

Anthropology is a discipline of modern origin in a sense that History is not. Lévi-Strauss speaks of anthropology as an expression of remorse for those whom history has vanquished. The anchor that demarcates anthropological understanding is constituted in an engagement with frozen time enveloped and buffeted by the movement and turbulence of historical time.

The instructive paradox is that the anthropological engagement, though predicated upon the triumph of historical time, is given to considering meaning and things in themselves. From within the discipline of history that kind of possibility remains foreclosed. To clarify the implications of such a closure, consider the following proposition:

From within the discipline of history, one could present an interesting and at times illuminating account of what the theory and practice of say, religion and painting entail. But however complex and close to complete such an account may be, it cannot consider the meaning and truth of religion or painting shorn of their specific locus.

Meaning in history accrues through context. It can stand forth only in and through its specific web of connections and relationships. The historical mode is resourceless when it comes to considering meaning or a thing in itself. One could ask at this point as to whence meaning begins? True, it is context which gives to meaning body and colour. Without context, life itself would be inconceivable. Even so, could it be said that meaning itself begins from context?

Consider for instance an axiom so dear to historians: *All categories are historical*. And hence meaning itself is also historical. Things mean what they do because they happen to be situated in a particular way. Differently situated, that very thing would mean something very different. The persuasive power of historical reasoning has a touch of finality. It holds true and useful in making sense of the immediate details of living. But the faith historical reasoning engenders in context as the repository of value and significance is somewhat akin to that of an idol worshipper, who comes to believe that the image he worships is God. For the axiom - *All categories are historical* - cannot account for the idea of category

## An Essay on Time

Suresh Sharma

itself. All categories may well be historical. But it is clearly impossible to locate the idea of category itself in history.

Time subsists not just as varied contexts in continual flux, but also as a meta-referent. And the meta-referent survives, albeit suffused and unrecognized, the mediation of even the most possessed of modern contexts. In advanced industrial societies, time seems to dissolve into a series of immediate requirements necessary for modern living. At all levels of modern institutional and personal life, a citizen encounters time as a series of inescapable short-term requirements: budgets, tasks, contracts, work schedules, etc. But however limited and hard-pressed a citizen may be, he is aware that

to fragment and posit the world of work and home, of play and production, in severe opposition to each other. Hence the urge so earnestly pursued in art to invert the human gaze inwards.

The anthropological gaze, though predicated upon the sovereignty of historical time, cannot help being alive to very different kind of referents. But unlike the unbounded realm of artistic imagination, anthropological insight seeks to know the world of human interiority through the rigorously bounded structures of human codes and artifacts. Time as witnessed forty years ago by Evans Pritchard among the Nuer of Sudan is experienced as one continuous flow linked to 'cycles of ecology, lineage and space'.

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short and apparently unconnected durations and requirements refer to something beyond themselves. That reaching out beyond the specific, the closely demarcated, is what sustains value and choice that give meaning to their past and present. It is the kind of referent which inheres in the most confined and severely closed demarcations. But it can never be contained and kept bound within demarcations, however vast and complex they may be. True, the referent is dimly perceived but it is never questioned. It abides as a silent resource against the accumulating burdens of short-term responses. The strange irony is that it also signifies what is seen as desirable and potentially realisable: power, prosperity, rights and rationality for the greater numbers.

Time as livid in the modern context engenders a deep disturbance which modern man is never able to quite master. Time as ever more swift movement is an assurance of what is best. But in speeding-up, time tends inexorably

Therein time signifies an 'inexorable structure', an 'enchanted' continuum in which all of the remote past is relived and experienced in the fullness and immediacy of the 'temporal present'. That was also true of time in pre-invasion America and Australia.

Time in 'Hindu Bali' as rendered by Geertz could be invoked as a proximate referent. The 'recurrent cycles' in Bali as among the Nuer, do not tell what time it is. Rather they serve to rob time of its cumulative and transformative quality. But therein a crucial difference stands forth. Different domains and symbolic structures may not be fully or perfectly integrated. In fact, opposites may exist in a state of unresolved tension.

Ancient China and India, as also medieval Europe, signify quite another kind of referent. Among them there are of course important differences. Time is contextualized and oriented in strikingly distinct ways. But despite all that, time in all of them still signifies an unruptured

continuum. Within it, different domains and cycles may be structured to differently oriented referents. For instance, in ancient China, technology somewhat akin to the modern in its power to control and transform nature could be pursued and cultivated. And yet in sharp contrast to the modern, technology could never become the sovereign reality to which everything else must conform both as fact and as possibility.

The definitive paradox of our time is as to whence lies the source and structure of the deep ineradicable longing for cyclical, holistic time, even as modern linear time seems poised so very close to complete triumph. This longing persists, as it were, deep in the midst of modern existence. For instance, even in the U.S., that vast and most modern artifact, the birth of the republic and the market are re-enacted in rituals of contemporary politics and economy. In this longing is perhaps rooted the almost insane commercial obsession with the originals of works of art. Worse, since this longing is mediated by a sensibility which seeks to put a price on even the priceless, this obsession becomes truly pathological in the way the modern market generates fabulous prices for say the shoe of a Marilyn Monroe, or the dress of a Princess Diana. What could the significance be of the sheer resilience of this longing? Does it raise basic questions concerning the nature of modern cognition and time?

Strictly speaking, the vocation of an anthropologist, does not, indeed cannot, allow for the question: 'what is Time?' The definitive concern simply is as to what humans seek to make of it. It is the kind of self definition which tends to conceal the nagging disturbance that anthropology seeks to obliquely confront, though often without requisite reflection concerning the formative ground in which the discipline is anchored. And that perhaps also explains the sheer naiveté in say the plea of the historian E. P. Thompson for a 'new synthesis of the old and the new' to create an 'imagery based neither upon the seasons, nor upon the market but upon human occasions'. As an expression of the ultimate in modern expectation, Thompson's statement is unexceptionable. But it says nothing at all about the seemingly ineradicable longing for recovering a sense of that timeless human link with life on earth. Worse,

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*Mutinies Now*. Nirad Chaudhuri's piece, 'My Hundredth Year' is yet another exercise in self-indulgence, and an apology - the *raison d'être* for his writings. His *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* had raised hackles on account of its dedication to the 'memory of the British Empire in India.' Chaudhuri thinks that the criticism was unwarranted and born of a basic misconception about his book.

Philip Knightley, who was associated with the Bombay magazine *Imprint* in its early years, writes in 'An Accidental Spy' how in the early sixties he became, unwittingly, a part of the covert operations of the CIA (*Imprint* was a front for them) and was wooed by KGB agents for all the wrong reasons. Jan Morris, in 'Clive's Castle', links Clive's fortunes, his ambitions and his unscrupulous ways, to the then British Mission in India: 'It was an Empire, by and large, without ideology.... For the most part their loftiest motive was Clive's loftiest too - the patriotic motive - and their basest was his too - to get rich quick' (p. 253).

An objective and dispassionate assessment of Arundhati Roy's first novel *The God of Small Things* can be possible only after all the media-generated hype around it subsides, when one will be able to see the work for what it is. The extracts published in the anthology do not reveal much, except for her deft use of language and its spontaneity. The anthology has two poems, one, 'What we lost' by Michael Ondaatje who recreates a charming old world giving way to the inexorable demands of change, and the other is 'Sampati' by Vikram Seth. It is a short, haiku-like poem, but is not as evocative, and the imagery is constrained. The selection, on the whole, makes good reading, though the colonial bias shows. It is a pity no translation from any of the Indian languages is included, though there is a significant *oeuvre* in these, both in literary and non-literary fields. Perhaps the omission is deliberate. And why not, if Macaulay's mission finds a promoter in Salman Rushdie (see his article in *The New Yorker* of 23 and 30 June 1997, which also shows a truncated map of India), who valorizes the English language, implicitly privileging the structures it embodies. The Empire rules the roost.

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Thompson's statement virtually empties the word human of all actual or possible substance.

Consider in this context the great perplexity of the modern situation. While seeking time as the marker of progress upon which all significance is predicated, in certain modern contexts, time that negates linear progression is meticulously nurtured.

To this one could add a related perplexity of another kind. Anthropology seems content to merely outline as to how survival of time that negates linear progression in the West is akin to the much more substantial survivals of that in say, India or Algeria. Further, the way that such survival continues to persist in non-Western societies may have something to teach the modern West. For some strange reason such survivals are often designated as 'indigenous'. One respects the implicit disposition of sympathy towards, to use that awkward and culturally inane expression, the 'Third World'. But that by itself cannot furnish firm philosophical or even anthropological basis for enlarging the ambit of such survivals in modern life.

The true significance of the persistence of a sense of time that negates linear progression is perhaps to be sought precisely in realms that modern theory and life dare not entirely negate. Painting and poetry are artifacts as different in appearance as any two human artifacts perhaps can be. But they both affirm the logic and sheer power of form. A poem signifies, in the words of Octavio Paz, 'human utterance frozen in time'. Poetry, like painting is a human happening but it is a happening that could never have a pre-history. Their power to speak and possess far beyond the bounded contexts of their origins stems from the unalterable freezing of a particular sequence of words and sounds in a poem, of lines and colours in a painting that invokes that ineffable sense of an eternal presence. It is that which imparts to the artistic form a resilience beyond the reach and might of institutions and structures of entrenched power.

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### The Many Meanings of Freedom

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attitudes are incapable of fighting the new materialism called communalism where religion becomes not the guide to the lone soul in the dark but a ploy in the hands of day-to-day power politics, a way not to salvation but to sabotage of the most destructive and inhuman kind.

One can fight this evil only from the higher spiritual ground where all created beings are able to hear one another's call, one another's silence, and share a platform of equality. I am referring to the other discourse where the tree gets involved with the earth, the other tongue in which water speaks to the wind, the wind to air, the air to the sky, the flower to the bee, the beast to the woods and man to all of them. My more recent poems, not only the ones on saint poets like Namdev, Kabir, Meera, Tukaram, Basava, Akka Mahadevi and Andal, but even the ones on my language and region and my travels inside and outside, emerge from the borders of these two languages: the one that bargains with the visible and the one that converses with the invisible. Perhaps I still have a long way to go to realize that alter-language of the spirit where freedom breaks free of its bondage to itself.

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### Mapping Postcolonialism

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attention and appropriation within its parameters.

However, despite so many disagreements, a definite sense of the postcolonial does emerge out of this collection, and will certainly set the discerning reader thinking about his/her individual relation to the postcolonial. In particular, this book is a scholars' delight: it is a timely publication, has no truncated essays and is equipped with a useful bibliography. However, after going through so many deliberations on subject positions and the sites and politics of scholarly production, one misses the usual brief note on contributors. Considering the price of the book, the quality of the print is somewhat disappointing.

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### The Many Worlds of Indian History

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NCERT books: combined with constant attention to teaching methods, they do seem geared towards much more classroom discussion and creative assimilation.[...]

What is needed is not just more effective channels of communication through which high academic wisdom can be disseminated downwards, but efforts to democratize also the production of historical knowledge, to work towards a new kind of historical culture. There is a need to pioneer ways of developing interaction among researchers, teachers, and activists drawn from, or working among, diverse social strata. On a long-term scale, collaborative research works and textbooks could emerge, enriched by multiple social and pedagogical experiences, and based on a mutual reformulation of perspectives.[...] Surely we can agree that the many worlds of Indian history must not be allowed to fly totally apart, as the social base of producers and intended audiences of front-ranking South Asian scholarship narrows, even while reaching out towards global horizons.

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### The Place of Tradition

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it is generally true that every Indian sociologist begins as if there has been no work done by Indians before, this is particularly true of those who set out to take the Indian tradition as their point of departure. [...]

There is a large and yawning gap in time and context between the tradition that is invoked and the purpose for which, it is invoked, rendering largely fictitious that sense of filiation which is an essential part of tradition as an active principle. It is obvious that the appeal to tradition serves a rhetorical purpose; but it is doubtful that it contributes anything of value to the method of sociological enquiry.

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