the society of their times. This process has helped the Indian people to retain a sense of continuity, direction and meaning without feeling estranged (from the ethos) and or threatened by the loss of identity. This quality of resilience of Indian ethos has been an insurance against psychological and spiritual death which was to be the fate of many societies and civilizations of the past. The ethos of those societies was bounded, contained and rigid. It could not sustain large changes in the social phenomenology. Their rigidity did not allow alternatives of world views to emerge from era to era. The Indian society has had its ups and downs through the ages, but it has

retained its vitality and responsiveness. In essence, the Indian ethos has the quality of maya itself. The word maya does not mean illusion or illusory phenomenon as has been interpreted by the English speaking elite. The root-meaning of maya is transience.

The quality of psycho-cultural processes The psycho-cultural processes of Indian society allowed individuals or groups of individuals to give differential meanings to their relatedness with the environment. The process also provided openness for adaptations of transactions to the locales of social living. The psycho-cultural processes were geared to let the collectivity of the same era at different locales and sometimes in the same locale to develop manifest social behaviour through matching, adapting and adjusting to the felt needs and the particularistic ethos held by the individual. Thus the psycho-cultural processes of Indian society allowed the development of a wide variety of divergent forms and manifest behaviour and achieved harmony in the life space of people.

The quality of the psycho-cultural processes freed the individual to retain in sanctity their world view, life style, their myths and even their technology of production and social living. Behind all the diversity of manifest forms and behaviour in transactions a singular unity of meaning and identity was managed by an overall social design. The life space of individual was postulated in such terms as having freedom to seek one's own realization and salvation in his own way without impinging on similar freedom of other individuals. This ensured a sense of psychological security for the individual in the midst of social diffusion. It also gave him courage and conviction to choose his actions and depart from norms as long as he was consistent with himself. This quality of the psycho-cultural processes has provided for assimilation and manifestation of changing forms without loss of a sense of cohesiveness and convergence. In essence, in this dynamic quality rests the ability of Indian society to rise from the onslaught of external influences.

The Social Design

The quality of social design Indian society displayed a unique social design. It emphasized self-sufficiency, containment and operational autonomy for each village unit. The life style of each village, a micro-unit was allowed to be anchored in the immediate environment. No attempts were made to create a distance between the life-needs and the resources needed for fulfillment. Each micro-unit had its own social authority. Thus, all issues of interpersonal nature could be dealt with within the self-contained unit. The basic principle, involved in the social design was distributive social authority but not decentralization of administrative power.

At the second level of social design these self-contained micro-units had been placed in a cohesive arrangement of affiliative relationships within the mainstructure. Each micro-unit had links with a set of other micro-units, and thus acquired region

bounded significance. Distributive (and not decentralized) social design allowed for integrative processes through secondary structure of affiliative relationships on the one hand, and cultural integration through the nature and quality of ethos and psycho-cultural processes on the other.

The quality of social infrastructure Indian design created a social structure which restricted life within the bounded space of the micro-unit or within the regional locale. This generated tremendous pressure on the individual. It bounded him, contained him and restricted him to the limited transactions prescribed by the social design. In spite of the resilience of the ethos and freedom for divergence at manifest level, this pressure accumulated and created psychic tensions. These often got expressed in deviant and pathological manner. Indian society in its social design created a model of a therapeutic community to manage this so that the core and substantive ethos, psycho-cultural identity and social design could remain largely operative. This therapeutic community revolved around festivals which provided a well-bounded socio-psychological space for expression of these tensions. Each community added to the main ritual of the festival, a set of second-level activities, some of them almost licentious. These activities could be carried out but in public without shame or fear of punishment only on these occasions.

Later, in this chapter we have elaborated these four characteristics.

The Value Assumptions The value assumptions supporting the processes of Indianization and the above four distinct characteristics viz the quality of Indian ethos, the quality of psycho-cultural processes, the quality of social design and the quality of social infrastructures of the Indian society were manifold. However, they were derived from a single crystallized cryptic sutra "Aham Brahmasmi" (I am the Brahma). In essence, it is a statement that I the self, the unit, the microcosm, am identical to the macrocosm, and am therefore the macrocosm. The unfolding of this sutra unravels the religio-philosophic ethos of India. The first level elaboration of the sutra can be stated as follows: Man is a part of the infinite and as such, infinite in nature. His purpose of being is to experience his infiniteness and grapple with the experience of being infinite. The infinite, however, cannot experience its own infiniteness except through taking finite forms.

The first-level elaboration lead the Indian ethos to propose that life is a continuum and death is merely a punctuating comma. According to this proposition then, man who is simultaneously a microcosm and macrocosm, takes finite forms to experience himself through a series of life cycles. Thus, a new proposition of the theory of reincarnation is stated, making man's life timeless and beyond the specificity of social phenomenology. In order to explain the variance in the location of microcosms in the social phenomenology at any given time, a theory of Karma is propounded. It explains beautifully both the variance and movement of the

different microcosms through the life cycle and the variations in the social hierarchy.

On the whole, the basic sutra of an individual being a microcosm and a macrocosm simultaneously, being and living for experiencing the nature of its own infiniteness through finite forms and finite time, became the corner-stone for designing social organization. It also resulted in the unique process of Indianization. The basic sutra with its multi-level elaborations involving the theories of reincarnation, Karma and transient social reality led to the following first-level boundary conditions in social design.

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Boundary Conditions for Social Design

The first-level boundary conditions had two components:

1. Each individual, no matter where he is born, would be in the process of unfolding his Karma and going through the process of realizing his infiniteness. His life-boundaries and his identity were sacrosanct and inviolate. They could not be interfered with.
2. The role of the society would be to provide space to the individual in the social structure to let him unfold his being. Life was a process to be lived, reflected upon and to be transcended.

Consequently, these boundary conditions led to the development of an ideology of non-interference, non-aggression and constancy. As a result, the emergent design of society carved out for each ethnic group a space which allowed its membership to retain its identity and yet be linked to the fabric of the larger society. The social design thus, was made to preserve the sanctity of the individual's life style and orientation and to reinforce it. For example, it is not unusual to come across in the same village four different castes of a profession, say weavers, or fishermen, who do not inter-marry or interdine. Within the same profession, the technology differs, their myths differ, their folklores differ and also their customs and rituals differ. Even their definitions of such concepts as incest differ.

All this goes to show that the process of Indianization was governed by the basic value of Aham Brahmasmi. The sutra not only reflected democracy as a political value but also reflected the governing principle of Indian social design. According to this, Indian ethos tended to preserve itself in its original forms and all the evolutionary steps of man's thought and technology, finding for each a location, a role and a status in the total social fabric.

It is within this primary religio-philosophical framework that the Indian agrarian society grew into a heterogeneous, highly diversified and differentiated unit at one level and very homogeneous, unified and integrated ethos at another. With the passage of time, wave after wave of alien ethos were assimilated in this highly dynamic social fabric without disturbing it much and without changing its basic identity. As and when dysfunctions arose giving rise to social turmoil, the Indian intelligentsia re-systematized the social codes and recodified social linkages retaining the unit level autonomy and regional sufficiency in socioeconomic and political processes.

The process of reorganizing social codes and linkages, is analogous to the organization development (OD) process of the modern era. The first evidence of this process lies in the 108 Smritis written over a thousand years. All of them anchor themselves in the primary code of Manu Smriti, but reinterpret operational principles according to the time and locale. Acharya Chaturseri

points out that there was a practice of holding a dharma yagna or rajsuya yagna by the dominant king of each era. According to his findings, at the rajsuya yagnas scholars of scriptures and pro-pounders of social law were invited by the King. Conferences were held lasting over days, where after thorough debates and discussions they restated the social code. At the conference they took stock of the emergent dysfunctionalities in the social order and modified them so that they may not give rise to further unintended consequences. Smritis are merely recordings of these decisions.

These ontogenetic corrections of social codes and reinterpretations of value assumptions into newer operational modes, are also reflected in the tradition of commentaries on scriptures. These commentaries reflect the dynamic tradition of modifying the Shashvat or the eternal assumption into a relevant form for the yuga, i.e., the current era. These commentaries were largely experience based restatements of the principles in keeping with the reality of the times. The process reflects the attempt of the Indian intelligentsia to reaffirm the basic principles, by reinterpreting and re-operationalizing the ethos, according to the needs of the time, the locale, and the people. There has been no other culture where such systematic efforts to retain the basic sanctity of man's value structure, his basic freedom to work out his life, and his basic sense of self-worth as a human being, have been made.

In this tradition of India the word 'value' has three distinct meanings each represented by different word. Each word locates the value in sequence from normative to phenomenological to existential levels. These are the mulya the normative behavioural values. It dealt with options. One can choose from various actions. For example, Indian ethics recognizes eight kinds of marriages. It includes gandharva vivah, which is analogous to two people living together in common manner of today. It also included rakshasha vivah which allowed forced marriage, rape and abduction. It also allowed niyog which allowed a woman to marry temporarily to have a child by another man outside the marriage if the husband was not available or capable for a long time.

The second word for value is pratiqya or dharma. This value implied individualistic choice within the social context which an individual made to himself in order to give meaning to his life. This set his boundaries in transactions and provided him with a sense of continuity and consistency with himself. This also blocked the forces of ambiguity with heterogeneity and diversity of social phenomenology confronting the individual or the group at any given time. Part of the pratiqya or dharma was shared with the community group. But a large part of it was called the Vyakti dharma or Kutumba parampara. This allowed the individual to carry on the socio-cultural heritage of the group and add to it by creating individual heritage.

The third word for value is aastha. In its meaning it is very close to the word ethos and refers to the existential level. The

aastha was a set of unifying process and statements which allowed the diversity of normative and phenomenological values. 'Ahimsa Parmo Dharma' (Non aggression and non-violence) is one such 'aastha'. But from era to era, from religion to religion, from community to community the meaning of non-aggression and non-violence differed. The aastha was universal.

Econo-political Structure: To put into effect the socio-philosophical ethos of India relevant and congruent political and economic structures had to be designed. If we put aside the continentalized interpretation of the socioeconomic and political reality of India, and look from within, the Indian tradition designed its political and economic structures on the following boundary conditions:

Distribution of Resources: Preservation of identity in which the total life style had to be contained in a social space along with the technology, the myths and the world view was a corner stone of the evolution of Indian economic profession. To illustrate: The various castes of weavers categorized through distinctions in professional orientations. This differentiation is through differential looms, technology of craft, processing of raw material, patterns of weaving, choice of dye and design of the structure of the fabric. It varied from one group to another. Even the texture and the pattern of the final product, the cloth was unique to each group of weavers. The differentiation inevitably led to a product market segmentation. These distinctions were in addition to other distinctions such as myths and world view. If we examine this and many other examples it will be obvious that the Indian social design provided economic viability for each group. As such Indian economic structure was designed on the basic principle of distribution of resources. Distribution of income was not the principle. Distribution of resources was tied to the configuration of life style, the identity, the technology and the world view.

Segmentation by technology in the same economic profession also ensured economic roles. For example, there were three kinds of malis (gardeners). Like the weavers, they too displayed social distance in terms of inter-marrying and inter-dining. They also displayed differences in the myths and community sagas. The role-task boundaries in their common profession were quite definite. There were 'phal mali' (fruit gardener), 'phul mali' (flower gardeners) and 'shak mali' (vegetable gardeners).

The roots of this kind of specialization go deeper than those of modern professionalism and specialization, for they were genuine attempts to preserve the total ethnic and psycho-cultural identity, orientation, life styles, beliefs and culture within the socioeconomic design. This is the basic process of formulation of jati and/or caste.

Self-sufficiency: The Indian social design was based on the principle of distributive authority to each village unit. The economic design was based on distribution of resources which was

congruent with the social design. Each village unit was made to rely optimally on local resources. The consumption pattern of various groups evolved to avoid dependency on outside resources. Commercial exploitation of distant resources was as such by consensus within the unit. The underlying principle of this governance was, "...create equation in membership. There is evidence that even the kings could not impose legislation without consensus. The basic community processes in each autonomous unit or sub-regions were managed through consensus. The authority of the kings could not be directly exercised in social and economic spheres. Each member unit, howsoever low it may be in the social task-role, had to be consulted, influenced, persuaded and negotiated with for a community action. This was a natural corollary of the religio-philosophic ethos which assumed that each individual's life was sacrosanct and could not be violated and interfered with the power structure and external authority.

Governance by consensus highlighting creation of equation reinforced the principles of distribution of authority. It also triggered processes which counter-acted against the propensities of structures in order to become hierarchical and to let authority and power converge at a single point in the hierarchy. This released the balancing process of creating a lateral system of exercise of authority on social issues. This system came to be known as the panchayat system

The caste and the panchayat system were two sides of the same coin. Together in tandem they provided social effectiveness in society. In order to hold them together and retain effectiveness a socioeconomic codification was formulated to determine interfaces and transactions. This was called the 'jajmani' system. The jajmani system was not a mere exchange of services or a barter. It was anchored in the construct of distribution of resources. For example a family could not fire their scavenger for inefficiency and neglect. If they did, the village panchayat intervened to censure the family and to restore the scavenger to his family heritage and privilege. The head of a certain family being somewhat modern in 1935 refused to accept the censure and refused to take the scavenger back. But, no other scavenger came to work. The scavenger community, with the support of panchayat, filed a case against the family. The law courts decided against the family. The judgement was based on the concept that the scavenging service is the economic resource to the scavenger community. The family is hence a resource to this particular scavenger. The resources, as distributed by social codification, cannot be taken away. This process left the individual spiritual and existential personhood free from social controls and compulsions of social task-roles. In a community this personhood ensured him the right of being his own representative and the right to protect his own

1. Mukhiya or Chowdhari

lifestyle. The choice was his. He was free to negotiate or opt out and move from the community. It also ensured him the independence of belief and knowledge rather than dogmatic conformity to any ideology.

Social Codification

In the Indian social design there is no evidence of jurisprudence and legally defined system of punishment. Most of the punishments are recommended. The unit communities examined offenses against the social code in the context of events. The panch declared a restorative punishment which was implemented through social censorship rather than through legal force. Even the determination of the restorative punishment was open to negotiation during the process of achieving consensus.

The second level boundary conditions were aimed and directed at creating self-contained and self-sustained unit communities. This allowed the members of the community an optimal social and economic existence within the geophysical resources of the locale of the community. This design left the individuals of the community free, if they so wish, to work for the ultimate goal of 'MANAN' and self-realization. We know of no society whose designers secondary advantage of the second level boundary condition was that catastrophic events such as an invasion resulted only in the replacement of the kings, while leaving these unit communities comparatively undisturbed.

Continuity of Psycho-social Relatedness

Indian social design recognized no discontinuity of the secondary system from the primary system. The voluntary relatedness and the complex pattern of familial roles were repeated in the two secondary systems of caste (occupation and education). The caste membership (occupational hierarchy) of distributed resources was also involuntary. An individual was born in it, as he was in the family. The nomenclature of familial roles were repeated for the caste elders. Psychological attitudes or relatedness were also reproduced in caste relationships. Group infighting in caste was a replica of squabbles in the joint family.

The education system demanded physical separation from the family. The individual left his home and entered his teacher's home. He carried the same attitude of psychological relatedness as in the family. The guru was the father and his wife was the mother and peers were gurubhais (brothers). Upon starting to work, the individual entered the producer - society but there were no occupational associations independent of the caste. The individual returned to a system which was qualitatively the same as that in his family. Essentially, the socialization of an individual to secondary systems was on the same pattern as the familial systems.

This aspect of the secondary system provided the basic cohesive forces of unit-based social organization on the one hand, and stability of psycho-cultural identity to the individual on the other. Hence the individual did not have to go through psychological moratorium in the life cycle. There was no need to reflect, reassess, and redefine society in terms of the emergent identity.

The wherewithals and mechanisms of relatedness in the family were adequate to last the rest of the life. The process not only provided stability to the psycho-cultural identity, but also overdefined the functional role identity and its linkages with the system.

Socio-psychological infrastructures of life space

The other level of boundary condition in the social design was related to the realm of socio-psychological aspects of life. Essentially, the religio-psychological ethos was centered round the individual. As we have said earlier, each individual, wherever he may be, would be in the process of unfolding his karma and going through the process of realizing his infiniteness. While his life boundaries and his identity were sacrosanct and inviolate and could not be interfered with, he could only be given a social task-role in the social design. (The individual then had to be conceptualized as being infinite, and a finite one simultaneously). His finite existence could not be treated as his totality. Hence, the social task-roles defining his transient finiteness could not bind him completely. The assumption that the individual is simultaneously a person, a self, and a social role, made social designers realize that such a social organization would inevitably end in self-role conflicts. Therefore, mechanisms for resolving the stress of self-role conflict, sporadically or permanently, had to be introduced. This resulted in three boundary conditions defining the socio-psychological infrastructures. This was regarding freedom in worship, beliefs and rituals.

Freedom in Worship, Beliefs and Rituals

Although social designers strictly codified the social task roles and laid down norms of behaviour and boundaries of interaction of the role, they left the person free to express his being in specified space and through rituals. These devices allowed for the expression of those instinctive and ontogenetic impulses which would otherwise disturb social organization. In this freedom even distinctions of caste vanished. These specified locations for rituals became the psycho-social space for the individual to explore and experiment his being. In terms of modern psychology the socio-psychological space, allowed sanction, gave outlet for psycho-pathological tendencies without any stigma being attached to the individual and without creating any adverse effects on the society.

Examples are abundant, a male with an inverted identity of a female, could join the 'Sakhi Sampradaya' and dress and act as a female within the boundaries of the cult. An intensely exhibitionistic male could join the 'Nangas'. A person who needed to emasculate and castrate himself and overcome his anxiety could worship 'Bahu Charaji'. A person caught with various kinds of psycho-sexual hang ups, could find his resolution and sublimation in various sub-sects of 'Vama Margis' and 'Shakya'. There was even scope for abandoning the mask of culture to fulfill the

needs and satisfy the physical impulses in these spaces.

The social design thus, permitted the discharge of stress and pathological impulses, without fear of punishment and rejection and helped the individual to retrain his functional sanity.

8. Festivals

Festivals, as part of social infrastructure, were another mode of expressing residual pathos of social space. Around the main religious ritual of the festival, various communities across the country developed varied activities through conventions. These activities performed two functions -- discharging reactive and residual feelings and allowing expression for action and feelings tabooed in actual role relationships. Holi with its various rituals is perhaps the most potent and clear evidence of the functions of festivals. The main ritual celebrates the steadfastness of one's convictions and the courage to act from conviction, even in the face of possible threat of loss of life. Around this main ritual are woven conventions expressing the joy of harvest and the thrill of the advent of the spring with playfulness and erotic songs. There are also conventions which allow temporary breakdown of taboos and expression of residual feelings. The example of temporary break-down of taboos is most clear in the horseplay between the sister-in-law and the brother-in-law. All the year round the relationship between the two is sanctified; it is a mother-child relationship. She is supposed to act as a buffer, softening the mistreatment meted out to the brother-in-law by the significant roles in the family. But on the day of holi suppressed, erotic overtones can be expressed in public through horseplay of colouring each other. They colour each other, freely giving vent to their suppressed erotic feelings.

The expression of residual reactive feelings can be best illustrated with the following examples. The custom in Bihar concerns young boys between eight and twelve years. They form a group and move from house to house singing loud songs. Each boy is stripped completely when he reaches his own house. When he knocks his father would open the door, (if there is no son in the family, the nephew will take up the role) and would listen quietly to the torrent of abuses which the son lets out. At the end, the father would pay him some money and the boys would move to another house. In Punjab, Haryana and Brij area of U.P. women get out of homes and block the streets. They carry sticks, and any male who dares to pass the street receives a token beating, and sometimes heavy thrashing from them. Incidents are not uncommon where thrashing has been so violent that wounds are inflicted and a person bleeds.

In small towns or villages of North India, people throng the houses of most important people in the community. He perhaps by virtue of wealth and status enjoys excessive power in the social system and sometimes uses it for his own ends. The people would ask him to come out of the house and then blacken his face and garland him with a string of old shoes. And sometimes make him

ride a donkey and take him out in a procession while hurling indignities of all sorts at him. The educated, scholarly and intellectual class hold a conference 'Maha Murkh Mandal' (the society of dunces). They would be given titles reflecting their idiosyncrasies and proclivities. These would even be published in newspapers.

Whereas holi is perhaps best expressive of this function of a festival, a proper look at any festival such as 'Makar Sankranti' and many others provides evidence of how a whole set of conventions around festivals create space for expression of residual feelings or tabooed impulses.

Freedom of Choice Between the Role and Task Self

The religio-philosophic ethos, centered around self-realization as the main purpose allowed the individual to surrender the role without feelings of guilt and fear of punishment. Indian social history presents a glittering congregation of individuals who abandoned their roles, followed their conviction and designed a life style and space of their own. Buddha, Mahavir, Sankaracharya, Sant Sukhobhai, Chaitanya, Meerabai, Soordas, Tulsidas and Raidas are some of its luminaries. Both, total or partial abandoning of the role was permissible. For example, Gandhi gave up the conjugal aspect of his role as a husband. In fact, examples of abandoning a part of the role whether that of a husband, father or son is more frequent and common than one realizes.

The Indian societal organization was then designed to sustain the organismic quality of religio-philosophic ethos. It was anchored in those institutionalized forms which permitted freedom to the individual to follow his unfolding and yet preserved the stability of the society. Through its distributive authority at unit level, through distribution of resources at the economic level, and through governance by consensus at the political level it ensured to choose a lifestyle and continuity of ethnic belonging. Through the second level boundary conditions, it created a setting and a social fabric where individuals in limited time and restricted space could work for their spiritual goal. It thus, provided a unique individualism and individuation, within the setting of a well-defined social role. The definition of the social reality is the cardinal principle of duty i.e. Dharma. However, duty was not coercive in nature and not in the nature of a 'must'. It was more of an 'ought' and the individual was always left free. But he always had the classical conflict, like Arjuna, "What is Kartavya and what is Akartavya?" (What ought to be done and what ought not to be done).

The Indian social design provided freedom to turn one's back on society and to criticize openly the overall social reality. It provided space to institute transcendentally different and unique beliefs, values and lifestyles without fear of persecution. It provided space, for continuous reinterpretation of ethos and behavioural forms. All these go to support the individualism as a fundamental value of Indian identity. Few modern interpretations

recognize this.

A close examination of the Indian social design reveals congruence in processes and correspondence in manifestations, between the individual and society. It helped to create outside the individual an organismic replica of the structure of his psyche and its processes. In implementing this principle the designers appear to have tried consciously to provide expression to the primary qualities of psychic impulses of man, within the contained boundaries of the social and psychological infrastructure. Essentially then, the social design is an analogue of the inner world of the psyche at birth. This design provides the most congruent setting for man to struggle with his being in order to achieve the purpose of life.

Most other social organizations, primarily those of the West, are designed with the specific purpose of creating a coherent collectivity where the expression of only one set of psychic impulses are permitted. The other part of the duality has to be suppressed, conquered or sublimated. Failure to achieve any one of these, make individuals carry stress and a sense of guilt. They have to wrestle with the temptation

Indian ethos and its social design utilized the intrinsic ambivalence of the human psyche. It integrated ambivalence for constructive expression through the theory of congruence of microcosm and macrocosm and the theory of time-bound finiteness and the infiniteness. These propositions propounded that all manifestations of reality be considered legitimate and woven into the organismic design of the society. It is this process that helped the Indian society to tolerate diversity of forms and yet create the unity of psycho-cultural identity.

The utilization of the intrinsic psychic ambivalence displayed the master craftsmanship of Indian thought. It created simultaneously coexisting spaces for all the three monologues of existential ambivalences. These monologues are :

I am, I am not - Who am I? The dilemma of Being
I can, I cannot - Can I? The dilemma of Choice of Action
I do, I do not - Do I? The dilemma of Involvement

The process created a space for being a role, a space for denying a role, a space for action, space for role-tasks and a space to deny aggression, eroticism, manipulation and impulsiveness. Simultaneously it designed a space to express these very feelings through ritualistic and symbolic behaviour and also through direct action under the mask of experiencing one's own infiniteness and one's own salvation. It designed action spaces to explore and experiment with many aspects of the being which were excluded from the role-task space. And finally it delinked the action space from intention space by postulating detachment on the one hand and the status of being a medium to the self on the other. Thus, the individual had the choice to treat himself as an agent of action or as a medium of action.

The Indian social design created simultaneously the forces for socialization and the forces of individuation. The forces of socialization pushed the individual to conform to the absolutism of role-behaviour. They demanded the surrender of the self and unquestioned commitment to withhold personal feelings from action. Rama and all the other characters of the Ramayana epitomize conformist behaviour. The forces of individuation left one on a razor's edge. It required making constant proactive choice while giving attention to situational variances. The forces of individuation are crystallized in the role of Krishna and his teachings. It is interesting to note that in Mahabharata, Bhishma, Drona and others who disown personal feelings from action in order to follow rigid role-commitment, stand opposed to Krishna who represents the ideal of individuation.

Retaining correspondence, congruence, convergence and coherence in the social and individual life and in the inner world and outer world inherently demands a social review. The social review needs to take into account the emergent situational and environmental variances which may trigger a drift between social role process and behaviour. Such a drift may be a product of catastrophes such as an invasion from alien groups or famine from natural causes. It may also be triggered by the primary ambivalence or insufficiency of social infrastructures. It would lead to events which may be dysfunctional in terms of earlier formulation of boundary conditions. As such, a design inherently requires processes of social review of setting new directions for achieving congruence. The review processes were also made a part of the design by institutionalizing the faisuya yagna, referred to earlier. The review process allowed reorganization of experimental elements into new configurations. Society thus, retained its fluidity, while it was rooted deeply and firmly in the organismic religio-philosophic ethos. Essentially, it allowed man to sustain his relatedness with society without becoming an outsider. The belief can be summarized in the following statement, - "The nature of order is beauty; the nature of system is certainty; the nature of structure is security". But the order, system and structure define man's oughts and a few shoulds and musts; when they start defining the majority of shoulds and musts, a man loses touch with himself and is converted into a compulsive performer of limited roles. It will be a sad day when this happens. The only recourse open to man then, is to learn to define and not to defy or deny and to persist rather than resist or desist.

The social design not only defined the structural and infrastructural modalities, but became the basis of constructing the socio-psychological world of objects and symbolic world of meanings and concepts. It led to a mode of pattern-thought rather than linear thought. It led to the creating of multi-faceted-object world. Every sphere of knowledge or life was interconnected with knowledge of every other sphere of knowledge of life. Every object was comprehensive and multi-functional. Most words were not mere object references, but connected a whole universe of meaning, behaviour elements and choice. Many of them in the Indian tradition were contradictory. For example, caste, through stratification and distribution of power represented the dilemma of quality of personhood and hierarchy of status in its political aspect. Socio-economically speaking, it demarcated an occupational space achieving economic segmentation. This was based on technology on the one hand, and ethnic myths on the other. It bound the field of inter-personal relations with the consequential dilemmas of inclusion and exclusion in relationships. In the socio-psychological sense, it represented the differentiation between self and role tasks. The concept represented simultaneously many levels and aspects of social living. Individuals in taking a stance with regard to the concept, were always on a "see-saw".

In the object world a similar phenomenon of patterned thought can be illustrated by the most common place object, the khat(bed).

The khat is not only a bed but it is a sofa to receive guests; a table-cum-chair to eat; or play cards; a rack to store things upon; a space to dry clothes and to process food; a prop and a ladder to climb walls; a shade against the sun; a shelter against wind and rain -- in fact it is a versatile object in its use.

Similar examples abound in the field of knowledge. A iyotishi (astrologer) knows something about medicine, weather, food, gems and other things related to the well-being and future of an individual. A musician is not only an expert in vocal or instrumental rendering. His training involved understanding the intricate theory of emotions and the analogous universe of the 'Swara' (notes) with other esthetic experiences such as colour, touch, taste and smell. Similarly, a medical man is not only a diagnostician and a prescriber of drugs but has integrated knowledge of iyotish, food and its qualities and temperament and its modalities related to various states of sicknesses. Essentially, there was no specialization in knowledge. It was more often holistic. Specificity of expertise could be valid and viable only if there was an awareness of the contextual universe of man's social, psychological and moral existence.

A similar phenomenon of pattern-existence applied to words. Here each word connoted not only the object in its physical existence but also the many levels of the universe of experience with it. For example, there are seventy words to connote moon the object. These words are not synonymous, or inter-changeable. They connote the quality of experience the moon can evoke. For example, the word Rakesh represents a whole universe of a full moon seen in a clear blue sky spreading soft, mystic, somewhat chilled light; in a calm night with no turbulent winds. As against Rakesh, Rajneesh connotes any moonlit night from the first to the fifteenth of a month. It only represents the centrality of the moon in the night time. The words were pregnant, carrying in them a hierarchy of meanings, some evolutionary and some operational. For example, the word purush connoting man has three meanings. Each is different in their genesis and application.

This process of conceptualizing and constructing the object world is a direct product of the organismic ethos of India. Every act of being was seen as a locus of the universe of associative acts, meanings, and their linkages. Nothing existed singly. Everything existed only in a pattern and as a part of a larger pattern. Such a process implies that the sutra "aham brahmasmi" does not restrict itself to the nature of self and the self alone. It extends to the whole world by postulating all existence in patterns. Everything was bounded yet boundless. The hypothesis of moreness of everything made the world worthy of exploration and experimentation and left the world open for potential experiences in diverse ways.

An Overview

The social design of India was cohesive and comprehensive. It encompassed a wide palaeoscopic universe which allowed the

elements of social life to realign into new patterns from era to era. However, it must be emphasized that the ultimate burden of the maintenance and sustenance of this design depended on the individual. The individual, though bound to a limited and restricted space, enjoyed a great deal of discretion and options. This process of locating the final burden on the individual made him walk on a razor's edge. He had to make a choice of playing the role, being the self, or integrating the two. The role of the intellectuals was to provide timely review of the social processes and reformulate new boundary conditions. It was the most critical variable.

The religio-philosophic ethos and the social design once supported a dynamic and throbbing society and culture which evolved almost in all spheres of life except, perhaps, in the field of technology. It pioneered and innovated in the fields of knowledge, perfected cultural forms, dance, music and dramas, and excelled in producing consumer products. It initiated and fostered the widest religious and social thought of man. In its prime it absorbed many assaults and impingements from alien sources and yet maintained its character.

Today the same society and culture has shrouded its ethos in mystery. The social design is battered and has become ineffective. It has almost become an inverted image of its former existence. It can be best described as a stagnant society degenerating and decaying slowly. In the social transactions of today none of the qualities are more often evident. Compulsive conformity, role-boundedness, denial of personhood, abrogation of representativeness in the system, dependence, deprivation, discrimination, and exploitation have spread throughout the fabric of the society, and have made inroads into its culture. Interference, manipulation and aggression which violate human dignity and crush human spirits are rampant.

The society and culture are no more multifaceted. Openness, creativity and innovativeness are slowly disappearing from both the society and its culture. It has become a borrower society and even there it has failed to dignify itself as Japan once did. It has lost its acumen, its pride, self-sufficiency, resources and stands pathetically denuded of dignity. The past strength has become a dream and its problems have become unmanageable. The Indian society today has truly become a pathological version of its bygone days. It has lost its quality dynamism of life.

In the ultimate analysis today reality is what matters. Our attempts to relive the Indian reality was only a journey to discover the antecedents. It was like the journey which the universal hero of the myths undertakes. Ulysses walking through the portals of hades, in order to come to terms with the ghosts of the past. And then to return to the reality of the day as a chastened and reflective human being. We believe in dedicated action and this journey was to discover the strength from our tradition to cope with the current scenario characterized by degeneration, exploitation, corruption, patterns of conspicuous

consumption, self-centered existence, imposition on the environment and oppression of subservients. The journey to explore Indian reality from within confronted us with the ghosts of the past. Our explorations with ourselves and other individuals laid many to rest. It helped us to encounter our self-hate, shame and our guilt for being born Indians and of belonging to India. We found ourselves willing and ready to face the reality of today with understanding and courage. The journey provided us with regeneration as it did to the heroes of the universal myths.

Yet the question remains. How could such a transformation take place? How was it triggered? What were the elements that converged together to create it? What state of society existed in India so that the encounter with an alien ethos anchored in its value assumptions and religio-philosophic beliefs could have such serious impact? In our desperation we even doubted whether the glory that was India ever existed? Our reliving of the Indian reality of the past has reassured us that glorious India did once exist. Our quest for the contextual perspective of the Indian identity for validation of being and becoming in which the self and role identities can be integrated afresh, demanded from us that we also relive the process of the transformation of India into its own inverted images of the past. As such we began our journey to explore the cognitive maps of the Indian society.

