INTRODUCTION

I

The word *culture* is used both conceptually, *i.e.*, generally, and historically, *i.e.*, particularly. Conceptually speaking, culture is due to human activities, ideas and ideals and their more or less durable expressions. Belief, knowledge, art and crafts, customs and morals are all constituents of culture. Human abilities and dispositions are also to be included within culture. Although some social thinkers of the naturalist persuasion have tried to discuss culture in a positivist or value-neutral manner, we think that they have not been quite successful in this enterprise. It is difficult to deny that artistic and moral considerations deeply orient human ideas and actions. Many of us tend to forget that value consciousness among humans is *more or less* universal and even "savages" and "tribals" have their arts, morals, sense of beauty and sense of justice. The more one can leave behind the pejorative sense often precritically attributed to such words as *savage* and *tribe*, the easier it becomes for one to understand the peoples who do not belong to one's own culture. Many of us are so enclosed within our own narrow cultural "tribalism" that we often fail to appreciate the normative traits or excellence of *other* cultures.

It is not surprising that many people of the industrially developed countries think that the peoples of the underdeveloped or developing countries are culturally inferior to them. They also believe that their cultures are superior to those of their "cultural others". The hidden assumption is that the cultures of countries like USA, Canada, UK, France, Germany, Italy and Japan, essentially based on modern science and technology, are to be rated higher than those of others. Except Japan, all these countries are Euro-American and the main basis of including Japan in this group (G-7) is her industrial development, not chrysanthemum, *i.e.*, aesthetic disposition, or sword, *i.e.*, valour.

It is interesting to recall that this way of rating and ranking different cultures is prereflectively recognized not only by the peoples of the developed countries but also, in many cases, following their capitalist paradigm, by those of developing countries. Such a mode of evaluation of culture may be and often is attributed to political and
cultural hegemony of the developed countries. Control over patents, copyrights and media, particularly the electronic ones, it has been plausibly argued, enables the developed countries to make others believe that they, because of their “achievements” in the fields of science, technology and industry, are models for others to emulate. What about the exploitation of the poor in the colonies and also in the homeland since the Industrial Revolution? What about the industries which survive on wars or threats of war, hot or cold, global or local, nuclear or conventional? Must we praise all types of industry and industrialization?

Why should industrial, scientific and technological achievements be accorded very high value or weightage in rating a culture? The techno-economic mode of understanding, explaining and even evaluating a culture, as we know, is of relatively recent origin. But why should not the mode of production and distribution be taken in a purely descriptive way? For example, why should a food-producing tribe be regarded superior to a food-gathering tribe? To take another example, why an industrial society should be taken as more developed than a feudal society? That production and accumulation of wealth have a positive aspect is obvious and undeniable. All things being equal, the wealthy society is found to be better equipped than the not-so-wealthy society to take care of the problems of poverty and ill-health of its people. At the same time some thinkers like Thoreau, Tolstoy and Gandhi, on the one hand, and Marx, Lenin and Mao-Zedong, on the other, have pointed out in different ways how higher production of wealth engineered by “modern” technology give rise to various negative characteristics like pauperization, polarization, conflict and alienation in industrial society. What is more, it has been pointed out, that the higher production and accumulation without social intervention cannot satisfactorily remove the negative characteristics of development and ensure distributive justice. But apex intervention, once allowed, is likely to increase its frequency and expand its scope. And that invariably encroaches upon individual liberty and tends to promote the cult of state. Given the accent on industrial production, national prosperity and personal/familial enrichment, it is not easy to strike and maintain the right type of balance between individual liberty and the sphere of state. Whose liberty is to be curbed and to benefit whom? Who will do it and on what authority?

The very concept of development is now under critical scrutiny. Must we take development only in its economic aspect? How can we
neglect the moral, aesthetic, ecological and other aspects which are often found to be relatively neglected in the economically developed societies? Moreover fragmentation and impersonalization of human relationship impart a hardly veiled negative character to the industrial society. Often this criticism of the industrial culture is sought to be met by a notion of post-industrial society and its culture. It is argued that the lack of individualism, i.e., the lack of distinct identity of individual human beings, often attributed to the mass society due to the industrial mode of production and marketing, is soon going to be a matter of the past. But the critic of post-industrial culture points out that social fragmentation and human atomization, largely due to industrialization, are going to be almost unpreventable unless the very model of large-scale and heavy industry is abandoned; and this unmistakably proves the weakness of the moral basis of industrialization which can hardly be read as vindication of normative individualism.

Industry is empowered by technology. And technology is based upon some sort of scientific perception, clear or obscure. There is a widespread view that technology, i.e., how to tackle a problem or satisfy a need, precedes science. The controversy over the issue “the primacy of science versus the primacy of technology” however seems to be incorrect. It is only those who are culturally blind can forget that without technology science can neither come into being nor be tested. They also are uncritical who fail to see that without science, a gestalt preview of our needs/problems, techniques or technology, cannot be appropriately decided. Man is aware not only of what he needs but also of how to have it. Science and technology form a virtuous and enlarging circle.

Every culture has its own way of testing its technology for wealth production and problem solution, whatever that problem may be, poverty, disease or natural calamities like drought, flood and earthquake. Both technology and science, rightly understood, are rooted in the life-world. The main reason why most of us, who can read and write, take science and technology at an abstract or theoretical level is that our consciousness is primarily literacy-based. When we closely study the orality-based cultures, we realize the intimate relation between the life-world, on the one hand, and science and technology, on the other. As many of us live in big cities, encircled by big industrial units, constantly watch them on TV screen and read about them in books, journals and newspapers, we unconsciously entertain the view that industry is necessarily large-scale in its character.
But reflection shows that this is not the case everywhere. Industry may be small-scale or even household in nature. Without being romantic or utopian one may be the defender of the thesis of “The Small is Beautiful”. After all the scale of a particular industry is need-and resource-based. Within one and the same culture we come across industrial units of different sizes, small, medium and large, and different types of technology defined in terms of its varying sophistication, automatic or semi-automatic character, capital-intensiveness or labour-intensiveness. The hidden presuppositions of technology assessment/choice are basically human, involving human needs and values.

When attempts are made to define technology without relating it to human needs and resources, i.e., without realizing that technology itself is an important component of human culture, an untenable and pernicious dichotomy appears between technological culture and moral culture. The moral dimension of human existence, man’s enterprise to enlarge himself and to realize what is there in him as promise or potentiality encompasses within its frame both the technical and the praxical, both the natural and the cultural. The division often drawn between agriculture and industry, for example, though conceptually understandable, is practically unsustainable. This truth becomes transparent when we recall the research inputs of the agricultural scientists, the machineries used for sowing and harvesting, the chemicals used for fertilization and crop protection, and the like. The point is driven home when we come across such expressions as “food-processing industries”.

More positively speaking, the intimate relation between nature and culture, man and machine, becomes increasingly clear when we, in our reflective moments, become aware that we, humans, are simultaneously productive as well as consumable resource. We are producer of goods and their needs, consumer of what we need and produce, and also, what is often forgotten, we, as resource, as manual and intellectual labourer, are used, abused, utilized, rewarded and exploited. In brief, nature-culture and man-machine relations are neither unilateral nor monotonic. They are dialectical, many-sided and cybernetic. If these formulations of culture-specific human beings are true, and we think they are, then two points become undeniable. First, there are some general truths which pervade all cultural configurations, contemporary as well as historical. Cultural otherness, at least in a qualified sense, is not only diachronic but also synchronic. Therefore it comes out of the studies of the anthropologist and also of the
historian. Secondly, the general or structural features of widely separated cultures, separated by space and time, have their distinct personality or identity traits.

These two points provide the main justification of undertaking the project of Cultural Otherness. The question may be raised, at this stage, about the rationale of including the “Beyond” within the scope of this project. As pointed out earlier, both cultural similarity and distinctness are parts of one and the same social reality, the reality that is complementarily studied in history, archaeology, philology, anthropology and other kindred disciplines.

Unfortunately, the point often neglected in these studies is the ontology of human nature. Human nature, rightly understood, is neither a transcendental and static essence nor is it a once-for-all-given and exhaustible resource. It has in it elements of transcendence or inexhaustibility, an intimation and invitation of the beyond. But to understand this one need not be a speculative metaphysician. Our life-worlds, plans, dreams and practices unmistakably throw up and bring forth our endless and boundless potentiality and freedom of creativity of what it entails, conjoined transformation of “the inner” and “the outer”.

The controversy between the pattern theory of culture, traceable to Kroeber, Ruth Benedict and Kluckhohn, and the structural-functional theory of culture, associated with the names of Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown and Evans-Pritchard, seems to rest largely on the unduly dramatized distinction drawn between the self and the other. According to the former, culture consists of patterns, articulate and inarticulate, and forms of actions, acquired and transmitted by symbols and expressed in artifacts and mentifacts, concepts and values. Patterns of culture are both products and determinants of action. In other words, conditioned by culture, humans author culture. But it may be mentioned here that all spheres of life are not equally susceptible to patterning. For example, in the forms of political institution, technology, management and business organization the patterns are easily discernible. Perceptual or functional definiteness and continuity, existential distinctness and durability of the patterns make their identification and representation easily possible. But the same cannot be said of the patterns found in customs of dress, diet, salutation, birth, death and marriage rituals, and works of fine arts. This is not to deny the uniformity observed in the dresses, for example, of the armed forces, persons belonging to different religious orders, and
the behaviour of some groups of people conforming to stipulated norms. Patterns, like family resemblance, are defined simultaneously by affinity and difference, and their extension. Some patterns are systemic or holistic and durable, some others sub-systemic or local and transient.

Following this analysis it is possible to show that individuals, the architects of history, express themselves in different ways in and through distinct cultural forms. All formations cognitive and emotive, say Cassirer and Susanne Langer, are symbolic. When the individuals are called upon to deal with the law-governed natural events and processes, or the "hardened" societal facts, their ideas and behaviour weave out clearer patterns than, for instance, when they deal with other individuals in fluid situations and are quite free in their decision-making and decision-changing. Ultimately, it is the ineliminable human freedom, exercised or not, which is symbolically expressed in and through relatively durable societal facts and changing moods of actors and actresses, styles of art and types of fashion.

In spite of their causal subjugation or probabilistic configuration, natural objects may be transformed into and viewed as cultural objects. This transformation may be brought about not only by the artist but also by the scientist and the technologist who, gifted with imagination, are engaged in seeking, discovering and showing multiple forms of symmetry and harmony. Cultural patterns are often, not always, found to have their correlates in the personality traits of the individuals belonging to the concerned culture. Cultural rootedness and ontological freedom are the basic aspects of all human beings. While the latter is symbolic of the inexhaustible character of human creativity, the former is indicative of the facts and factors which account for and determine the processes and forms of acculturation. The two are deeply interlinked.

Human freedom is not an idle or vacuous competence; essentially expressive in character, it is articulated in different forms of cultural objects. Cultural objects, without ceasing to be a part of causal configuration and natural in a sense, "natural" to the relatively uninitiated or unintelligent, are unfailingly symbolic, idealized representative or construct in import. The drift of culture, its ups and downs, are at times primarily internal, i.e., orthogenetic, and at times primarily external, i.e., heterogenetic. Generally speaking, cultural drift is found to be of mixed character. This implies, among other things, that the self of every culture, its personality or identity, is more or less open
to and influenced by other cultures, their personalities or identities.
Individuals and groups of one culture are obliged to interact with
those of other cultures. This interaction may be cooperative or com­
petitive, peaceful or belligerent, interrupted or continuous, depend­
ing upon time, environment and motivating factors. In our age of
information explosion, intensive communication and mass travel, time
“shrinks”, and both motivating factors and environment are manipu­
lable from without by others. Drift and patterns of culture therefore
often appear to be non-linear or fuzzy.

We have already referred to the exaggerated difference between
the pattern theory of culture and the structural theory of culture.
Perhaps it will be in order, first, to present the considerations why
this exaggeration, blind to the points of similarity between the struc­
turalist views and the patternist views, is indefensible and, then, to
make use of the comprehensive and composite patternist-structuralist
theory to understand the basic issues of cultural otherness from an
Indian point of view.

II

Social structure is said to be a network of relations between different
groups, classes and roles, which forms a functional unity. Moral,
legal, political, economic, religious, educational and linguistic phe­
nomena hang together and are to be understood in their mutually
supportive relation, not in isolation or abstraction. Development of
social structure, like that of a biological organism, has to be grasped
historically in the context of its growth, growth from simple organi­
zation and functions to increasingly complex organization and func­
tions. Initially the structuralists like Radcliffe-Brown focussed their
attention on stable, i.e., a-historical, conflict-free, nonliterate, i.e., orality­
based, and isolated tribes. It may be recalled here that the subjects
of Radcliffe-Brown’s early studies were Australian tribes and Andaman
Islanders (of India). Later on when his followers started studying
complex, modern, large, urban and literacy-based social systems it
was realized that the assumptions of stability, orality and isolability
cannot be universalized. Absolute isolation, like the physicist’s fric­
tionless (perpetual motion) machine, is an abstraction or idealization
not to be found in the real world. The anthropologist or for that
reason any social scientist has to admit that individuals of all “real”
societies have their other(s) and with whom they are obliged to enter into some sort of relations, and therefore, cannot be studied as “primitive isolates”. Social structure or, to use Radcliffe-Brown’s favourite expression, social physiology cannot be understood without a concept of culture. Structure, like culture, is undoubtedly an idealization, but at the same time, it has to be admitted that both are rooted in a network of empirically ascertainable social relations, roles and values, which “link together certain human beings”. Patterns are the ways how some definite human beings and groups act and interact between themselves and orient their behaviour to other beyond their culture or country according to certain received norms. What bind individuals together are mutual interests and needs, perceived threats and recognized values. Both patterns and social structure are expressive, although in some more or less abstract ways, of these factors.

In order to bring out clearly the similarity or parallelism between what is called structure and what is called pattern it may be pointed out that neither is purely observational or concrete and that both admit of grades or levels. That is, structure has its superstructure and often nests substructures within it, more stable or less stable, and patterns may be basic or non-basic, macro or micro, more durable or less durable. Another way of clarifying the relation between the two approaches is to highlight the point that the structuralist has his own way of explaining cultural patterns and the patternist, in turn, also knows how to explain social structure in terms of his own theory.

The issue may be illustrated thus. The patternist thinks that a kinship system is a sort of independent semantic system, a type of cultural pattern based on a limited number of socially recognized categories of relations defined in terms of generation difference, lineal and collateral difference, sex of relative, difference between relation by marriage and by blood, etc. To the structuralist, a kinship system is not like an independent semantic system, and kin terms and social institutions are closely related and interdependent parts of social structure. While the former views structure under cultural pattern, the latter sees culture under or as a component of structural system. The difference is a matter of primacy or priority. The social structures or the cultural patterns of villages, towns, cities, countries, civilizations, and also of economic classes, occupational groups, castes, and religious sects may be analyzed in terms of how, i.e., by what process, they become what they are.

Generally speaking, neither the structuralist nor the patternist pays
much attention to interpersonal and intergenerational contacts and interactions leading to formation and transformation of different patterns and cultures. It was left to some later anthropologists like Robert Redfield and Raymond Firth to emphasize the fact that without institutionalized social relations the transmission of cultural tradition is not possible. Social organization needs to be distinguished from social structure. The former is concrete and denotes the social structure of a particular tradition. In different traditions the arrangements of roles and statuses of such groups as castes, religious leaders, teachers and students are found to be significantly different. At least in some cases these differences undergo change from age to age, from generation to generation. It has been rightly pointed out by Redfield that every civilization has both a social structure and a cultural structure. The specific systems of social relations like marriage, business, political and judicial institutions are dynamic, exhibit some or other process of cultural transmission.

In India, for example, the forms of marriage and the roles of spouses of today are significantly different from what these were in the yester-years. The modes and scales of trade and industry have undergone notable, if not fundamental, change. The political administration of free India, to take another example, is substantially different from what it was in the era of imperial rule. The significance of the transition from Raj (imperial rule) to Swaraj (self-rule) is wide-ranging and far reaching, both structurally and functionally. The roles of different professional groups and cultural specialists, of political culture, of business culture, of artistic culture, etc. are changing fast, introducing new elements and subtracting old elements from the identity of Indian civilization.

This historical way of understanding and analyzing the social process of a particular civilization with many social groups and communities in it substantially takes away the supposed dualism between the cultural approach and the structural approach. It is true that the composite approach referred to before has its distinct normative underpinning and individualist orientation. But this can hardly be regarded as unjustifiable or criticizable. For, after all, without being reductionist we find that no corporate group or societal fact is a purely theoretical construct. Underlying it are concrete human beings of flesh and blood. In order to avoid individualistic reductionism the only advisable point to be remembered is that these concrete human beings are not isolated atoms and unaffiliated to, or uninfluenced by,
It may be recalled here that the normative underpinning and individualist orientation of culture and social structure are not at all new. These have been highlighted by anthropologists like E.B. Tylor and creative writers like Mathew Arnold in the last century and poets and cultural critics like T.S. Eliot and Tagore of this century. Without healthy normative elements in culture, it has been rightly pointed out, we are doomed to some form of anarchy or anomie, normlessness. Social structure can neither be formed nor transformed without normative motivation and conduct. We try to leave behind our unlived or dead tradition and recreate what is living and abiding in it; we are engaged in restructuring our social structure; and we are trying to change our civilization in the light of new needs and in search of new values. This search is partly due to our own free and internal impulses and partly due to contacts with alien social forces and cultures. This process of acculturation encourages abandonment of some unlived and outdated norms and acquisition of new norms. It is a historical way of renewing our own cultural heritage and renewing it in the light of critical understanding of our new problems, needs and values.

Our emphasis on such concepts as history, development and change are intended to minimize or, if possible, eliminate a blemish common to patternism and structuralism. Neither the patternist nor the structuralist nor even the defender of the composite theory of structuralism-patternism is adequately aware of the significance of individualism-linked history in understanding social phenomena. It is true that the structuralist, the patternist and their followers occasionally refer to the role of history in the career of culture and social structure. But this does not prove adequate to bring out the full humanistic significance of culture and social structure. Unduly afraid of the possible criticism of their commitment to reductionist individualism, they somehow or other consistently underplay the role of human values and creativity.

III

Even the neo-structuralists like Levi-Strauss seem to have failed to be fair to historical development of distinct social structures and
patterns. In their anxious search for cultural universals, common structural features of all cultures, they tend to lose sight of their distinct identity. The well-known controversy between Sartre and Levi-Strauss has brought out the point very clearly. Sartre is of the view that social structures, though clearly formulable in terms of binary relations, are essentially historical products or concrete “totalities” based on human praxis. These totalities, because of the workings of dialectical reason underlying human consciousness, get detotalised and are again retotalised maintaining a continuity in the course of history. Sartre critically observes that Levi-Strauss’s accent on analytical reason and binary relation, borrowed from structural linguistics, prevents him from seeing the dialectical historical lineage of social structures.

This criticism is rejected by Levi-Strauss who claims that social structures, as conceived by him, are doubly historical, both in their process of formation and in their test through ethnographic application. Neither cultural universals nor structural universals are to be taken as ahistorical simply because of their abstract and formal representations. Taking his criticism to Sartre’s own arena, Levi-Strauss claims to have shown that the former’s criticism of Straussian structuralism rests on four misconstrued pairs of contrasting concepts, viz., (i) self and other, (ii) civilized and primitive, (iii) dialectical reason and analytical reason and (iv) history and anthropology.

Sartre’s ontological individualism and historism are viewed by Levi-Strauss as a modern extension of the Cartesian dualism between (self) consciousness and matter (material other). Sartre is criticized for his alleged attempt to present social history in the model of self’s (internal) history without duly recognizing the effects of the material other on it. What Descartes did to liberate physics from self’s (subjective) fancies, i.e., to vindicate scientific objectivity against bodily, i.e., causal affections, Sartre tries to re-do it from the other end, keeping self-based history free from other’s influences. Singularity of one society, like self’s individuality, can hardly be assimilated under, or even rightly viewed in the analogy of, another society. The Sartrean image of social history, alleges Levi-Strauss, makes cultural generalization impossible and subverts the very project of discovering cultural universals. If self in the name of freedom remains enclosed, how other(s) can ever be truly disclosed to it?

The neo-structuralist seems to have failed to understand Sartre. While the Cartesian time, a mode of thought (consciousness), is itself separative or juxtapositional and passively derives its unity from
material content, the Sartrean time, essentially active and unitive, confers durational self-identity upon things, simultaneously separates the self from its being-in-the-world and reunites it through praxis with the latter as its other. Situated amidst needs, the self gets more and more involved in group-praxis and transcends its own narrow confines. The poverty-stricken human beings in particular, driven by scarcity, tend to enlarge the scope of their group-praxis and intensify it increasingly. The display of affluence and the consumption patterns of the rich societies in the capitalist world multiply the needs of the exploited peoples of the erstwhile colonies and make them more and more conscious of their scarcity. Richness, exploitation and scarcity perform two seemingly contradictory tasks, uniting the separate societies and separating the united ones. Strictly speaking, no unity—individual or group—can be absolutely unitive. Freedom-linked tension or conflict informs every unity, feeding its praxis in search of satisfaction of its perceived needs. While the neo-structuralist is basically interested in explaining and formulating this almost universal phenomenon, Sartre’s main aim seems to lie in articulating and enlarging the scope of freedom by the projects rooted in freedom itself.

The attempts to draw the line of distinction between the civilized and the primitive in terms of the scope and limits of freedom are well known both in the Indian tradition and the Western tradition. All purusarthas (human ends),—dharma (ethico-religious), artha (politico-economic), kama (somatic-hedonic) and moksa (liberation/liberty/freedom) are often viewed in the Indian tradition as a spectrum of values culminating in the last named value or end, i.e., freedom. Some Indian thinkers speak only of the first three values or ends (trivarga) and leave it implied that the realization of these leads one automatically to the realization of freedom as one’s summum bonum. The so-called European view that freedom is teleological unfoldment or gradual disclosure of God in the World is not peculiarly European. Similar views are available in various other cultures. The freedom-disclosive theme has also been formulated in causal-evolutionary, not necessarily providential, terms.

During the last two hundred years in Europe, as we find, Hegel’s providential account of freedom and Marx’s secular and techno-economic account of the same have proved very influential. What is common to these two accounts is their reliance on dialectical method and reason. Dialectical method is marked by twin tensions of separation/differentiation and unification/integration at all levels.
tical reason is said to be the "living logic of action". Another common feature of the Hegelian view and the Marxist view is historicism, i.e., the process of history in all cultural configurations is claimed to exhibit certain definite and necessary rhythms. The followers of Hegel and Marx have been trying to relate the primitive society and the civilized society in terms of this rhythmic and progressive laws of history. Critics like Karl Popper and Isaiah Berlin have forcefully argued that these so-called laws are only patterns, largely due to theory-construction, and existential, not universal, in scope.

It is not difficult to represent different cultural configurations of the world either synchronically, i.e., in their structural diversity, or diachronically, i.e., in their temporal sequence. When these two types of representations, structural and temporal, are brought together, some problems arise. Are these social structures, pastoral, feudal and capitalist, for example, purely descriptive or do they inter se have a normative and ratabe character? Are the primitive societies, simply because they appear before the modern ones in time sequence, to be regarded as inferior or simple, innocent and superior? The civilized/primitive distinction, like the value/fact distinction, is systematically ambiguous. This distinction, under certain description, is valid but not invariably. A civilized society, viewed under certain aspects, may be said to be brutal and barbarous. Because of its supposed simplicity and hospitality, primitive society may be deemed to be excellent. A Rousseauite, for example, finds a "natural society" more admirable than a "cultural society". A Nazi Germany or a polluting country, in spite of its high industrialization, "civilization" and technological achievement, is likely to be widely condemned. The grounds of condemnation and appreciation are, on analysis, often found to be culture-specific or language-specific.

Every person's ways of classifying the objects of nature and culture, of what is primitive and what is modern, are in a very important sense linguistically grounded. It is not surprising that Levi-Strauss, following the cues of Peirce and Cassirer, is in favour of viewing anthropology as a branch of semiology, science of signs. What a sign will or can signify, depends much upon the linguistic/cultural affiliation of the sign, symbol or code. Totem, taboo, kin, calendar, month, year, era, longitude, latitude, etc., for example, are all signs or codes. What they signify or encode are culture-relative. Whether a particular group of signs is to be treated as myth-logic or science-logic depends upon who, when and in what context are using the concerned signs,
expressions. Levi-Strauss does not find any natural inferiority/superiority relation between a steel axe and a stone axe, between the primitive and the civilized. Obviously this approach to different cultures is in marked distinction from the positivistic orientation of such anthropologists as Tylor, Frazer and Levi-Bruhl who speak of the prelogical and pre-scientific mentality of the primitive peoples.

But does this Straussian way of looking at different cultures, suspending judgment on them, mean a strong form of cultural relativism? NO is Levi-Strauss's own answer. He thinks his version of structuralism is a natural recognition of cultural diversity (of human societies). What unite them, undoing the supposed relativistic misgivings, are certain “nature-transforming, unchanged and unchanging powers” lodged in the very structure of the human mind. The cultural and linguistic relativity and contextuality do not and cannot affect or influence the natural unity of the humankind, and the natural unity of human mind. And in that unity are rooted cultural universals and linguistic/symbolic/coded universals. The fact that these codes can be decoded in, or applied to, such widely different cultural objects like hand tools and machine tools, kinship systems and languages, shows that, in spite of their individuation in (geographical) space and (historical) time, human cultures have a natural but concealed unity of their own.

Obviously this analytical account of cultural unity and amidst diversity is not acceptable to the dialectically disposed pro-historical writers like Sartre. The structuralist supposition of unchanged and unchanging powers of the human mind seems to be a pure construct of analytical reason. All human powers, all social structures, are believed to be dialectically constituted and reconstituted by praxis, need-induced group activities. The structuralist, much in the fashion of the scientific positivist from whom he differs in very many ways, uses the latter's paradigm of analytical reason. Reason in its analytical stage is used for definition, classification, subsumption, differentiation, etc. But at the next or a higher stage human reason works as an integrative, or totalising, capacity. Man's mind cannot understand nature in its “raw” form. For the purpose the objects of nature need to be “cooked” in terms of prior definition, classification, encoding, etc. Thereafter the cooked nature, rather than the precooked one, is totalized or meaningfully integrated, by the human mind and is made a part of living culture. It is impossible today (at present) for the unaided analytical reason to understand culture or even nature.
as it was cognitively available to the people of yesterday (past). In other words, in the name of structuralization the defender of analytical reason unwittingly destroys or “kills” the actual findings of nature, i.e., science, and those of culture, i.e., anthropology, of yesterday.

It is undoubtedly true that in the modern world, or in what we call the modern world, different countries and cultures do come in contact with one another, i.e., interact. But this fact, rather this claim, can not be universalized. Every culture has its own identity. Only the neighbouring cultures and the historically proximate ones can be said to be interactive. Without straining the meaning of such expressions as “international relation” and “global interaction” it is difficult to show causal or quasi-causal connection between, say, Europe and USA, on the one hand, and Asian countries, on the other. To make their relation intelligible we are required to fall back upon some cultural, apparently non-causal, factors like political imperialism or market forces. It is to be noted here that both imperialism and market economy have hegemonistic elements built in them. Historically speaking, it is not at all surprising that Britain, for example, has the most intimate relation, besides its European neighbours, with the former colonies in Asia, Africa and North America. The same can be said of France and Holland. Of all the far-flung countries in the world they are closest to their own former colonies. For example, the dominant British presence in South Asia, the dominant French presence in Indo-China and the similar Dutch presence in Indonesia show that the selective character of interaction between distant countries is basically historical, linguistic and cultural, a superstructural result of past politico-economic relations. In spite of the antagonistic past of their historical relations, culturally speaking, they continue to remain close. To illustrate the point: the average educated Indian knows more of British history and culture than those of its next-door Central Asian neighbours. Among other things, this cultural integration, intimate relation of one country with another, is not mainly based on geographical proximity. Rather it depends upon co-sharability of certain myths, events, processes and their memories. Totalization or globalization is bound to be selective and interest-relative. To understand the nature and workings of the globalizing ties between different cultures we need the resources both of analytical reason, for “cooking” or interpreting the “raw”, what is uninterpreted, and those of dialectical reason for integrating, comparing, and generalizing the results yielded by analytical reason.
All the above considerations make it clear that the supposed antithetical relation between self and other, civilized and primitive, dialectical reason and analytical reason, and history and anthropology is untenable. For every “self” has its “other”. Every “other” presupposes some or other “self”. Every “civilized” society has its “primitive” aspects; and every “primitive” society has its “civilized” aspects. “Analytical” reason is marked by its “dialectical” moments; and “dialectical” reason performs some “analytical” functions. Rightly understood, these “paired” concepts are really and functionally complementary and show one main point: anthropology is enfolded history and history is unfolded anthropology.

IV

If our line of approach to anthropology, study of culture, and history, reconstruction of human past from a particular point of view, are correct, then structuralization, although to be recognized to a certain extent, must be viewed under the aspect of the primacy of history. Even structure itself is found to have its own history. Language, which is said to be structure of structures and readily lends itself to structural analysis and generalization, is also found to be changing. Not only the meanings of words but also the ways of conjoining, uttering and using them undergo change. Whether historical changes of cultural objects, including language, are rupturous, radical or incommensurable, is a matter of interesting controversy between the structuralists like Levi-Strauss and deconstructionists like Derrida. The deconstructionist defends acentricity and attacks the theses of knowledge without subject, art without artist, and the like. He discounts the claim of the structuralist that music and myth, for example, are shadowy, i.e., promised, or possibility of actualization but not concrete or historical actualization. If cultural objects are left shadowy in this essentialist manner, then signs and symbols could be claimed to be genuinely meaningful even after the objects they are supposed to signify or symbolize do not turn out to be existential or actual. Respect for structurality, or supposed reality of shadows, Derrida feels, leads to negation or “neutralization of time and history”.

How structures come into existence? How do they disappear? If their appearance and/or disappearance are found to be rupturous and without origin or end, then, by implication, reality of time and
history are never established. And in that case origin, growth, decline and destruction of all sorts of structures remain enigmatic in the structuralist scheme of cultural studies. Even more enigmatic prove the fundamental concepts of chance and discontinuity, play and contingency. If cultural objects can be deemed to be real, present only by proxy, i.e., without being available to sense perception, then human life is deprived of the significance of what is called play, its playful elements. Without the elements of play or contingency in it, social life becomes monotonous and the process of history mechanically anticipatable. Polytonous and unpredictable characters of society and history are due to play or human freedom. By his emphasis on this point the deconstructionist reminds one of Sartre’s ontological individualism. Play is always play of absence and presence, a sort of very complex dialectical interplay between the individual praxis and the group praxis. If the origin of structurable cultural objects is not available or, plainly speaking, absent, then what remains of a structure can hardly be affirmed. In the structuralist scheme of things affirmation is possible without traceable origin or end, and negation is admissible even in the absence of perceptual justification. In the absence of the difference between presence and absence how to determine what is shadowy and what is concrete? This question deeply puzzles the deconstructionist because he always emphasizes the play element, the element of contingency, in our life, individual and social. In this play, he finds, the living space of freedom, freedom of humanism.

Obviously, deconstructionism is a reaction against structuralism, marked by radical relativism, incommensurabilism and uncertainty of the human life. The deconstructionist is opposed to any fixed and permanent difference between received juxtapositional words and expressions. Also he seems to be opposed to the very idea of accepting any word, any context, any culture, as specially privileged. If any name cannot mean “properly” what is intended to be named by it, the very expression “proper name” loses its proclaimed semantic pre-eminence. In that case many time-honoured philosophical views like realism, correspondence theory of truth, true representation are sure to miss their target. What is more, even the very prevalent ideas about “theory”, “context”, claimed difference between “analytic” and “dialectical”, “nature” and “culture”, “literature” and “philosophy”, and “anthropology” and “history” become fuzzy. Identity and clarity then prove elusive. Many of these ideas, though in the current Euro-
American tradition, are attributed to thinkers like Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida and Rorty, may be easily traced in different ways to Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud. Following the anti-methodological approach of deconstructionism, one can look for the genealogy of these views still backward in time to thinkers like Parmenides, Heraclitus, Plato and Protagoras. For, after all, every context, it is claimed, can be differently contextualised, decontextualised, and also recon­textualised. In other words, physics or physical time cannot compel the writer to decide his own ways of writing. The creative writer is free to write differently, in endlessly different ways.

Since the rejection of method because of its alleged tyranny by the structuralists like Foucault and deconstructionists like Derrida is not peculiar to philosophers and social scientists and is also found among philosophers and historians of science like Toulmin, Feyerabend, Kuhn, and Lakatos, no traditionally recognized discipline can be taken to be definitively cognitive. When method itself comes under fire, science, scientific method and scientific or physical reductionism cannot claim to have a special cognitive status. Every discipline is an ongoing discourse and nothing is conclusive. Do all these considerations and questions mean cultural anarchy and breakdown of the relation between self and other both within and between cultures? This very question, the deconstructionist tries to point out, makes sense only within a theory. Since theory and the method of forming it are questionable and other theories based on other methods on the same discourse are available, the claim of one particular theory cannot be taken to be specially “privileged” or “true”. The way out of the problem regarding the relation between self and other, knowledge and reality, the deconstructionist suggests, lies through lived life, group praxis and similar other enterprises.

In order to stave off the threat of radical relativism realists like Putnam recalls Plato’s arguments against Protagoras. If truth is doubted or rejected on the ground of its alleged relativity to some person or some context, then the very act of rejection itself may also be shown to be equally vulnerable or self-refuting. Rejection of truth, like affirmation, may also be said to be contaminated by relativity (to person/context). Another criticism of relativism, particularly moral relativism, is brought forward by thinkers like Thomas Nagel claiming that transcendence from personal and contextual peculiarities is possible. This pro-Kantian view rests on the possibility of self’s attainment of a transcendental, Archimedean or universal point of
view. This suggests that we can go, or at least try to go, out of our own mind, successfully ignoring the effects of nature and culture on our body-mind complex. Moreover, among the implied claims of this view are the validity of “correspondence” and usefulness of “representation”. To try to speak of something extra-linguistic in and by language raises and reopens many problems and questions. If language and reality are juxtapositionally or externally related, what relates them? What, then, happens to representation of reality in language? Who can answer these questions plausibly and how? Is language a mediumistic instrument?

But it is not difficult to show the infirmities of this strong pro-transcendental view. It has been rightly argued by many writers that it is extremely difficult to show the exact correspondence between what is expressed or stated in a particular language and what is (extra-linguistic?) there. The ideal of picturesque correspondence has long gone out of fashion after the breakdown of Wittgenstein’s *Tractarian* theory of elementary proposition. It is not without reason that internal realists like Putnam and anthropological rationalists have discounted the theory of privileged access of human mind to God’s-eye standpoint. It is impossible for any human mind to stand above or beyond this or that historical context or web of beliefs. Somewhat in a similar vein Davidson points out that there is no chance for any person to take up a vantage point for surveying and comparing different contexts or conceptual schemes by temporarily suspending one’s own. The idea of total exile of mind from every context,—linguistic, conceptual or cultural, is as unworkable as its privileged transcendental situation.

Most of the philosophical attempts seem to stand in between two extreme positions, ethnocentrism and universalism. The ethnocentrist thinks that it is impossible for any person to be entirely free from the influences of the culture he is accustomed to live in. The free citizen of the world is an idealized concept. The power of acculturation appears so overwhelming to every one that he is not prepared to believe in his own ability to understand fully his counterparts living in other cultures. He gives the impression that cultural others are constructs of abstract imagination.

Actually, however, this highly idealized extreme position is not ordinarily entertained by any writer. The general-level truth seems to be that in practice each one of us, historian or anthropologist, ethnocentrist or universalist, always lives with, speaks to, or thinks of
some other person(s). He, on reflection, realizes that to live all alone is a metaphor, an excerpt from a social reality, being-with-others. Similarly, the concept of speaking makes no sense if there is none to whom one can speak and who can somehow understand the speaker. Extending this argument it can be shown that even what we call loud thinking turns out to be impossible. Without a given form of life signs fail to signify and the “possible” ways of using them are just not available. In his argument against the private language Wittgenstein painstakingly shows how private language, like private living or private thinking, is an impossibility. Positively speaking, there cannot be thinking, speaking and living without some sort of language, some form of life. For the purpose we need some language, some publicly sharable institution or way of communication. It is obviously true that one and the same institution of language may be used differently. In fact even the very difference of use makes sense only within a commonly sharable institution.

Can the universalist, radicalizing the point of common sharability, make out a plausible case for transcultural universalism? Can he refute the argument for ethnocentrism, cultural singularity? A culture may be singular or peculiar in very many ways, in terms of power (military, industrial, intellectual, spiritual, etc.), excellence (artistic, religious, literary, etc.), repression (political, sexual, economic, etc.). On close analysis, every culture is found to have some distinct traits of its own, which separate, not isolate, it from other cultures. Cultural distinctiveness is not antithetical to universalism. Some of our ideas and ideals, for example, of truth, justice, development, are genuinely universal. This is not to deny the possibility of understanding, defining and following these ideas and ideals differently.

On closer analysis, it can be further shown that commonness or universalistic argument is not uniformly applicable, interculturally or intraculturally. Even within a particular culture the norms and beliefs which are said to be commonly shared are in effect differently perceived and practiced. For example, the same language is differently spoken. The study of linguistic geography, of the shifting relation between different dialects of the same language, makes the point clear. Also it brings out the related point how by speaking a language its speakers change it over the years. The changes in a life of an institution, of a culture, are brought about by how it is lived by the concerned human beings. In the process one institution is influenced by other neighbouring institutions, one culture by other neighbouring cultures.
The ways in which the British speak English are not the same as the Americans speak it. The ways the English-knowing Indians use the language are significantly different from those of the peoples whose mother tongue is English. The point may be pressed further: even in the different parts of Britain this language is spoken or used more or less differently. Can an Indian, whose mother tongue is Bengali or Hindi or Tamil, learn and use English as an Englishman does? This is an intriguing question. The answer to this question may be both “yes” and “no”. Obviously in a sense an Indian, like any other foreigner whose mother tongue is not English, can learn it and, given appropriate training and practice, speak and write it with reasonable, but not extraordinary, felicity. It may be recalled here that the English language in which Tagore wrote *Gitanjali*, literally means an offering of songs, and which earned him Nobel Prize in 1913 was critically commented upon on linguistic ground by Yeats, himself a Nobel laureate and who was an admirer and a friend of Tagore in the early phase of his life. Another example. Some years back when Spender during his visit to India was asked at Bhopal “what do you think of English poetry written by Indians?” his cryptic response was “Is there anything like that?” Obviously he refused to recognize the so-called English poetry written by Indians as ideal English, ideal for an Englishman.

It is not surprising that many of us feel amused when a foreigner speaks our language. This is not a phenomenon peculiar to any particular language-speaking group. Proficiency in use of a language is not merely a matter of mastering its grammar, vocabulary and idioms. There are many other things, almost invisibly embedded in the concerned culture, which contribute to linguistic proficiency. Language is indeed a very complex form of life which has many fuzzy subforms nested within it. In it are found many *peculiar* concepts and expressions which do not have their counterparts in most other languages. Linguistic indeterminacy is not merely a philosophical thesis of Quine and some other philosophers. It has its many other nuances.

To illustrate the point the English word *history* is ordinarily translated as *Itihasa* in many Sanskrit-rooted Indian languages but the Sanskritic scholars point out that in Indian tradition *Itihasa* comprises *Itivṛtta*
(chronicle), Akhyayika (story/tale/narrative), Udaharana (example/instance/precedent), Vamsa (lineage), Gatha (ballad), etc. Many European writers, including Hegel and James Mill, are of the view that Indians have no historical sense; and that to them time is unreal. Most of them think that non-dualistic Vedanta system, marked by its so-called a-temporal and maya interpretation of the world, is the typical way of Indian thinking. Also they are ordinarily unaware of the distinction drawn by several Indian systems between cosmic time, physical time, and historical time. Yet when they speak of ahistority of Indian thought obviously they have a particular concept of history in the back of their mind, apparently forgetting the history of European historiography itself before the mid-eighteenth century. To be more precise on the point, the watershed between the old European historiography and the modern one is often unconsciously drawn mainly in terms of the works of such writers as David Hume (1711–1776) and Edward Gibbon (1737–94). Hume’s History of Great Britain from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution of 1688, 6 Vols. (1754–1762), and Gibbon’s The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire 1976, 6 Vols., (1776–78), have been largely influenced by what may be called the scientific way of writing history by spelling out the causes of the historical events and processes. Both French Encyclopedia and British Historiography of the time were deeply influenced by the scientific spirit due to the Newtonian Revolution. In brief, the changing perception of history in Europe is a part of its cultural metamorphosis.

Somewhat in the same fashion it may be pointed out that the early historiography of Europe, like the Indian one, was closely associated with supernaturalism, genealogy, fable, and the like. But when towards the end of the eighteenth century the cultural presence of Europe in general and of Great Britain in particular was effectively established in eastern India, the impact of European historiography was deeply felt in India. The works of William Jones, Hayman Wilson, Prinsep, Elphinston, Colebrooke, Macaulay, Henry Maine, etc. unmistakably show the rising influence of the concept of European historiography. Some of them like Jones, Wilson and Colebrooke took the trouble of learning Sanskrit and few other Indian languages to understand India, while most others, like James Mill, openly claimed that one need not learn any Indian language to write on Indian history. This seems to be patently incorrect. This is the point, among other things, which has been argued in “Itihasa,
History and Historiography of Civilization”. By generalizing this point one can say even this Introduction that we are writing and the language in which we are writing clearly indicate the cultural presence of Europe in India.

A kindred point has been persuasively made out by Richard Shusterman in his essay, “Understanding the Self’s Others”. His line of presentation is both theoretical and autobiographical. The words chosen by him for formulating his issue are insightful: “we come to understand better by discovering the cultural others in our self”. Some of us are born in one country and reared up elsewhere. Many families are bilingual. In the multi-ethnic countries like India, the former USSR, and USA this phenomenon is very common. By mastering a second language one becomes both bilingual and bicultural. Migration of population is nowadays a very common phenomenon. It is interesting to recall that till the late medieval age, when immigration laws, passport and visa systems were not there, the people used to move more freely than we are allowed in the modern age. In a very important sense people’s movement implies mobility of their language and culture as well. In India came and permanently settled the Aryans, Bactrians, Scythians, Mongolians, Turks, Arabs and Persians; they have got assimilated in Indian culture. A similar thing happened in the last four hundred years in USA. Therefore it is not surprising that many cultures like the Indian or the American can rightly claim to be composite. It is well known that in the 1930s a large number of European scholars and writers moved to and settled in the USA and Canada. If we forget for the time being the questions of personal difficulties and family tragedies, it is difficult to deny that migration had some positive cultural fall-out. The history of the Vienna Circle and the Frankfurt School during the years 1930–1950 introduced and disseminated many philosophical and social ideas of European origin in USA. The post-war development of American science and technology owes a lot to the academic community from Europe in general, and the Jewish community in particular.

Shusterman’s own case, self-understanding, in this context, is very instructive. Born in America with English as mother tongue, educated at Oxford, bearing a Jewish surname, and interested in learning German language and philosophy, he identifies himself “as an American-Israeli binational”. Environed by different cultures one’s self-identity cannot be absolutely free from an element of ambiguity. This is an experience which has been expressed, among others, by
many Jews settled in USA or Canada. Even the black Americans, many of whom have forgotten their ethnic origin, living in America for several generations, and whose mother tongue is English, are not entirely free from an ambiguity in their self-understanding. To take some other examples, most of the Indians who travelled to Mauritius, Fiji and the West Indies do not speak nowadays any Indian language. Still they have not been able to erase completely their ethnic origin or racial-cultural memory. The cases of Creoles in Mauritius and the West Indies, of the Eurasians, Parsis and Armenians in India are even more complex and instructive. Simultaneous affiliation to different cultures and languages are bound to impart some ambiguous traits in the concerned human character. Self and others cannot be easily separated.

The relation between self and other(s), as has been rightly pointed out by Shusterman, is marked by several characteristics, viz., (a) self-understanding, self-discovery, and self-enlargement, (b) comparative and contrasting consciousness, and (c) comparative expression of the self in the light of self’s understanding of other persons, other texts, etc. in the self. Self-understanding knows no limit. On the conceptual interdependence between self and other(s) much has been written by the philosophers. As already noticed, some anthropologists have tried to show the complementarity between and convergence of them.

Comparative and contrasting approaches to the relation between self and other(s) are beset with various difficulties. The point has been clearly brought out by Shusterman’s reference to Eliot. Born in America and settled in England, trained in philosophy and giving best of his time to literary activities, Eliot discovered a new identity of his own. His conversion from Catholicism to the Anglican faith also contributed to the complexity and richness of his self-understanding. These have found expressions in his various writings. His interest in and study of French and Indian cultures made him acutely conscious of the difficulties, in fact impossibility, of completely identifying one’s own self with other cultures, selves and texts for the sake of understanding.

That true understanding or knowledge involves identification, overcoming the difference between self and other(s), subject and object, has been highlighted not only by Eliot but also Sri Aurobindo and several other Indian thinkers of the Vedantic persuasion. Knowledge by identity, as distinguished from empirical knowing by difference, is extremely difficult to attain and retain. It involves a sort of total self-
transformation. This self-transformation or what has been referred to earlier as complete self-transcendence is a very lofty normative invitation. One might say, it is also an ontological invitation which, with difficulty, can be accepted but almost humanly impossible to keep. Therefore it is not surprising that most of us, like Shusterman, are inclined to recognize the presence of others within our own self. This means that in the process of understanding other cultures we do not propose to, rather cannot, completely assimilate or internalize other cultures within ours; nor can we be totally oblivious of our culture, internal to ourselves.

No self remains in total seclusion despite the relativist rhetoric concerning “otherness”. Shusterman’s insight about the presence of others within our own self is widely recognized as noted above. Still one wonders whether this insight can extend to a realm where in response to a normative invitation a self seeks complete autonomy from the “other”, other selves, as well as the natural, social and cultural environ which the self faces as the other. Kalyan Sen Gupta writes about this realm, the realm of cultural objects, particularly fine arts, where the creative freedom or autonomy of the artist takes him/her prima facie totally beyond the others. Sen Gupta, following Tagore, maintains that art objects are expressions of “the surplus in man”. This creative surplus is neither causally related to nature, nor is it even quasi-causally related to the artist’s social background. But this is an extreme position which harks back to the false portrayal of the self and the other as binary opposites, which Shusterman has exposed. The artist, like any other individual, cannot be completely unaffiliated. Art critics like Dewey think that works of art are located within the historical and cultural context of both the artists and their appreciators.

To reject outright the view that art has nothing to do with nature raises questions. One cannot be cultural without being natural first. Reason or imagination, whatever may be the main fountain of art, is in a way bound to be located in some human being. The cultural identity of the artist is somehow rooted, thickly or thinly, in the biological identity of the creative artist. This point becomes clear from iconography and art history. The art and architectural forms of every culture, Indian, Chinese, Egyptian and European, have their distinct features. Even within every culture are found different art forms in different regions and periods of history. The “monotony” of the identity of natural objects is broken by the creative artist, it is true. The “surplus” in him enables him to transform natural object
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into an artistic one. Natural and seasonal sights and sounds, for example, are transformed into different forms of Raga by the musician. But this only shows the close link between the "natural" and the "cultural".

If art objects are essentially "expressional" in character as Sen Gupta thinks, can we discover any universal or generic forms in them? If we can, how is that possible? If we cannot, to what is it due? The terms like style and pattern are indicative of the possibility of generalization. If this possibility is discounted, then one has to defend the claim that the artist's creative freedom is absolute, i.e., unrelatable to anything external to his imagination. But this strong claim seems to be indefensible. Even the creators of so-called radically new styles are, on close analysis, found to be indebted to some tradition, often several traditions. And that is why one feels that different art forms show a trend of convergence. Sen Gupta rightly highlights this concept of convergence. This does not mean that the different art forms or styles found in different countries would exhibit some kind of artistic universals. It is true that some psychologists and anthropologists have tried to extract elements of artistic universals from "collective representations" underlying the art objects of different cultures. But when the art critic is called upon to examine this claim, he finds it very difficult to endorse it. By implication it is suggested that the creative freedom of the artists cannot easily be chained to any "creative representation" or "collective unconscious".

This shows that the conflict between the two extreme positions, universalist and relativist, cannot be easily resolved. The project of discerning convergence, not to speak of essentialist unification, is hazardous. Still most of us avoid the two extremes and operate in the middle region despite the obstacles encountered in comparing different cultures. For alongside the obstacles there are satisfactions as well, as shown and persuasively argued by Frank Hoffman.

VI

It is a common experience of most of us who have tried to study different cultural heritages,—Indian, European and American, that the outcome of this enterprise is almost invariably mixed, partly satisfying and partly disappointing. For example, although we have studied Greek philosophy, our claim to have understood Plato and Aristotle
is likely to be rejected on linguistic ground by the classical Greek philosophers. Analogously, the Sanskrit-knowing classical scholars of India often refuse to recognize the knowledge-claim of the modern philosophers who have studied the classical texts only in English, Hindi or any other vernacular translation.

The problem of translation poses a major obstacle to the success of comparative study of philosophy, anthropology and other forms of culture. With the problem of translation is intimately related the issue of semantic variance. On this ground particularly in the areas of fine arts, ethics and law we find it relatively difficult to pass universally acceptable cross-cultural judgment. It is in this problematic context that Hoffman highlights the importance not only of linguistic competence but also of context-sensitivity. Also related to the problem of meaning is the problem of ascertaining the exact identity of the problem. It is true that all philosophical problems are not necessarily linguistic. But that linguistic competence is very important in philosophical and other forms of cultural understanding has been highlighted not only by the followers of later Wittgenstein but also by various other scholars, including the classical scholars. In India Vyakarana (linguistic analysis or grammar) has been recognized as a distinct science (sastra) right from the Vedic period (sakalya) to the modern time and learned treatises have been written on the subject by an illustrious line of authors from Panini (400 BC), Patanjali (150 BC) and Bhartrhari to Bhattoji Diksita (late 16th century), Konda Bhatta (mid-17th century) and Nagesa Bhatta (early 18th century). Even in the recent past some very erudite books have been written following the tradition.

Simply because the problems besetting comparative philosophy are mentioned, one must not think that it provides no reward. Far from that, Hoffman tries to show how Asian philosophy, often presented under the rubric of “orientalism”, has been widely misunderstood by many Western scholars. The best way of defining, rather understanding, Asian philosophy would be to use the method of comparison and contrast. To appreciate a particular type of philosophy one need not necessarily praise or deprecate it. Before passing judgment one is expected to try honestly to understand what is going to be judged. Unstudied criticism is as puerile as uninformed admiration. One need not be an Indophile to be a good scholar of Indian culture. Nor an Indian is required to be an Europhile to appreciate the excellence of European culture. To be a good comparative philosopher what are
needed most are, in the words of Hoffman, "imaginative sympathy and critical acumen".

The view that there is no self which can possibly internalize within its consciousness all that it is conscious of suggests, among other things, that solipsism is untenable. Similarly untenable seems to be the view which claims that the knowing self is reducible to the world or part thereof which it knows. The second view, reductionism, like the first view, solipsism, is a promise which is sometimes made philosophically. But this is never honoured in practice. Rather, one can say, because of its very nature, it cannot be honoured. Both reductionism and solipsism are in the nature of unexecutable programmes. Strictly speaking, there is neither any practicing solipsist nor any practicing reductionist. All of us move in the space between the extremes. Most thinkers who write or speak about their views, scientific, philosophical, anthropological, historical, or literary, may on analysis be shown to be working in between their own selves and for whom they are writing. There is no subject, self, or knower, who is absolutely foundational or self-contained nor is there any object which is foundational or self-contained. The fluxist philosophers of West and East like Heraclitus and Nagarjuna have been drawing our attention to a sort of dynamic continuity on the basis of this kind of unfounded symbiotized unity. Joseph Margolis, referring to the works of such philosophers as Descartes, Husserl, the later Wittgenstein, and Nagarjuna, tries to show the continuative nature of philosophy.

The theoretical thrust of different types of fluxism is anti-presuppositionalist or anti-foundationalist. There is no first philosophy which can be taken as the matrix of all other types of philosophy or theoretical enterprises. It is ordinarily believed that neither self nor other is available without presuppositions. Kant speaks of categorical presuppositions, Vaihinger believes in the hypothetical ones, and Collinwood's "absolute presuppositions" are all historical, epochal and culture-bound. Neither God nor Matter is sovereign, i.e., can be shown to be independent of our ways of apprehending them. Descartes tried to show that the knowing self, thinking consciousness, on its own may not be self-contained but as affiliated to a non-deceiving God is unquestionable. But his argument has apparently failed. Because if we need God to accept the possibility of unquestionable self, one can point out, how can God be thought to be veracious without assuming or presupposing the infallible ability of self to apprehend God? Circularity seems to have vitiated this argument.
If the claim of self-knowledge can be so easily vitiated, how can one be sure of the existence of the physical (other) world as studied in science. Because, after all, world as extended matter as such is not self-shining or self-proving. It is only in self’s consciousness or knowing capacity that the true nature of the world is captured. This argument proves either the dependence of the world (as other) on self-consciousness or the cognitive fallibility of the self because of its contingent character and dependence upon the self-contained world. If this thesis of interdependence is accepted, then the primacy claim of cogito breaks down; also breaks down with it the primacy claim of the so-called self-existent world. In that case both self and the world (as other), both consciousness and matter, have to be viewed as dependent upon and expressions of God, the only sovereign being. It is precisely this sort of foundationalism which Husserl, for example, following Kant’s philosophical anthropology, wanted to combat. He, like Nagarjuna, wanted to vindicate anti-presuppositionalism. Of course their ways of attempted vindication are quite different.

Opposed to the thesis of dichotomy between the self and the world, Husserl is persuaded that neither is self-contained. World in its raw or pure physical form, marked by corporeality and temporality, is not available to the knowing mind which variably interprets it in the process of apprehending it. The knowing mind or self is not available even to itself in a finished or fixed form. There is no end to the process of self’s self-discovery. The “complexity” of the knowing self is partly due to the presence of life-forms in it. In other words, world without ceasing to be objective, is available, articulately or inarticulately, within self. It is only within self, self-reflective consciousness, that life-forms of the world get coherently related, become objectively meaningful and unified. The unity of world and that of self are inseparable.

Admittedly, this view sounds transcendentally idealist. It is doubly transcendental, both self-wise and world-wise. Self’s apprehension of the world and also of itself is endlessly growing. Whatever self apprehends, itself or world, is endlessly intentional, every content of it is said to have its “beyond” in it. Every form of knowledge is a transcendental invitation, promise of the expansion of its meaning-horizon, in it. Every cognitive content is self-exceeding. Neither physical world nor history nor language can set a permanent limit to what self can possibly know. Whenever self knows something new, its existing knowledge undergoes change and in a way is renewed. Viewed thus,
one can say, somewhat like Margolis, that Husserl’s programme of
eidetic reduction or unification cannot be completely carried out. It is
doubly open-ended, both from the end of the knower and also from
that of the known. The symbiotized structure of human knowledge,
of subject and object, is being continuously destructuralized. This
cognitive process is claimed to be endless.

It is not easy to find a straight way from Descartes or even Husserl
to fluxism of Nagarjuna. For, after all both Descartes and Husserl
are in favour of “founded and definitive knowledge”, a sort of first
philosophy. In marked contrast, Wittgenstein discovered that the most
natural locus or home of human knowledge is this or that natural
language. He discounts the Cartesian search, substantially endorsed
by Husserl, for a transcendental form of knowledge which can rise
above, not only above the physical temporality and corporeality but
also above the natural linguisticality. The nuances of human knowl­
edge and discourse are to be found, says Wittgenstein, in actual uses
of natural language within different forms of life. Words have no uni­
ified or unifying metaphysical “home”. Their homes or contexts are
varied and variable. It is by using the anti-metaphysical and plura­
listic tools of natural language that Margolis makes his way to Nagar­
juna, understanding and interpreting him.

Undoubtedly Nagarjuna is a fluxist. He believes in no originary
or antecedent foundational home of knowledge. Knowledge is nei­
er historical nor futurist. It is momentary (ksanabhanga), a matter
of dependent origination (pratityasamutpada) and having practical effi­
cacy (arthakriyakarita). These are the basic features of the Nagarjunite
fluxism. It is both backward-looking and forward-looking. Every past
moment of one’s “self”-consciousness collapses. “Self” is bracketed
because of its elusive nature and which reminds one of the views of
self found in Hume, Kant and Wittgenstein. As “self”, according to
Nagarjuna, is elusive his (Mahayana) view is often called nairatmavada
(non-selfism). The collapsing past of the non-selfist “self” makes its
presence, though momentarily, possible. In an important sense “self”
is real; otherwise to speak of its nirvana makes no sense. The present
moment of “self”, of “self”-knowledge, dies paving the way for “its”
future. However, these moments, though different, are continuous
only in terms of practical efficacy. Their causal connection is only a
matter of imagination (kalpana), not determinate perception. Kalpana
means making possible (by imagination) and possible ways of appre­
hending past and future are numerous. Madhyama literally means the
middle. Whatever it is is between no-longer (past) and not-yet (future). *Sunya* is not ontological emptiness. It is reality but without any permanently identifiable/predicable determination of it; we cannot say either *asti* (is) and *nasti* (is not), either *ek* (one) or *anya* (other), about it.

That *Sunya* is reality in a sense and is *not* reality in a sense is clear from the Mahayana dictum: *Samsara* (empirical world of change, of birth and death, of appearance and disappearance) is *Nirvana* (world beyond change, chain of birth and death, *etc.*) and *Nirvana* is *Samsara*. This is also in accord with the principle of fluxism. Nothing is; every thing flows. Translated in the discourse of *self* and *other*, it may be said, *self*, in a sense, is *other* and, in a sense, is *not other*; further, *other*, in a way, is in *self*; and, in a way, is *not in self*. Slightly varying a distinct Vedantin theme, one can say, every *self* is in every *other* self and every *other* is in *self*. For this reason some Vedantins, from Gaudapada to Samkara, have been understandably referred to as crypto-Buddhist (*pracchanna Bauddha*). Vedanta and Buddhism, two main traditions of Indian thought, are not quite antagonistic as ordinarily believed. Their points of convergence and affinity, a modern deconstructionist historian of thought may well say, are numerous and very important.

**VII**

The dialogue between different cultures, as we have noted before, is an on-going process. It has been going on down the centuries between East and West. Since we are now, for historical reasons, particularly interested in the dialogue between Euro-American countries, on the one hand, and India, on the other, it is quite understandable why writers like Fred Dallmayr focus their critical attention on the hegemonistic and/or global approach of the West to the question of development.

Must the aim of development of all societies be identical or uniform? Should the state authority be exercised in the same way in different societies or even within one society? How should the ideals of justice and freedom for the individual be conceived in the context of uneven political states of affairs? These are some of the basic questions understandably raised and sought to be answered by the social scientists of the developing countries like India. Dallmayr draws our attention to the views of Indian social scientists like Rajni Kothari
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and Ashis Nandy, both of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies in Delhi. Apparently encouraged by Gadamer’s critique of uniformism and univocal globalization, Dallmayr finds, Kothari’s “Search of Humane Alternatives” very refreshing and instructive.

Indian political culture, particularly in the present century, has come under two basic influences, one of Gandhism and another of Marxism. Indigenous tradition has found its most influential articulation in Gandhi and his followers. Gandhi was deeply influenced by the ideals of minimal statism of Thoreau, Emerson and Tolstoy, and above all by the ideal of *Ahimsa* (non-violence) preached by the Buddha and other Indian thinkers. But, right from the early decades of the century, the impact of Marxism was felt in the struggle for independence. Experience of his Russian visit (1927) left a lasting impact on Nehru. It was further deepened by the rise of Nazism in Germany (1933) and the Spanish Civil War (1936). Nehru and Subhash Bose leaned to the Left within the Congress, comprising the Marxists and Socialists.

After independence both in the spheres of politics and economics the relevance of Gandhian thought and that of Marxism has been differently perceived. This difference in perception is clear from the Indian Constitution, marked by federalism with unitary bias, and the initial Five-Year Plans. Haunted by the political and regional diversity of the country and working under the background of partition (1947), the founding fathers of the Constitution wanted to make the Centre very strong. Till date, the Centre-State relations have remained a highly controversial issue. In the sphere of economic planning, mainly because of Nehru and Mahalanobis, both considerably influenced by the Soviet model of planning, India espoused a sort of welfarism. The core sector of the economy came directly under the State control and heavy industries, compared to small-scale and village industries, received higher priority. In effect the Gandhian economic motto, “The Small is Beautiful”, was bypassed. The accent on village economy, though notionally recognized, was practically missing. Some Gandhians like Vinoba Bhave and Raja Gopalacari, taking cues from the thought of Gandhi, strongly criticized political centralism and controlled economy. The ideas of alternative approach to economics and politics may be fruitfully traced to the tradition left behind by Gandhi, and the legacy of the mixed economy was partly due to Marx and partly due to Keynes. The experience of the years of depression of 1930s in Europe and America persuaded the Left
in the Congress that State intervention in the sphere of economy is absolutely imperative.

The importance of land reforms and that of fast industrial development were more or less recognized by all political parties and the policy-makers. But the question was how to go about these programmes? Should the people themselves and the non-governmental organizations come forward and take the lead? Or, must the state take the initiative both in formulating and executing the action programmes? Over this question the Gandhians and the welfarists understandably differed.

Kothari and others of his persuasion felt that in the name of industrialization and building a nation-state the society was getting increasingly stratified, widening the gulf between the elite and the poor. The state, largely because of its inherited structure of unresponsive bureaucracy, failed to deliver the goods meant for the poor and the exploited. The political policy-makers largely drawn from the upper castes and the propertied sections failed to tackle effectively the growing problems of inequality. The turbulent years of Emergency (1975–77) and the mass movement headed by Jayaprakash Narayan and other Gandhian leaders, backed by intellectuals like Kothari, successfully highlighted the weakness of the political system and of the Government of the time. But the collapse of the Janata Rule and the return of the Congress under the leadership of Indira Gandhi in 1980 once again brought the sad fact to the focus that the needs and say of the masses were yet to reach the level of governmental functioning.

What is worse, the direction of development followed by the Government is unsuitable to the people of a developing country like India. The modern science and technology of West are being allowed to propel the development of the country, resulting in high expenditure and neglect of indigenization of technology. Moreover, the heavy defence expenditure is cutting into the poverty-alleviation programmes. A new civilization is coming up which is westernized, consumption-driven and wasteful.

The main thrust of Kothari’s argument is that the right way of developing India and its political-economic system cannot be blindly borrowed from this or that developed and industrialized country. We have to think of different alternatives and choose the one which is most appropriate to the meaningful life of the people of this country. The ideal of decentralization, a corollary of the minimal state, is
favoured by both Kothari and Nandy. This does not mean that they are blindly in favour of “privatization” or mindless “liberalization”, allowing foreign investment in all sectors of national economy. Critical of colonialism and statism, they are not in favour of importing neo-colonialism.

Nandy is in favour of a social system which has to be built up from the bottom level, on the basis of the needs and values of the poor and the exploited. He, like Kothari, is opposed to western-style modernization which is being defended, wittingly or unwittingly, by the modern elites, professionals, entrepreneurs and intellectuals. Respectful to the age-old tradition of the country, one need not be a traditionalist in the uncritical sense. Critical of the irrational elements of tradition, Nandy refuses to be identified as a traditionalist. But he favours the idea of understanding India and its culture in terms of what he calls “native categories”.

Whether one is traditionalist or not, one, together with others, modernist and post-modernist, can hardly escape certain problems or even crises. The difference in the mode of understanding or interpreting problems and crises makes little or no difference to how possibly we can tackle them effectively. Practical compulsion is a hard task master. Even if we agree that different countries/cultures have some different peculiar problems, we cannot deny that the crisis through which the world is passing today affect us all irrespective of our countrywise affiliation.

This crisis has been understood in different ways. Pranab Kumar Sen views the crisis under the heads of economics, politics and ecology. Economic poverty seems to be a very important factor which is aggravating this crisis. Politically speaking, conflict of ideologies is making the situation additionally critical. The ecological crisis can be viewed both independently and also in relation to economic and ideological conflict. Generally speaking, the poverty-stricken people are obliged to live in close touch with nature and depend very much upon it. Yet, paradoxically enough, they are forced, forced by poverty in countries like India, to exploit nature. For example, those who live in the forest or hill areas know very well that deforestation is harmful to their own interests, but because of their inability to pay for commercially marketed fuel, fell the trees and use the wood as fuel and for heating in cold climate.

The economically developed countries often use the less developing or the least developed countries as the captive supplier of their
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natural resources like oil and iron ore. Because of the latter’s poverty the terms of trade between them are also found to be relatively tilted in favour of the developed ones. What is more, underdeveloped in industry, the poor countries rely mostly on trade for their earning in hard currencies. In the process they have to sell out or export most of their non-renewable resources at a relatively cheap price. It is not difficult to see the close relation between the economic, political and ecological aspects of the world crisis. In a different form this crisis is evident also within the bounds of every country.

The essence of the crisis is conflict. Sen points out that conflict is rooted in distrust towards others and in the wrong belief that one can live all by oneself. This misunderstanding of our own situation explains at least partly the absence of the spirit of cooperation between different individuals, groups and countries. The lack of the spirit of cooperation indicates also our failure to appreciate the needs and values of others. At times some of us even willfully reject others’ value systems. Thus we land ourselves in a kind of “axiological nihilism”.

It has been rightly pointed out by Sen that the spirit of humanism or human unity does not require us to forget our difference based on cultural, political and economic distinctiveness. What is expected of us is the spirit of cosharing our available natural and cultural resources. Practical compromise and adjustment are not only unavoidable but also positively welcome. To minimize or remove the causes of conflict we must enter into ideological dialogue. The use of public reason makes our communication successful. The more we communicate with each other, the less intense becomes our conflict. Dialogue and communication also instill trust both in ourselves and also in others. Success in communication is reflected in the rising level and different areas of cooperation. Philosophically speaking, that we are not victims of radical relativism or incommensurabilism is evident from our acts of cooperation and cosharing. To show the weakness of relativism Sen makes use of the conceptual resources of Davidson and Strawson.

VIII

The course of history is largely conditioned by trains of ideas which human minds conceive, articulate and propagate. The hand that holds...
the pen holds the future. Relativism, despite its weakness exposed by Davidson and others, enshrines such a train of ideas which has an immense practical significance. Difference, heterogeneity, otherness, are key relativistic ideas which still have a firm hold on the modern mind. These are ideas celebrated in today's cultural ethos notwithstanding the philosophical warnings against "incommensurabilism" to which radical relativism leads. Each of us as well as any group to which we belong have a strong urge to re-examine our identity and speak from our own centre of experience. The passion to gain voice from one's own centre of experience and to remain rooted in one's own way of being however impels one to drive others into silence. And the silence and seclusion to which the search for singularity eventually leads deepen lines of division that fracture society in every aspect of its being—social, economic, political, religious, racial and gender. Is there a way in which we can retain otherness, which relativism rightly stresses, and yet go beyond otherness so that the course of history is not fraught with conflict and fragmentation? To move beyond otherness we need a new vision, a vision that eschews the false image of the self and the other as binary opposites. We need to evolve new linkages between the two which may transform the course of history averting anxiety, fear, oppression, discrimination and conflict hitherto aggravated by the false construal of the self-other relationship.

Christina Schiøes speaks of multiple exploitations, discriminations, and oppressions to which women have been subjected, and contends that feminist philosophy as "practical philosophy" should "conceptualize an alternative project" a "vision" that would not only liberate women from men, but also transform society into a "world of partnership". She envisions a change in the course of human history which will achieve “linking of the two halves of humanity”. What has to be given up is the long entrenched misconstrual of the self-other relationship, which, instead of linking the two halves has arrayed men and women in conflict.

Schües finds the genesis of conflict in the history of occidental thinking, in the train of ideas expressed in Hegel's writings for instance. Self-consciousness faced by another self-consciousness has come out of itself or lost itself as it were. Confronted with the "other" the self is haunted by a sense of fear, domination, loss and anxiety. To overcome this, Schües thinks, the autonomous subject establishes “the universal law in the light of his own self-image of rationality” to
which all must conform. This, she thinks is “his story” of rationality with which “her story” should also merge. If it does not, then women are simply what men are not. From the 17th century onwards, she observes, woman is defined by negation and lacks, as nonaggressive, non-competitive, and private, not public. She is defined by a lack of autonomy. A drama of antagonism is thus enacted in which the “other” is a threat to the self. The woman, who is the “other” is perceived as “nobody”, as “nature, matter, irrational etc.” She must therefore be controlled. This androcratic characterization of the “other” by negation lies at the root of sexual discrimination.

A challenge to occidental tradition has come from two phenomena according to Schües, the re-emergence of women’s movement in the last thirty years, and the zeal of deconstruction in transforming and dissolving dualistic thinking underlying dichotomies like male/female, rational/emotional etc., and their implied hierarchies that tend to subordinate the second member of each pair under the first.

To avoid such hierarchical ranking and live up to the vision of linking two halves of humanity, a proper understanding of the nature of the feminine subject is necessary. One must not endorse an oversimplified account of essential characteristics and roles within a specifically female context, a context which Carol Gilligan explores in her very influential work: *In a Different Voice*. Gilligan is right no doubt in stressing “otherness” of the feminine subject, but this should not be seen as a prelude to segregation along essentialist lines, for that might revive androcratic characterization of the feminine subject by negation. Simon de Beauvoir, Schües approvingly says, was right to raise her voice against this androcratic characterization. The woman as “other” must not be reduced to an inessential object, defined by lacks. But then, though a woman is not born but made, made an object doomed to inessentiality and immanence, as Simon rightly claims, it would be wrong to portray the feminine subject as one who is striving to become like men in order to attain transcendence, equality and freedom. For that would destroy her distinctiveness, her positive alternative identity contra Gilligan’s correct insistence on the necessity of speaking “In a Different Voice”. Deconstruction of the subject too is mistaken for the same reason. At the end what remains after deconstruction is “nothing” or “nobody”. If feminine subjects are reduced to “nothings” or “nobodies”, who have no distinctive identity, then they can never find a voice of their own and therefore no direction, no political programme of liberation. Instead of fluid “nomads” or
“nobodies” Schües envisions a feminine subject who is capable of acting and communicating with others, without isolating herself from and controlling the other. She is one who is not afraid of others and can link with others. Her thesis in her own words is “an attempt at linking rather than ranking”.

The distinctive identity of the subject however is not completely constituted. Schües is not speaking of a notion of identity, entailed by the metaphysics of presence. The subject is always “a possibility of beginning”. She is a being, as noted before, who is capable of acting. Acting means beginning; something begins, and others must help in order to push the beginning forward. So a beginning is always linking up with others. And since being free is synonymous with acting, and acting with beginning which involves linking with others, in being free one must link with others. Liberty is achieved only in relation to others, not by dominating others.

It is by moving beyond the traditional bipolar opposition of self/other that we can have a vision leading to transformation. Neither the selves nor their others however are so radically free that they can transform in the sense of creating. But we are not mere products of a power beyond our control either. We seek to transform by acting and acting is a striving towards making a difference. Making a difference does not amount to creating, nor to mere repetition owing to some controlling power. Bare repetition of traditional values implies status quo. But repetition done reflectively and in a different style can initiate transformation. Transformation for emancipation or liberation, to repeat, is not to be achieved through radically free creation, nor through bare repetition, but by linking with each other.

The false image of an opposition between self and other produces a wrong notion of power as domination. Schües conceives power in a different way following Hannah Arendt. She argues in favour of a notion of “power” which inheres in the condition of linking with other human beings. It is grounded in the acting-together of individuals and groups. It is power as affiliation in contrast to power as control over others. That is why even if women do demand empowerment, and adopt means like affirmative action for realizing equality they would not and should not want to be accomplices of androcratic power strategies that culminate in aggressive hierarchies and domination, in increasing militarism, economic exploitation of large parts of society and other forms of control and oppression. In stark contrast to this, a non-destructive view of power is vindicated which
tries to privilege links with others, caring for others and having a responsibility towards others, in the way a mother has responsibility to help her children and care for them.

It is this power or strength that helps in building a community which has justice as the ideal basis. Unification in a just society may be secured through a sharing of subjectivities though this should not be taken to imply conformity to a fixed common paradigm of understanding. Justice for Schües is based on the responsibility for others, on partnership and linking with others, and on respect for differences. In linking with the other through friendship, love and care one does not merely confirm his/her humanity but his/her human individuality.

The need for a reconstrual of the self-other relationship which does not erase difference and is still able to secure human unity, stressed so strongly by Shusterman and Schües, is reaffirmed in “Understanding Human Action: Women’s Free Acts as a Case-Study”. In a specific context the general question is raised once again: How can we remain rooted socio-historically and still not sink in abysmal loneliness and conflict?

Cultural diversity, according to radical relativists, segments society into hermetically sealed worlds, each with an irreducibly native set of norms, beliefs, concepts and customs incomprehensible to the other. Against this thesis, especially in the form given to it by T.S. Kuhn, it is contended that (a) the relativists draw wrong, crypto-absolutist lessons from right relativistic insights; and (b) it is possible to understand, evaluate and learn from others’ experiences and actions despite “otherness”.

The social investigator or critic or any other person should surely try to understand and assess the actions of a feminine subject or “self” from the standpoint of her own centre of experience. However, the assumption of the agent’s subjectivity must not be overstressed, for that might result in complete gap in communication. The “other”, in this case the critic or the investigator, is shut within the prison of a subjectivity in the same way as the agent is confined within hers. And so the “other” might not be able to reach out beyond the frontier of his/her own culture to understand the actions of the subject belonging to a different culture. The action of a Hindu widow or “sati” who sacrificed herself on the funeral pyre of her husband illustrates such an action. The agent herself perceived this practice as a free act of self-effacement in many cases, for a strong sense of conjugal identity might have generated the feeling that life without
her husband was meaningless and insufferable. The practice is now abolished and the values of self-effaciveness and sacrifice which it symbolized are seen as delusions which women have internalized under social pressure. Still there are many women who are engulfed in this mystique and believe that an act, though self-effacive is free. The belief and the acts to which it leads might not be defensible but they do suggest one particular image of being free. And this image can hardly be understood by investigators who have a different cultural background. To an alien investigator therefore who construes freedom as self-assertiveness and self-fulfilment, such a free act of self-effacement would either seem to be incomprehensible or seem to be one which was forced.

If the two subjectivities of the agent and the investigator are thus seen to lead to two contradictory characterizations of the same act as “free” and “forced”, we seem to face a dilemma. The investigator must either give up all effort to understand and judge the action, acknowledging that the standard of judgment which can be used in this context must be internal to the agent’s own culture. The internal standard in that case turns out to be crypto-absolutist which forbids the use of any other external standard. Or, the investigators may continue their efforts and ultimately import their own standards and concepts applying them to a context which is inappropriate and resistant.

The gap however is not so wide as it is imagined to be. The thesis of incommensurability which makes it look so wide is indefensible. Besides, the self-other relationship, when reviewed and reconstrued, is seen to be one of assimilation, absorption and mutual enrichment as Shusterman urges, or of “linking” as Schues contends. The alien investigator need not coerce the feminine subject, the Hindu “sati” into accepting the interpretation, which describes her action as “forced”. By “linking” with each other the alien may realize that whatever she did was “free”, free in the sense of exercising an option. The agent in her turn may be persuaded as agent to absorb freely a new image of freedom which is expressed in self-assertiveness and self-fulfilment. Out of the contrasting images of freedom one particular image may get entrenched on which others converge as a result of cultural interaction, transvaluation and synthesis. Which among these will be entrenched and may reflect a commonly accepted converging viewpoint is a matter that depends largely on experiences of common human concern—of features of humanness
which constitute “feelings of recognition and affiliation that link every human being to every other human being” as Aristotle observed (in *Nicomachean Ethics*).

These features of humanness which lie beneath all local traditions and practices can provide the basis of trans-cultural norms, by reference to which we may criticize different local conceptions, not only of women’s free acts but of other matters as well. Radical relativists however, refuse to recognize such trans-cultural norms and their relevance for transvaluation of different local conceptions. Traditional ideas, local conceptions of different cultures, they contend, are all immune to criticism on the basis of these norms which are supposed to be justified by reasons of universal validity. Krishna Mallick contests this extreme relativistic contention. She unravels the morally pernicious consequences of the relativist’s immunizing strategy in a specific context of gender discrimination, a specific socio-economic, cultural, religious context where accepted practice and local traditional conceptions are utilized for reinforcing the bias against women. She shows how oppression is institutionalized by reference to practice, and how practice is protected from criticism even when it collides with the basic human concern about the worth of life.

The practice Mallick refers to and writes about is the strong preference for male children some countries have, particularly India, on socio-economic, religious and cultural grounds. She reports how this preference has led to the appalling rise in the figure of abortion of female foetuses detected through amniocentesis. Sex determination test through amniocentesis has become an instrument of discrimination against the female foetus for women themselves are culturally conditioned to consider females as burdens to the family, who drain its wealth in the form of dowry, and who do not stay with their parents to take charge of them. Mallick questions whether the sex determination test can relieve Indian society of such burdens, and thereby make a difference to the quality of social life. The answer is no, and she suggests other morally preferable ways of improving the human condition by introducing changes and reforms that would no more allow these oppressed beings to remain as burdens. She points out that far from slowing down overpopulation, as some argue, misuse of amniocentesis for preselection of sex, would aggravate the already existing adverse sex-ratio. Besides, there is no reason to target one gender for trying to solve the problem of overpopulation. Against yet another argument that women themselves are availing of
amniocentesis of their own volition and that the test should therefore not be banned, Mallick says that this is not a free choice. The so-called choice results from powerlessness of women who are conditioned to accept that unless they are able to produce male babies they have no social worth.

However, even if the specificity of the social, economic and cultural situation in which the choice is made cannot be ignored, larger questions of common human concern are bound to arise at this juncture. Contrasting images of what choice should be like, pro-life or pro-choice, would emerge. Which among these two contrasting images will get entrenched, and on which of these the other viewpoint may converge, will perhaps be decided by some shared human concern. Such a shared concern is a feature of humanness which is there underlying diverse practices whether or not it is recognized in these practices. So in whatever way the woman acts, she has a responsibility to respect the right to life of the foetus and a responsibility towards her action. Even if late abortion of female foetuses is an accepted practice in India, and even if it is important to understand differences in the accepted practices of different cultures, the practices can and should be appropriately criticized, not immunized. They should be criticized in the light of some trans-cultural norm, in this case respect for life. And this is a feature of humanness, in discerning which one may recall what Aristotle said: in one’s travels to distant countries one may observe feelings of recognition and affiliation that link every human being to every other human being.