

**THE IDEA OF A TRIBE
AND
THE PROBLEM OF CULTURAL IDENTITY**

BY

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DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY



SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENT OF THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

TO



**THE NORTH-EASTERN HILL UNIVERSITY
SHILLONG-7930014
INDIA**

SEPTEMBER, 1985

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CERTIFICATE

Certified that the subject matter of this dissertation is the record of work done by Laldineni that the contents of this thesis did not form a basis of the award of any previous degree to her, or to the best of my knowledge, to anybody else, and that the dissertation had not been submitted by her for any research degree in any other University.

In habit and character Laldineni is a fit and proper person for the degree of M. Phil.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This work is but an humble offering at the feet of the Lord, without whose benign grace the work could not perhaps see the light of the day.

I am deeply indebted to Professor Mrinal Miri without whose guidance and help I could never have completed the work. His humility and understanding is a source of encouragement throughout the period in which I was engaged in the writing of the dissertation.

My affectionate thanks go to my parents, brothers and sisters whose toil, tears and silent sacrifices and constant encouragement are of great help in accomplishing this task.

I am thankful to Dr. Sujata Miri, Dr. N. Malla, Dr. S.C. Daniel, Dr. Jagat Pal, Dr. R.V. Vyas, who have a keen interest in the progress of my work and who have helped me a lot while I was doing my course work.

I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to my research mate, Miss Alpana Chakraborty, for her encouragement and help. I express my gratitude to other research mates, friends and well wishers who remain unnamed for their valuable/useful suggestions.

(ii)

I am thankful to the authorities of North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, for awarding me Junior Research Fellowship which helped me in completing my M. Phil programme.

I wish to express my thanks and gratitude to Mr. Joseph F. Khongbuh for his neat typing of the final draft of the dissertation. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Mr. K. Laldailova and Mr. H. Rualthankhuma for typing out the first draft.

SHILLONG
The 3rd Sept 1985.

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CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Acknowledgement	... i - ii
CHAPTER - I INTRODUCTION	... 1 - 6
CHAPTER - II THE IDEA OF A TRIBE	... 7 - 22
CHAPTER - III <u>CULTURAL IDENTITY AND</u> RELATED PROBLEMS	... 23 - 46
CHAPTER - IV RELATION BETWEEN CULTURE AND LANGUAGE	... 47 - 69
CHAPTER - V CONCLUSION	... 70 - 72
BIBLIOGRAPHY	... 73 - 79

INTRODUCTION

I

Frequently, it is said that the concept of culture has to be understood by contrast with the concept of nature. This contrast may be understood in many ways. It might, for example, be said that the domain of nature is above all a causal domain whereas the notion of causality may not enter into the understanding of culture at all, or that nature is something given whereas culture is something made and so on. To my mind, however, the most fruitful way of making use of this contrast in our understanding of the notion of culture is to stress that unique feature of man which makes him a communicating creature. An act of communication is an act of intentional conveying of meanings and what I might be allowed to call, a non-causal receiving of meaning. A culture can be thought of as a complex system of conveying and receiving of meanings in terms of which actions of people belonging to each culture can be understood and explained.

A human action may be capable of a large variety of descriptions which bring out the different meanings of the action. Thus take the following case: A man and a young boy walking down the road: an alternative description of this

could be "the man is taking his son for a walk," or "father and son are going shopping" or the "father is taking his young son to the school" and so on and so on. I think, many of these descriptions are available to us only because the actions in question take place within one particular cultural context and not another.

II

Perhaps the most general way of stating my point is the one to be found in the anthropologist David M. Schneider's insightful paper entitled 'Notes toward a Theory of Culture.'¹ Schneider makes an interesting distinction - between the concept of a 'norm' and that of culture. A norm, according to him, indicates a pattern of action and enables one to distinguish between an action that conforms to this pattern and an action that doesn't conform to the pattern. Thus, for instance, given that a person is correctly designated as a father within a given culture implies that his activities towards some given member of the same society ought to conform to a certain pattern. Deviation from this pattern would be generally regarded, within that culture, as wrong. But to recognise a pattern of action in terms of a norm is - so it will be said - to inform that pattern of action with a particular meaning. While this is true, the

meaning that a culture embodies is much wider than the meaning endowed by the idea of the norm. As Schneider puts it,

Culture contrasts with norms in that norms are oriented to patterns for action, whereas culture constitutes a body of definitions, premises, statements, postulates, presumptions, propositions, and perceptions about the nature of the universe and man's place in it. Where norms tell the actor how to play the scene, culture tells the actor how the scene is set and what it all means. Where norms tell the actor how to behave in the presence of ghosts, gods and human beings, culture tells the actor what ghosts, gods and human beings are and what they are all about. Obviously, how to behave toward gods, ghosts and human beings is not unrelated to how these are believed to consist regardless of whether such beliefs can be shown to be specifically right or wrong.²

Let me try and make the idea that human communication has to be understood in an essentially non-causal way a little clearer. The idea of human communication involves the idea of addressing another person. Addressing another person is essentially different from purely causally capturing his attention. For instance, addressing somebody must be distinguished from, say, making a loud noise in the presence of the person such that his attention is turned towards me. Then the latter is what might be called a causal extraction of the person's attention whereas addressing is really much more like inviting another person's

attention to myself. And inviting somebody's attention is non-causal in the sense that it rests on a conscious abandonment of the idea that other person's attention can be purely causally extracted. It seems to me that without some such idea of what one might call, the possibility of transcendence of causality the phenomena of human communication will be inexplicable.

I might, however inadequately, say the following in clarification of the idea of transcendence of causality:

✓ Culture doesn't causally determine human activity nor, for that matter, human activity culture, in the way, for instance, in which our biological structure determines many of our urges. A culture is not part of a causal hypotheses by reference to which the behaviour of a group of people can be explained. This is for the simple reason that the behaviour of what might be called a culture group cannot, in the required sense, be identified at all except by reference to the culture in question. Thus, if the idea that a certain group of people has a certain culture were to be a causal hypotheses to explain the behaviour of the people in the group in question, then the whole procedure would be hopelessly and viciously circular. The behaviour of a culture group embodies the culture in question rather than

being explained by it. The culture informs the behaviour in somewhat like the way in which meaning informs the spoken or the written word. In neither case is the relationship a causal one. The behaviour expresses the culture in the way that the word expresses its meaning. The problem of making the behaviour of a culture group intelligible is the same as the problem of discovering what their behaviour expresses. And the solution lies not in a causal search but in what has been called a hermeneutic exploration.

III

In what follows I have not explored, in anything like a detailed or adequate manner, some of the fascinating philosophical questions that I have hinted at above. My point in mentioning them right at the beginning has been rather to make my own basic position with regard to some of these questions clear. And what I have to say in the following pages should be viewed in this light.

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CHAPTER - II

THE IDEA OF A TRIBE

The concept of a 'tribe' has been sought to be defined in many ways. But most of these definitions are either too wide, or too restrictive. Let us look at some definitions of a 'tribe'.

- ✓ A tribe is a group of people in a primitive or barbarous stage of development acknowledging the authority of a chief and usually regarding themselves as having a common ancestor.¹

- ✓ A tribe is a collection of families bearing a common name, speaking a common dialect, occupying or professing to occupy a common territory and is not usually endogamous, though originally it might have been so.²

- ✓ In its simplest form the tribe is a group of bands occupying a contiguous territory or territories and having a feeling of unity deriving from numerous similarities in culture, frequent contacts, and a certain community of interest.³

- ✓ A tribe is a group united by a common name in which the members take a pride by a common language, by a common territory, and by a feeling that all who do not share this name are outsiders, 'enemies' in fact.⁴

- ✓ A tribe is a social group with territorial affiliation, endogamous, with no specialization of functions, ruled by tribal officers, hereditary or otherwise, united in language or dialect, recognizing social distance with other tribes or castes, without any social obloquy

attaching to them, as it does in the case structure, following tribal traditions, beliefs and customs, illiberal of naturalization of ideas from alien sources, above all conscious of homogeneity of ethnic and territorial integration.⁵

✓A tribe is an independent political division of a population with a common culture.⁶

Ideally, tribal societies are small in scale, are restricted in the spatial and temporal range of their social, legal, and political relations, and possess a morality, a religion, and world-view of corresponding dimensions. Characteristically too, tribal languages are unwritten, and hence, the extent of communication both in time and space is inevitably narrow. At the same time, tribal societies exhibit a remarkable economy of design and have a compactness and self-sufficiency lacking in modern society.⁷

When we look into the different definitions of a tribe, one is bound to be impressed by the dissimilarity of definitions as regards what constitutes a tribe. Kinship ties, common territory, one language, joint ownership, one political organization, absence of internecine strife within have all been referred to as the main characteristics of a tribe.

T.B. Naik-elaborates that a community to be a 'tribe' must have all the following attributes. It might be undergoing acculturation, but the degree of acculturation will

have to be determined in the content of its customs, gods, language etc. A very high degree of acculturation will automatically debar it from being a tribe.

Naik's attributes of tribe are the following:-

- a) A tribe to be a 'tribe' should have the least functional interdependence within the community.
- b) It should be economically 'backward.'
- c) There should be a comparative geographic isolation of its people from others.
- d) Culturally, members of a tribe should have a common dialect which may be subject to regional variations.
- e) A tribe should be politically organised and its community Panchayat should be an influential institution.
- f) The tribe's members should have the least desire to change. They should have a sort of psychological conservatism making them stick to their old customs.
- g) A tribe should have customary laws and its members might have to suffer in a modern law court because of these laws.⁸

Even Naik's attempts is not without defects. It is, like most others, too restrictive in its scope.

According to some other scholars a tribe is generally described as a group of people characterized by a common and distinct name, a group sentiment, and a common and

specific territory. It is endogamous and has common institutional agencies for maintaining order in the community.

✓ A tribe follows its own specific magic and rituals along with other social, economic, political and cultural tradition. Each particular tribe has its own code of conduct and practices and the conventional taboos.

On the other hand, we can say that a tribe is a group of people speaking a common language, observing a uniform rules of social organisation and working together for common purposes, such as trade, agriculture, or warfare. Other typical characteristics include a common name, a contiguous territory, a relatively uniform cultural way of life, and a tradition of common descent. Tribes are usually composed of a number of local communities e.g. bands, villages, neighbourhood and are often aggregated in clusters of a higher order called nations. The term 'tribe' is seldom applied to societies that have achieved a strictly territorial organisation in large states but is usually confined to groups whose unity is based primarily upon a sense of extended kinship ties. Anthropologists are accustomed to divide people into 'tribes' on the basis of linguistic and cultural resemblances.

II

What the above discussion makes clear is that it is no easy matter to capture the meaning of the word 'tribe' in one single definition however complex the definition might be. What at least in part, accounts for this indetermination in the concept of tribe is that the dictates of bureaucratic procedures and the increasing acculturation going on throughout India and particularly among many identified tribal people make it difficult to apply an idea which is, in many respects, an ideal type formulation.

We can have a clearer idea of the concept of a tribe from philosophical perspective. Perhaps, Wittgenstein's idea of family resemblance might be of some help to us here. Wittgenstein asks us to consider the various kinds of games, there are e.g. board games, card games, ball games etc. and the variety within each kind. If we pick out a feature common to two games we shall find that it is absent from some other place in the spectrum of games. Not all games are amusing, not all involve winning or losing, not all require competition between players, and so on. What makes all of them games, what gives unity to those activities, is not some feature present in all games but a multitude of relationships (overlapping and criss-crossing),

Wittgenstein employed the analogy of family resemblance between several generations of the same family; studying them at close hand one may find that there is no feature common to all of the family. We can apply the notion of family resemblance in our present problem too. There are a great variety of people that are called tribes in different parts of the country. Different tribes have nothing in common which run through all the tribes living in different places. But, they all have resemblances (overlapping and criss-crossing) which characterize them in the way that resemblances characterise different members of one family. The different members e.g. father, son, daughter, can be seen as belonging to one family from the eyes that the son has in common with the father; or from the gait that the daughter has in common with the son, or, the way of speaking that the son has in common with the mother and so on. We might, likewise, say that different tribes are 'tribes' not because there is any one thing or complex of things running through them all, but because of a network of criss-crossing resemblances.

III

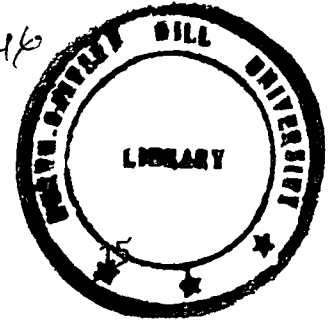
✓ The word 'tribe' is derived from the Latin 'tribus' meaning 'one third', which originally referred to one of the three people who united to found Rome. The Romans later applied 'tribus'

to the thirty five (35) people who, according to tradition, became a part of Rome before 241 B.C. and still later, to segments of the Gallic or Germanic people whom they conquered. The Roman and Germanic tribe comprised a group of patrilineally related families who had an identifying name, occupied a common territory, and followed a common leadership.⁹

✓ More recently, the word 'tribe' has acquired a new group of meanings. But instead of looking for definitions let me contemplate on some of the characteristics which have come to be closely associated with the idea of a tribe. In a tribal society the way of living is generally simple. Unlike 'modern' people who are very much individualistic and who are craving for freedom in different aspects of life, the tribal people are generally 'submissive' to the authorities in their community. The individual is protected, cared for and loved by his own community. He can never starve or reduce himself to begging. The life of each person is closely knit together with that of the community through their different rites and rituals. The birth of a child, a marriage, a funeral and different sacrifices etc. are all performed in conjunction with the other members of the community.* There might be an occasion when a person has to do his sacrifice alone but they always eat together the sacrificial ceremony. On many occasions one can be forgiven his wrong doings in the society by giving a feast to the people of his village.

Tribal people are very fond of helping each other in their work. The whole community will help the poor and the needy when they build their houses or when they need help in weeding or reaping. They are very generous and they love to share with others during their festivals whatever little they have. When a person makes a big celebration in the community it always involves giving a feast to the whole community and also giving out some other things which are valuable to his fellow members in the community. So, everyone is important in the tribal community, he is a link in the chain of his society, and a weak or broken link will affect the whole chain. He has an insurance scheme which covers and guarantees not only the welfare of his family after his death, but also avenge his death if he meets it by foul means at the hands of his enemies. In a society such as this, there is 'restricted' freedom of action for the individual. But this does not necessarily mean that the individual feels 'constrained' in such a society; it rather means that although the individual can do many things, whatever he can do, must be within the bounds of rules. Each member seeks the approval of their fellow tribesman and the social prestige and merit is their ideal and ultimate aim. In social activities and interaction between individuals, powerful moral and social imperatives are at

101746



work; but these imperatives have to be understood in the context of the total system of meanings which is the tribal culture. Thus to take a much talked about example: Among head-hunters killing by itself is not the aim but enemies' head are needed to appease ancestral ghosts, to ensure good crops, fertility in women, good luck during hunting, and general well being and prosperity for all. Since their beliefs are like this, a tribal boy who wants to gain social recognition is always willing to hunt for enemies because thereby he earns recognition; praise from his group and a reward from the society. A young man is eager to prove his mettle, and long to take a head, bring it home in triumph, to be feted as a warrior, gain the privilege of wearing the coveted warrior's ornaments and having at last proved his worth and manhood. But, in spite of all these, conduct of war must generally conform to certain rules. They may decide the weapons to use or they may decide not to harm the peace-maker or the go-between.

✓ In every tribal community the traditional laws and customs have an encompassing grasp of every individual. Conformity to customs is often taken as a mark of group membership and makes the individual a 'member of the group'. Conversely, failure to conform stamps the individual as an

outsider or perhaps a heretic or rebel. The use of custom to signify and affirm membership in a group is especially obvious when a sub-group in a society e.g. a religious sect, a military order, a social caste, or a professional elite wants to differentiate itself from the rest. On the other hand, a non-conformist may refuse to follow the customs of a group simply in order to express defiance of the group. But, it will be a rare case in a tribal society. In both cases, customs are used to communicate with others in order to establish, or to deny 'identities' that is, relationships, powers and claims.

In one important way, customs function like a language; they are used as a means of communicating with one another. To a large extent it is only by means of custom that we are able to relate to one another, pro or con, and to express our attitudes and feelings towards one another. Without knowledge of customs one would not be able to fulfill some of the simplest moral injunctions, like the injunction to love and respect others. One would not know what his commitments were and how to honour them. He would not know how to be decent and honest, how to avoid hurting the feelings of others. These general requirements of morality transcend every particular group, but they cannot be executed apart from customs. We have to operate within the

context of customs. So, knowing the customs is very important in order to understand a particular cultural group. As the tribal societies are closely knit and linked together none can escape reward or punishment. The community has the authority to impose a fine, to count them out from their family line, to expel from the village, to excommunicate from the whole tribe or even to put a person to death depending on the offence he did which is against the idea of the community. As a whole, the tribal people can never live a purely individualistic life as their daily living necessarily involves other members of the community. They go out together in groups for hunting, fishing, and when the need arises they have to prepare to make wars to defend their own people. Among some tribals, affairs like quarrelling theft, divorce etc. are decided by the people or representatives of the community.

✓ As the tribal people are living nearer to nature, they ✓
are influenced very much by its overwhelming forces. They
are influenced by the course of nature in their thoughts
and nature as a symbol is interwoven in their socio-religious
beliefs and rituals. They live a hard life and feel
the interplay of natural forces playing their different and
yet distinctive roles: devastation caused in no time all

and wholly unaccountable, a river comes suddenly in spate; a rock falls suddenly from above and ruins the whole village. The phenomena around fill them with a feeling of remorse and piety. It is not surprising, therefore, that the metaphysical and spiritual imagination of most tribal people are dominated by symbolic representations which are rooted in nature and natural phenomena. There is nothing of importance that happens to man that cannot be found a profounder meaning by relating it to the powerful and vital nexus of symbolic forms derived from nature. Gods and goddesses, 'spirits' and 'ghosts' are inevitable elements in a spiritual ecology which gives an encompassing meaning to the natural ecology of man and nature. The mountains around fill them with a deep feeling of awe and reverence; the waters of the rivers appear so threatening, so do the big rocks and the big trees, and they can hardly challenge them.

- ✓ From the above discussion, it may be tempting to say the philosophy of life of the tribal community is shaped and moulded by nature which is around them. They have given their religion a philosophy which can see a universal role of the supernatural in the destiny of man and which invariably warrants a hierarchy of gods, deities and spirits in shaping their small and big fortunes and prosperity in

life. Religion is intertwined with life at every step and stage because the meaning of almost everything is to be sought in terms of symbolic formations. Religion becomes a part of their life and is interwoven in their socio-religious beliefs and rituals. Religion perhaps is not so much an expression of their own inner realization as the ultimate arbiter of meanings. The supernatural becomes the motivator and custodian of all their deeds. Interestingly, among the tribal people, especially in the North East India there is a very general belief in a supreme God who is just, benevolent and essentially good and it is associated with the belief in different deities, spirits who need to be appeased and who occasionally seem to indulge in petty affairs or wilfully harm people for no apparently valid reasons and even for no gain to themselves.

The Supreme God blesses the desperate humanity. The tribal people think that there is a demon everywhere in the sun, the thunder, the earth and the water. One striking feature of tribal religions, is perhaps the insight into the nearly all-pervasive forces of evil and violence. Many symbolic representations are representations of malevolence and violence which must be contained. And much psychological and spiritual energy is spent on the containment of such forces.

They do not normally worship the Supreme supernal nor do they offer any sacrifice to him. He does not need them, he is above human desire and wants. It is the evil spirits who always desire very ordinary things, find small pitfalls for men and are greedy of such sacrifices. They have to be appeased lest they inflict their anger on men and trouble them unnecessarily.

The tribal people of the North East Region seem to have a religion with a peculiar blending of 'naturism', 'animism' and 'animation.' These terms are used without their evolutionary or derogatory connotation. But what is most striking is that each tribe here has its own religion **which never runs exactly parallel to any other religion.** In some religions, attitude toward God is rather impersonal. The Supreme Being does not do any harm nor does he do any good. Some others believe that he looks after the ailing humanity. Spirits (mostly evil) are usually after sacrifice and need to be kept in their proper moods because their mere wrath can cause a great havoc to the people.

The normal behaviour of a member of a tribal group must include not hurting others, not causing misery, and not to be a burden on other members of the community. If one unconsciously and without any intention causes anger to his gods he will immediately try to propitiate them.

If things still go wrong he will try to know the cause through divination (via a priest) who has a direct communion with gods, deities and spirits.

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CHAPTER - III

CULTURAL IDENTITY AND RELATED PROBLEMS

Cultural identity is a fairly widely discussed subject in different disciplines of the social sciences. Sociologists, anthropologists, philosophers examine the problem of cultural identity and related problems of change, cultural diffusion, acculturation, assimilation etc., in their own ways.

I

The world seems to be in a perpetual flux, undergoing ceaseless transformation, yet in spite of the alteration we notice we want to say that this is the same tree which shed its leaves last month, that this adult is made up of the same stuff as the piece of ice which melted.

Philosophical reflections about the nature of change about the problem of identifying or re-identifying something or someone gives rise to a set of issues which cluster under the name 'the problem of identity.' In its simplest form this is problem of trying to give a true explanation of those features of the world which account for its sameness on the one hand and for its diversity and changes on the other hand.

How do I know that this is the same table which I saw yesterday in the classroom? What could be the grounds on the basis of which I make an identity judgement? The concept of identity will be clearer if we can give appropriate answers to the above questions. We may be convinced of the identity but we might fail to justify. In material identity it is very easy to confuse similarity and identity. But one material object can be very similar in shape, size, colour, etc., yet not identical with the one we have seen before. For example, I lend out my book for a week with my signature inside it. But how can I know that it is the same book even though the signature is still there because it is possible to change the book and put on it a copy of my signature which is indistinguishable from the original. 'Similarity' can be evidenced but not the criterion; and this means it is not a necessary and sufficient condition. So, 'similarity' is ruled out as it is not good enough as a criterion for material object identity. In general cases "spatio-temporal-continuity" seems to provide an adequate answer to the question about material object identity. The table I saw yesterday in the classroom and the table I'm looking at today at the moment may look different and yet be identical. Somebody might have painted it with a different colour. But the

table must not have been replaced. Replacement must be ruled out in the intervening period. And this can be ensured only by ensuring the spatio-temporal continuity of the original table. But, there are some rare cases where one is at a loss in spite of there being spatio-temporal-continuity. For example, one bicycle undergoes repairs of different parts at different times. At the end there is not even a single part which is not changed. In this case one will have to decide whether it is a different one or still identical with the original bicycle. These are border line cases where one is at a loss which way to choose. But here it really doesn't matter whether you call it the same, (identical) or different. As long as the facts are clear, one is, as it were, free to choose between calling it the same or a different one and this would not normally create a confusion.

✓ ✓In personal identity similarity is not required because there can, for instance, be a vast difference in the same person when he is one month old and when he is eighty years old. Besides this, the criterion of material identity i.e., spatio-temporal-continuity seems insufficient in the matter of personal identity. We can broadly divide the criteria that have been proposed for personal

identity into two: the criterion of bodily continuity and the criterion of memory.

In the case of material objects; we can use spatio-temporal-continuity but a person is not a material object only, so we need to modify our criteria. Wittgenstein was also puzzled by this problem. We can think of identity at a time and identity through time. Numerical identity is not possible without identity at a time. In a philosophically strict sense we cannot say two persons are identical even if they are "identical" twins, because they do occupy different places; unless there is numerical identity we cannot count them as identical. Here we mean by identity one and the same thing. Almost all the writers of the period from Descartes to Kant took the term 'identity' to mean "the same with itself." Everyday discourse allows two items to be identical even if they may be numerically distinct but our present discussion takes 'identity' as 'one and the same.' In the case of personal identity there may be a problem in saying that a person A is the same as person B, even though bodily continuity and spatio-temporal-continuity criterion are fulfilled. Mr. A can fulfil the spatio-temporal continuity criterion even after his death. His dead body may be preserved as it is

with medicine but he cannot be the same person as Mr. A. A person is not just a sum-total of flesh and bones, he is more than that. If one died we cannot identify the dead body as the person because there is something crucial that is missing.

On the other side, some people emphasize the importance and necessity of memory as a criterion in the case of personal identity. No doubt, bodily continuity may plausibly be thought of as a necessary condition of personal identity but it cannot, as we have seen, be a sufficient condition; the same, however, happens to be the case with regard to memory as well. For example, one might meet with an accident resulting in a head injury that caused the loss of memory. Can we call that person the same person as the one who had the accident? It seems that we must, and yet there is no memory here. Now, is memory a sufficient condition of personal identity? Suppose one person has all the correct memories of a famous person who died two hundred years back, can we say that he is identical with the famous person who already died? Of course, there is no bodily continuity but it looks as if the memories which we can check are all correct and they are the same with those of the one who died two hundred

years back. The problem here is that even if we can somehow ensure that the memories of the person in question are genuine memories, the facts of the cases are such that there is nothing, in logic, to prevent another, a third person, from making such 'genuine' memory claims. Such an eventuality will immediately generate the paradox that two persons who are quite clearly two are, in reality, one and the same.

II

In the light of the above discussion, we can safely say that the problem of material object identity is different in crucial ways, from the problem of personal identity. Of these, the problem of personal identity seems to be intriguingly intractable. However, cultural identity seems to be even more complicated. Culture is not a physical object which is visible like a material object and a person, moreover culture is something which is not an entity in any clear sense of the term.

✓
 Culture is a total system of signs, symbols, customs, way of living; beliefs, world views of a particular group, the striving to achieve a moral ideal. And as culture is frequently changing we have to try and answer the question. "How much change can a culture take without ceasing to be the same culture?" ✓

We shouldn't put culture on the same level with material objects and persons because putting them together will be a category mistake, a material object and a person are objects or particulars to which we can point, but, culture is not something to which we can point in the same way. Culture is the sum total of all the systems and symbols in the society, recognised by that society and we cannot point to an item and say, 'Look, this is their culture', we can at best point to aspects, parts or some 'instances' of culture.

✓ Identity of culture is an evaluative concept whereas the identity of a material object or a person is not, in the ordinary case, an evaluative concept. We can identify material objects in a general case if there is spatio-temporal continuity and in the case of a person we can identify someone as the same person if memory and bodily criteria agree together which they most often do. But in the case of cultural identity evaluation has an important role to play. To understand a particular culture and its specific identity we need to understand the delicate balance of the different values of each culture. In the general case, the question of identity of a material object and of a person emphasize the importance of what

it is', rather than 'what is ought to be'. In the case of cultural identity, since culture is not merely a noun, but a verb, or in other words 'culture is of our own making, our own responsibility',¹ the criterion here must, therefore, take into consideration the normative aspect of culture. 'Loss of culture' is not just a matter of brute fact, it is also, to my mind essentially, a matter of moral concern.

A particular cultural group might put different values on different aspects of life. A culture may remain the same through various kinds of change and, it is very difficult to point out the stage where a culture has ceased to be the same. Because, through inter-cultural contacts, values, ideas, world-views are changed, added and modified constantly. But there is a point where a particular cultural group is assimilated and can be said to have completely lost their identity. What is this last stage between continuity of a culture and its loss? This is a puzzling question and we cannot, it seems, point to any one thing as 'this is the one the loss of which has led to the loss of identity.' A cultural group can lose its identity by losing different aspects of their tradi-

tional activities not necessarily the same with their neighbours who lost their identity by losing another aspect of their traditional life.

III

In connection with this let me discuss the importance of language for a culture and its identity. Language is the form of communication, means of transmission of ideas and means for social interaction par excellence. Language and a culture are closely related and any study of a culture without knowing its language is bound to generate distorted views. Language is pregnant with the ideas, views and moral principles of its native speaker. All the rites, rituals and customs will not have the same value if they are conducted in a different language. Language has almost a magical and deep effect on the user, besides, it is not possible to find exact translation of one language into another.

All languages have their own literature, stories, songs, legends, myths, parables, incantations, etc., through which cultures are made articulate and become self-aware.²

If a society loses its language it is very easy for it to lose its identity because it is through language that their views, ideas, customs, rites have particular

specific expression and meaning. But this doesn't mean that as long as a society keeps and uses its language, it still keeps its cultural identity. There can be a society losing their cultural identity but which still uses its own language as a form of communication. Language may be a necessary condition for cultural identity but not a sufficient condition.

IV

✓ * Cultural identity depends on an extremely delicate balance of a variety of features which are all loaded with values of different kinds. To understand a particular culture and its specific identity is to understand this delicate balance. It might at this point, be more profitable to discuss the concept of culture itself rather than cultural identity and compare it with the related concept of civilisation. Culture is defined differently by philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists in different ways. The distinction between 'culture people' as those who advance in civilization and 'nature people' as the more primitive has long since been discarded. And the theoretical interests in the 'essence' of culture have diminished too.

✓ Culture is the total system of symbols and meanings. It is not just bits and pieces of customs, rules and

regulations, tradition, etc., in a society. Culture is also regarded as the expression of man's mode of living, not any more within a purely natural milieu but a mode of intervention of making inroads into that natural milieu. Man's living encounter with nature, with death and life, with sexuality, his way of providing himself with food, his cultivation of the social, hunting, manufacture of tools, pots and dishes, clothing, all these are as much part and parcel of his culture as are art, science, religion and the striving to reach the social ideals/values set by their society.

Now many anthropologists and philosophers are in favour of the broad conception of culture, discarding the distinction between 'culture people' and 'nature people'. Kant says, 'it is the essence of culture that man should be his own instructor.' Culture, therefore, is that activity of man which never stops at what is given, either historically or in the course of nature, but presses on with the quest for improvement, change, reformation. In that way man is able to break through the determinate condition produced by the process of nature or of history by means of his cultural identity. Culture is in part a confrontation of man with the powers that surround him and his relation with other men.

If we are to examine the real nature of man we must stop regarding him as an isolated being and begin to analyse how man functions in his world, namely, his culture. It is on this that many different kinds of enquiry social and cultural anthropology the phenomenology of religion, the study of symbols, information theory and praxology converge. Culture is then thought of not so much as substantive or as substance, but as a verb as the manner in which man expresses himself.

Culture is not a noun, but a verb, or in other words, culture is of our making, is our own responsibility. So our account of culture is a 'functional' one, relating it to our own policy of life. This means that cultural development does not take place above and beyond us, but that man himself must find a strategy of culture.³

In every phase and in all forms of his history, man tries to find the right relationship to the powers and forces that surround him. Here his relation to the divine always becomes a special point at issue. Culture is a learning process and is tied up with the whole of man as a knowing, acting, expressing and self-expressing being. Man has the capacity to understand the signs and symbols provided by nature and he also has the ability to design and develop signs and symbols in order to communicate ✓

different information, his views, ideas, beliefs, etc. Animals are devoid of this inventiveness and they are unable to raise any question about the situation they are put in.

V

How is the concept of culture related to the concept of civilization. Frequently, of course, these two concepts are used interchangeably. However, that there is a difference between these two concepts is clear enough, and some people think that the difference is rather of a fundamental nature. This latter thought is based on a distinction made famous by Descartes - the distinction, namely, between the purely inner and the outer, the private and the public, the mental and the physical. Much western philosophy of the latter half of this century has been concerned with the intractable difficulties, paradoxes and alleged absurdities involved in this distinction. I do not, however, wish to go into this debate but would like to point out how this distinction generates a difference in the concept of culture and that of civilization.

The beginnings of this conception of the difference between these two ideas are to be found in Alfred Weber

and R.M. Mac Iver. Alfred Weber and R.M. Mac Iver in conformity with the uses of "culture" outside the field of anthropology reserved the concept of culture for the area of material organisation. Weber regarded civilization as the product of science and technology and as universal and accumulative in that it relates primarily to nature rather than to man. Culture on the other hand was the human interpretation expressed in meanings and values, in philosophy, religion and art in the purposes of life and society, Mac Iver particularly in his earlier work made a broadly similar distinction; he related culture to ends and civilization to means and viewed the technological order of civilization as determined within the cultural order of meaning and values.* ✓

✓ Culture means something inner and anyone who possess a sense of love, truth and non-violence, self-control and many other requisite, mental qualities in the society and who manifest these qualities is referred to as cultured. ✓ What is gained through education in training cannot be what is called culture. ✓ Culture must be acquired through the intrinsic, inborn or inner activities of the individual. ✓ Culture must be drawn out of the individual's mind,

*See Chapter IV Sec. I.

and spirit. In other words, it must be from within, whatever development or fulfilment there may be of it, if it is borrowed from outside, authenticity of culture will never be achieved. Let us look at what some people have said in this connection.

Civilization and culture are fundamentally distinct from each other, the two can be said to be poles apart. Civilization is external, culture is internal, civilization can be said to be the name given to material progress. Culture relates to spiritual development; railways, telegrams, radios, cars, aeroplanes, ships are the emblem of civilization; non-violence, truth, contentment, self-control and self-abnegation are the symbols of culture. (Siddhantalankar Heritage of Vedic Culture)

✓ The Indian word for culture is sanskriti from a root which means to purify, to transform, to sublimate, to mould and to perfect. A cultural man is a disciplined man who has brought his natural propensities under control and has shaped himself in accordance with the ideal placed before him by his ethical consciousness. This central thought is to any culture what the soul is to the body, and just as the soul is responsible for the dynamism in the culture. The strength or the weakness of a culture will and must ultimately depend on the force or subduedness of the central thought. The more powerful the central thought, the more rigorous and animating will be the culture emanating from it. (S. K. Chatterji)

According to this idea a particular group or society who prescribes violence, untruth, licentiousness etc.

cannot be described as cultured, for a people to be violent, untrue, licentious etc., it requires an emphasis on 'physicality' the 'outer' whereas the notion of non-violence, truth, self-control, demands spiritual 'inner' strength or perseverance. And, culture, being an inward condition of the mind it should be devoid of any essential reference to merely material or physical activities.

On the other hand, civilization, so it is claimed, does not have any connection with the above mentioned pairs of opposites, qualities such as violence and non-violence, untruth and truth, hatred and love, and so on so forth. If people in a given society or nation is rich economically, lives in big cities and possesses luxuries, like motor cars, refrigerators, television set, etc., then they fit into the category of 'Civilised nation'. Similarly a man who fail to possess the requisite inner qualities of life cannot be called a cultured man at all, even if he possesses all the physical requisite qualifications for being called civilised. Civilization is material, it depends upon outward or physical, material things. Culture is spiritual it has its roots in the inner life, the life of the spirit.

The inner-outer distinction, as suggested earlier has been the subject of much lively controversy in recent

philosophy. The distinction, to my mind, cannot be maintained with any degree of plausibility at least in the form that it was formulated by Descartes. Now to the extent that the distinction between culture and civilization is supposed to rest on the Cartésian distinction between the inner and outer, the private and public, that distinction must therefore also be infected by the same logical mistakes. As Wittgenstein suggested, the inner stands in need of the outer. Culture therefore, as a purely internal phenomenon is a non-entity.

However, the 'inner' of culture may not have been conceived as the same as the Cartesian inner or private. It may simply refer, in a fairly and non-controversial sense, to things like qualities of character, mind and spirit and so on, and these latter need not be understood as 'inner' in the Cartesian sense at all. Nonetheless these qualities are so inextricably logically bound up with activities which are supposed to be civilisational rather than cultural that it is not **at** all clear that the kind of distinction that we have considered above is at all plausible. Besides, while morality and spirituality are important for culture, and perhaps, in a sense are central to the notion of culture, it will be a serious limitation on the

welding of the concept of culture if it is limited to just these, because culture really is the total systems of signs, symbols and meanings which enables a person belonging to it to place himself meaningfully in respect not only of the so called inner world but also in relation to the world of nature and, if you like, the world of super-nature.

VI

Let me, here, say something very briefly, about another concept which once again seems to be closely related to that of culture. This is the concept of tradition. Tradition is the handing down of statements, beliefs, legends, customs, etc., from generation to generation especially by word of mouth or by practice. Tradition has an important role to play in all cultures, especially in tribal culture. The traditional laws and customs, the "beaten track" have a far reaching effect on every individual. They are almost fixed and most members of the community are almost automatic followers of the traditional laws. As they are closely knit and linked together in the community almost none can escape reward or punishment if they deserve. Everyone is important in the tribal community, he is a link in the chain of his society and a weak or broken link will affect the whole chain. He has an insurance scheme which covers

and guarantees not only the welfare of his family after his death, but also avenges his death if he meets it by foul means at the hands of his enemies. In a society, such as this, therefore, there is 'restricted' freedom of action for the individual or rather, the concept of 'freedom of the individual' has a different connotation altogether.

I would say that one aspect of culture is tradition - the handing down on of effects and of rules. Tradition is subsumed within the variety of man's activities and within the countless possibilities of change and development presented by existing patterns of culture. Culture may be changed, modified, added to by a new generation; however, the continuity of culture is at least in part, guaranteed by tradition.

VII

✓ Let me briefly return to the problem of identity in relation to culture. As I mentioned earlier the concept of culture doesn't seem to be that of a particular in the way that the concept of a person or that of a material object is that of a particular. Is a concept of a culture then that of a universal? A universal has particular instances of it, but is itself not a particular. Thus the

colour red is a universal and particular patches of red are instances of this universal, whereas the colour red is itself not a particular. I suppose in at least the sense in which culture denotes the 'cultured' the concept of culture is very close to being a universal. To be cultured is to possess a set of properties, and anybody who instantiates this set of properties is a particular instance of the cultured. But we have also talked about culture in the sense of a total system or framework of meanings and symbols which as it were defined the bounds of meaningful possibilities for the people belonging to it. Now, is culture in this sense a universal or a particular? Can there, for instance, be different instances, may be at different times and different places of the same culture? It is difficult to imagine such a possibility. Can there, for instance, be another instance of the Mizo or the Assamese culture in quite another part of the globe? Perhaps, speaking merely of logical possibility, there can. Of course one is assuming here that the central features of the Mizo or the Assamese culture are repeated in these 'instances'; features such as language, tradition and the normative and institutional frameworks. But when this is made clear, even if one were to discover such 'instances', there would be an overwhelming inclination to regard them

as parts of the Asamese or the Mizo culture rather than as instances. And yet they will not be part in the normal ordinary sense of the term, the sense in which my arms are parts of my body.

Perhaps one way of getting over this difficulty is once again to look at what it is that in a central way endows specificity, or 'particularity' to a culture. And here I would like once again to emphasize the role of language. It is language that more than anything else, gives, specificity to a culture. And a language is not a universal; different areas of a language are to use Kant's word, not instances of the language, but are rather parts of it. But, it may be asked, what about the relationship between a language and the more or less different ways of using it? Thus how; for instance, is the English language related to the American speech, the Australian speech, the Irish speech, the Indian 'English' speech, and so on? Are they not more like instances of the English language rather than parts of it? I still think it will be misleading to treat these as instances of the English language. A more perspicuous way of thinking of the relationship would be to think of them as extensions of the English language rather than as instances of it.

I think the difficulty of regarding culture as a universal is much the same as the difficulty of regarding a language as a universal. One would like to say culture is much more a particular than a universal. One must of course be clear here that a culture cannot be a particular in the way that a particular material object is a particular. A language in the same way is much more a particular than a universal and just as there can be extensions of a language there can also be extensions of a culture.

But what about tribal culture. Is this concept not that of a universal with different instances under it e.g. Mizo tribal culture, Naga tribal culture, Khasi tribal culture and so on. But I think it will be a mistake to think so. What gives 'tribal culture' the apparent character of a universal is the word 'tribal' rather than the word culture and we have seen that although this word may be helpful in bringing together a certain network of similarities, it, by itself, cannot be said to denote a group of qualities which are both a necessary and sufficient conditions for a community to be a tribe.

If then culture is neither a universal nor a particular in the full fledged sense of the term, how is one to individuate a culture? I think the difficulties of

individuating a culture are the same as the difficulties of individuating a language. And although here the philosophical difficulties may be quite enormous, in practice one is frequently not in any doubt at all that what one is confronted with is an individual culture or an individual language. The philosophical difficulties are compounded, as mentioned earlier, by the fact that frequently an identity or individuating question with regard to a culture or, for that matter, a language, is a value question rather than a purely factual one. Thus one might say you cannot really call yourself a true Mizo just as one might say what you speak is not the English language at all. And these claims about lack of identity are based on evaluation rather than plain observation of facts.

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CHAPTER - IV

RELATION BETWEEN CULTURE AND LANGUAGE

I

When we talk about culture the idea of "an act of communication" through language is very important because culture and language are most intimately connected.

In order to have a better and a clearer idea of the relation between culture and language we will recapitulate a few of the things said in the previous chapter.

Culture is a difficult word to define. Actually it has been defined in various ways. Some thinkers are of the opinion that culture is the material process for the acquisition of a good and a better life in the society whereas others think that culture centres round the spiritual process of development of the individual in all spheres of life. Material process implies outward physical agents, whereas spiritual process implies inward mental agency. Culture has been thought to be the development and refinement of both the individuals physical and mental abilities through training and education imparted to the individual concerned. However, what is gained mostly through education or training cannot wholly be called culture. Culture must also be acquired through the intrinsic, inborn or inner

activities of the individual. The agency through which culture is gained must be spontaneous. Eminent social scientists, historians, philosophers etc. have generally come to the conclusion that culture is development, refinement and perfection of the individual in the society.

Generally, culture means accomplishment or fulfilment. According to Dewey, culture means at least something cultivated, something ripened, it is opposed to the raw and crude. Man want to move forward for the fulfilment of his potentialities. No one likes to remain stagnant at a particular point. Each and every individual is responsible for his/her upgrading of life. When an individual is involved in such pursuit (with an intent of upgrading his life) the question of cultivation or ripening comes into being and which is no doubt culture.

A concept which is closely connected with that of culture is the concept of civilization. In the Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Raymond Williams discussed about culture and civilization in his article of 'Culture and Civilization' and he said that, 'when we look at the root meaning, civilization and culture means two different concepts.' According to this article culture means the cultivation of mind while civilization is contrasted with the concept of

barbarism. Yet another social condition, which in fact originally describes the life of a foreign group. He further underlines that culture is an act of cultivating the soil. The cultivation of the mind is seen as a process comparable to the cultivation of the soil. Generally, cultivation applies to land, where the farmer pays full attention to the soil in developing the crops planted.

In the concept of culture similarly the main concern is the cultivation of the individual mind for development towards a higher reality.

Culture must be drawn out of the individual's body, mind and spirit. In other words, it must be from within. Whatever development or fulfilment there may be, if it is borrowed from outside authenticity of culture will never be achieved.*

Another way of looking at culture is to think of it as a total system of symbols and meanings. Culture should not be viewed as something which one can make a long list and label them as constituting a particular culture. Culture is no doubt a pattern of learned behaviour, and man's adaptation to nature. Culture is not something which is

*See Chapter III Section V.

visible and which we can observe in day to day life. Culture also consists of the ideas, the different concepts which are there in a society. It includes the worldview of the society. Culture crucially includes a complex network of symbols, the meanings shared in common by the whole society. The world view of that particular culture, the different views on different aspects of life, which we can understand through the symbols and meanings assigned by the society in question are all included in culture. Culture is then the total system in the society not just bits and pieces of customs, rules and regulations, traditions etc. in a society.

II

A human language is a signalling system as its materials, it uses vocal sounds. It is important to remember that basically a language is something which is spoken; the written language is secondary and derivative. In the history of each individual, speech is learned before writing and there is good reason for believing that the same was true in the history of the race. There are primitive communities that have speech without writing, but we know of no human society which has a written language without a spoken one. Such things as the sign, language of deaf

and dumb people are not exceptions to this rule. Even if used by people who cannot speak and have never been able to speak, these languages are derived from the spoken languages of the community around them. Languages are learned, not transmitted genetically. Man has an ability to invent symbols and the quality of patterning in linguistic structure.

Words play an enormous part in our lives and are deserving of the closest study. The old idea that words possess magical powers is false, but its falsity is the distortion of a very important truth. Words are magical in the way they affect the minds of those who use them, "It's mere matter of words" we say carelessly, forgetting that words have power to mould men's thinking, to canalize their feelings, to direct their willing and acting. Conduct and character are largely determined by the nature of the word we currently use to discuss ourselves and the world around us.

The primary function of language is to facilitate communication. Language consists of words and sentences, signs and symbols. To speak a language is to exercise certain techniques, linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour or (symbols) are woven together into an intricate

whole. So, speaking a language which includes engaging in certain modes of behaviour that exhibits a variety of ability and skill. It is to engage in what Wittgenstein calls forms of life. To speak a language is to behave in certain highly complex ways which require a skill of a very complicated sort and which can be right or wrong, correct or incorrect.

The modes of behaviour are so very important that Wittgenstein compares the using of words to the playing of games. Words are not pictures, but pieces used in various language games, in which it figures as Wittgenstein put it 'an expression has meaning only in the stream of life.' So, if we forget these intimate connections between language and behaviour and try to treat words in isolation from the actual situation in which they are used we end up in riddles and paradoxes.

The debate whether there can be private language or not seems to be resolved only by denying the possibility of such a language because a language means to be learnable and teachable. Learnability and teachability are dependent on external situations. Meaningfulness and communicability is also related to the idea of understandability.

The following may be regarded as some of the crucial features of our language; our ability always to use words and combination of them in such a way as to say things in the language which might never have been said before; our ability to represent the past and the future as well as the present, to make general statements; and, therefore, also to give reasons for or against such statements; to lie, to promise and so on.¹

III

An intriguing feature of human languages is their extraordinary-almost incredible-variety. However, in spite of this variety, in spite of claims made about the logical autonomy of any language, languages do, in my opinion, have a central commonality. This follows from Kant's thesis that conceptual thinking must make use of a set of concepts which are indispensable for any conceptual thinking. And I believe that this thesis is largely correct. Since, all conceptual thinking must be embodied (capable of being embodied) in language, a very important consequence follows from the validity of Kant's thesis. This is that every language if it is a language at all, must necessarily have room for concepts, without the application of which no conceptual thinking would be possible. This means that different languages must have a common core, namely, the core which embodies. What Kant calls the categories.

There is unity in all languages as they share a basic (central) conceptual framework. Apart, however from this schematic core of concepts which all languages share, all other concepts which a language must embody may be to greater or less extent specific to that language. So, language is the door or window through which we can see the kind of thought, views, ideas, beliefs of a particular cultural group.

^ A culture, includes things like the way a people cultivate their land, bury their dead, celebrate marriages, build their houses and so on. And a study of the culture must include a study of all these and more. But these people's language, which of course, includes its literature, is not another of these cultural things that they have. It embodies, as it were, the special 'life' and 'tone' of the entire culture. That is why, mastering another language is not just a matter of mastering its grammatical rules, vocabulary and accent. It is much more importantly a matter of understanding, nuances of gestures, pauses, voice, and subtle differences of action and reactions. In the absence of such an understanding, speaking another language with a mastery over its grammar etc. is speaking it without grasping the 'life' of the language. One's access to another culture, based on what might be called a mere 'mechanical' understanding of its language, its grammar and pronunciation is therefore, bound to be a superficial one. Therefore, any assessment of a culture based on such an understanding of its language, must be fraught with danger, both intellectual and moral. There will be a great danger of assimilating it with one's own and applying to it one's own criteria of evaluation. If the assimilation is wrong, the

evaluation is bound to be wrong. Someone who thinks of polyandry, as practised in some societies as indicating an extraordinary moral depravity in the women of these societies, makes this type of mistake of assimilation and evaluation.² *

IV

I would now like to consider the view of some linguistic anthropologists, primarily that B.L. Whorf who have been concerned with the problem of the relationship between language and culture and state my conclusion by way of comments on these views. Some of the questions asked are as follows. In what respect does language fit into the general conception of cultural systems and in what ways is it distinguished from other components? What role does language play in the overall functioning of culture? In what way do language and culture reflect each other over a span of history? What technique may be used to infer linguistic from non-linguistic behaviour or vice versa either in terms of predicting the future or reconstructing the past. Needless to say I shall not be dealing with answers to all of these questions. Only a few of them will interest me here.

Language is not merely one of several aspects of culture, it makes possible the development, the elaboration, the transmission and (particularly in its written

*See Chapter III Section III.

form) the accumulation of culture as a whole. One can imagine handicrafts being taught by one generation to the next without the use of language, but social, legal, religious, political or community of deaf-mutes (if they were deprived of such speech surrogates as writing) could carry on human social life.

In addition to correspondences between vocabulary and cultural inventory, a much more controversial type of co-relation between language and culture has been proposed. This involves, on one side, whole grammatical systems and sub-systems and on the other side, whole philosophies or ways of life held to be characteristic of a particular culture (though often not brought to the level of conscious formulation). The interest of anthropologists was drawn to such correlation by Edward Sapir who not only recognised a linguistic relativity but also postulated a linguistic determinism operating on culture.

Sapir and his student of culture Benjamin Lee Whorf remarked,

Language is not just an element which interacts with other elements; it is the very forge from which cultures emerge in the forms they do.³

Sapir said that,

Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. The fact of the matter is that the 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached.⁴

Benjamin Lee Whorf, a student of Sapir, continued the exploration of the matter, although with less emphasis on the tyranny of language over culture. His position has become known as the "Whorfian hypothesis" which holds that 'language patterns (and) cultural norms... have grown up together, constantly influencing each other. But in this partnership the nature of the language is the factor that limits free plasticity and rigidifies channels of development in the more autocratic way.' The deterministic role of language is easy to understand when we consider how much of culture is transmitted through the linguistic medium.

Whorf tried to illustrate how differing concepts of matter, time and space were represented in the grammatical structure of Standard Average European (English,

French, German and so on) with certain Red Indian Languages. Whorf argued that language actually determines a speaker's perception of reality and in this way perpetuates cultural differences. To give an example he associated the absence of 'tense' form in the Red Indian language 'Hopi', with an outlook on life that was timeless and historical. He disputed the correlation between language and culture understood in the sense of a constellation of observable practices and institutions. He finds that the Hopi language makes the Hopi think not in terms of space and time but in terms of events, states, intensities. Hopi language has no tenses such as those one finds in the Standard Average European languages. In the Navaho language, one cannot represent motion in general, but must choose among a number of words describing varieties of motion. The Whorf hypothesis may be summed up by saying that languages embody integrated modes of expressing thought and experience. Different language groups embody several distinct "World-views." Facts are functions of languages.

Whorf's belief that the linguistic system (in other words, the grammar) of each language is not merely a reproducing instrument for voicing ideas but rather is itself the 'Shaper of ideas, the programme and guide for

the individual mental activity, for his analysis of impression, for his synthesis of his mental stock in trade. We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages. The categories and types that we isolate from the world of phenomena we do not find there because they stare every observer in the face, on the contrary, the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions, which has to be organised by our minds and this means, largely by the linguistic systems in our minds.

It is evident from these statements, if they are valid that language plays a large, indispensable crucial, role in the totality of culture. Far from being simply a technique of communication, it is itself a way of directing the perceptions of its speaker and it provides for them habitual modes of analyzing experience into significant categories. And to the extent that languages differ markedly from each other, so we should expect to find significant and formidable barriers, take an even greater importance when it is realized that the phenomena of a language are to its own speakers largely of a background character and so are outside the critical consciousness and control of the speakers.

According to Whorf's theory,

No individual is free to describe nature with absolute impartiality but is constrained to certain modes of interpretation even while he thinks himself most free. We are thus introduced to a new principle of relativity, which holds that all observers are not led by the same physical evidence to the same picture of the universe, unless their linguistic backgrounds are similar, or can in some way be calibrated. The linguistic relativity principle means 'that users of markedly different grammars are pointed by their grammar towards different types of observations, and hence are not equivalent as observers but must arrive at somewhat different views of the world.⁵

Experience of nature is segmented in a particular manner by particular linguistic patterns.

We cut up and organize the spread and flow of events as we do largely because, through our mother tongue, we are practised to an agreement to do so, not because nature itself is segmented in exactly that way for all to see. Languages differ not only in how they build their sentences but in how they break down nature to secure the elements to put in those sentences... English terms like "Sky, hill, swamp, persuade us to regard some elusive aspect of nature's endless variety as a distinct thing, almost like a table or chair. Thus English and similar tongues lead us to think of the universe as a collection of rather distinct objects and events corresponding to words. Indeed this is the implicit picture of classical physics and astronomy - that the universe is essentially a collection of detached objects of different sizes.⁶

Whorf states that the concepts of time and matter basic to Western European science are not given in substantially the same form by experience to all men but depend upon the nature of the language or languages through the use of which they have been developed.

Standard Average European objectifies time as if it were a ribbon or scroll marked off in equal spaces. This is incompatible with the Hopi linguistic pattern, which is essentially a historical one. The past for them is always implicit in the present. Whorf notes that a cultural resultant of the Western European view of time is our linguistically conditioned interest in record-keeping, diaries, histories, and the concern with the 'past' generally, as well as our emphasis on devices such as clocks, calendars, and time graphs, for the exact quantification of time.

Whorf believes that the notion that when we talk we are completely free to express any ideas we wish to express is an illusion. He says,

This illusory appearance results from the fact that the obligatory phenomena within the apparently free flow of talk are so completely autocratic that speaker and listener are bound unconsciously as though in the grip of a law of nature.⁷

The phenomena of language are to its own speakers largely of a background character and so are outside the critical consciousness and control of the speaker who is expounding natural logic. Hence, when anyone, as a natural logician, is talking about reason, logic, and the laws of correct thinking, he is apt to be simply marching in step with purely grammatical facts that have somewhat of a background character in his own language or family of languages but are by no means universal in all languages and in no sense common substratum of reason.⁸

Whorf assumes an interaction between cultural norms and linguistic patterns. There are 'connections but not correlations or diagnostic correspondences between cultural norms and linguistic patterns.' (1952a 45). As to which was first historically, he says,

In the main they have grown up together, constantly influencing each other. But in this partnership the nature of the language is the factor that limits free plasticity and rigidifies channels of development in the more autocratic way.⁹

Language 'represents the mass mind' and while it is affected by innovations it is affected 'little and slowly'. It is this rigidity of linguistic patterns that obstructs the development of new world views, especially new scientific theory. Such obstructions can be overcome only, according to Whorf, by developing a new language. He says,

Science is beginning to find that there is something in the cosmos that is not in accord with the concepts we have formed... It is trying to frame a new language by which to adjust to a wider universe.¹⁰

We have discussed Whorf and his hypothesis at some length, primarily because the most famous anthropological approach to the relationship between language and culture is found in his writings and in the later development of his ideas by anthropologists and linguists, as the Whorf hypothesis. Whorf was not alone in hypothesizing a formative role for language in relation to thinking and cultural behaviour.

For example, Franz Boas and his contemporary Dorothy Lee. Dorothy Lee discussed language as the means through which experience is codified in different cultures, including Greek, Wintu of California, and the Trobriand Islands of Malanesia. Her views are quite similar to those of Whorf and Sapir. Whorf's writings achieved their greatest popularity in the 1950's several years after his death. More recently, there have been efforts to test and restate the 'Whorf hypothesis' of the influence of language on behaviour, or in a more systematic and controlled way than did its originators.

Whorf's goal was to identify parallels between the grammatical categories of language and the 'logic' of culture. Assertions of such a relationship can be very persuasive, but they are difficult to prove.

Max Black attacked Whorf's hypothesis in his article 'Some Troubles with Whorfianism'.¹¹ He said that Whorfianism constantly runs the risk of degenerating into blank tautology. If speech behaviour, or some aspects of it, is recognized to be itself part of culture, there can be little interest in claiming that it "reflects" or "determines" culture. One might as well say that a man's facial expression reflects or determines something about his whole bodily posture. Speech behaviour, one is inclined to say, is a part of culture - and there's an end on't. The two terms of the Whorfian relationship must be logically independent if anything of interest is to be in question. Another difficulty is in identifying the cognitive structure (metaphysics, Weltanschauung or something more restricted) with which the favoured grammatical features allegedly connect. For the only 'thoughts' presented will themselves necessarily be expressed in words, and in the Whorfian's own language to boot. Is the meta-language used by the Whorfian itself irretrievably tainted

by preconceived metaphysics? If not, how was it purified? Does language contain the seeds of its own redemption?

The Whorf hypothesis is easier to accept intuitively than to prove in a rigorous way; in particular, no correlations can be traced, between language and world view until specific world views are themselves defined in terms of observable behaviour, Whorf shows that Hopi linguistic structure is compatible with a world view involving a peculiar relation between subjective and objective experience; but he tends to assume, rather than to demonstrate, that the Hopi actually holds such a view of the world. Pending the outcome of extensive, strictly controlled, cross cultural testing of the Whorfian hypothesis, we may limit our acceptance to the following modified formulation. Carroll also examines the Whorf hypothesis and his views are as follows.

In so far as languages differ in the ways they encode objective experience, language users tend to sort out and distinguish experiences differently according to the categories provided by their respective languages. These cognitions will tend to have certain effects on behaviour.¹²

We have seen the comments on Whorf's hypothesis of some scholars. No doubt, Whorf sheds some lights on the

relation between culture and language and there are some points which need modification, correction and addition. Whorf said that we are imprisoned in the language of the culture we belong to in our thinking and ideas. This implies that it is not possible for a different culture which is encompassed in a different language to arrive at the same conclusion in their search for knowledge, truth, and scientific facts. He says that it is an illusion to think that we are free to express our ideas. Of course, our ideas, views and thinking are very much influenced by our background, language or culture to which we belong; but it does seem possible that we can reach a stage when our perceptions and beliefs are not culture or language bound. Besides, Whorf believes that linguistic patterns and culture do influence each other but he gave more authority and importance to language. According to Whorf 'Language represents the mass mind', it is affected little and slowly. And he believes that by overcoming the obstruction of language we can change the ideas of the masses. But, I think that there are some problems in the Whorfian view. While I do believe also that language pattern and culture influence each other, in many cases when the ideas, the world view of a particular community change the language changes too. The evolution of language is the

result of changes in the views of the masses in the community. Language by itself independently will never give us ideas; but the root of all these ideas, even language, resides in a person. Man is a rational animal and he is capable of thinking new things forming new ideas etc. So, if the linguistic pattern really determines our ideas and world view there won't be a change for improvement. But, thanks to the geniuses, the big minds who say 'no' to what their language induces them to think, it is always possible to discover things that are new which are very useful for human beings. If there were no people like these the world's civilization would not reach what it is today.

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CHAPTER - V

CONCLUSION

I would like to conclude this work with some remarks about what I might call the problem of a crisis of identity among the tribal people of the North Eastern Region of our country.

As I have tried to make clear in the chapter entitled "Cultural Identity and Related Problems," questions of value are almost inescapably bound up with the problem of cultural identity. The idea of the loss of identity seems to imply, in some deep sense, the idea of a lapse - a lapse which has perhaps both a moral and a spiritual dimensions. And this is precisely what makes it so appropriate to talk of a crisis here. A crisis, in this connection means not just a situation where one find oneself at some cross-road not knowing which way to go, but more importantly it also means that somehow one cannot entirely escapes responsibilities for the situation in question and that one ought to bring all one's intellectual and moral resources for finding the right solution to the problem.

The problem of the crisis of identity for the tribal people of the North Eastern Region of our country can be said to have its genesis in the following:

I. A gradual and systematic erosion of what might be called the tribal way of life as I tried to characterise in my chapter on 'The Idea of a Tribe'. This erosion has also necessarily meant a corresponding erosion in the frameworks of meanings and symbols in terms of which the tribal conceived and articulated his idea of himself in his relationships to others, to nature and to super-nature. In view of this it is not surprising that the question 'Who am I?' asked by a tribesman today has a special moral and spiritual poignancy.

II. The erosion of the traditional framework has been concomitant with the arrival of rivals and frequently conflicting frameworks, with powerful forces working for their acceptance by the tribesman. Confronted with this multiplicity of frameworks of meanings, the tribal is frequently not able to find this way into a system which gives life and existence a sense of authenticity and depth. The crisis here once again is a moral crisis - it is the crisis of being a position where it is not at all easy to find an answer to the question 'What ought I to be?' which can give one's satisfaction in, as it were, the depth of one's being.

III. What may be called the crisis of modern civilization is also in a way the crisis of identity among tribal people. The crisis of modern civilization is generated, so one might say, by the conflict between, what Erric Fromm calls being and having, and the seeming victory of having over being. Modern civilization, as Gandhi saw so clearly at the beginning of this century, is a civilization devoted to having. And this has meant that man is measured in terms of what he possesses rather than in terms of what he is in the depth of his being. The rapid changes that some of the tribal societies are seeing are invariably changes which have tended to strengthen the forces of 'having' to the detriment of the forces of being of, if you like, 'tribal being'. The tribesman's crisis is, in many ways the crisis of hollowness of being created by the overwhelming power of the forces of having.

I have no solutions to offer here. Perhaps the new religion that many tribals have adopted might provide some answers; perhaps out of the moral and spiritual conflict that one witnesses at present something more abiding and satisfying will eventually emerge. Nonetheless it will be fascinating for a student of philosophy to go into the various dimensions of these questions and, if possible, achieve a clear articulation of them. I leave this task to the next part of my work.

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