

Modernity in India and Tendencies of Assimilative Appropriation*

“There is nothing past for which one may yearn,
there is only an eternal newness which is shaped
by the wider elements of the past and true nostalgia
has always to be productive to create a new
excellence.”

J. W. von Goethe

Every culture expresses unique feature of its own that constitutes its dominant configuration and differentiates it from other civilizations and cultures. Indian civilization is distinguished from other civilizations of the world in respect of its continuity (*sanātana*) heterogeneity and its assimilating *ethos* along with its divinity-oriented integral character. Unique phase of the socio-cultural transformation and assimilation in Indian society and thought during the so-called period of modernity generated either from the endogenous sources or through the contacts with the external factors. Becoming increasingly conscious and to act in the light of that consciousness or awareness, make person or a society modern.¹ The concept of modernity has got many implications. Besides analyzing those implications in this article we will also discuss whether that overwhelming storm of modernism has affected the essence or spirit of Indian culture as such or not or up to what extent. More over it is to be taken into account as how the modes of assimilation, appropriation and integration were functional within the contemporary Indian culture in the tensed situated ness of the traditional Indian culture vis-à-vis modernism.

The word ‘modern’ generally signifies pertaining to the present time; contemporary; at least not antiquated or obsolete; characteristic of contemporary styles of art, literature and music that rejects traditionally accepted or sanctioned forms and emphasizes exercise of the individual experimentation or sensibility.² A ‘modern person’ is one whose views and tastes are considered such. The word arrives into Modern English language by way of the Latin adverb *modo*, which means only, merely, lately (of the time), just now. The word *modernus* is created from the original ablative singular of *modus* (*mode*) added to *-ernus*, the adjectival suffix of time. Elaboration on the etymology is crucial because of the element of time involved with seeing how the term ‘modern’ is used because it is time that propels movement and, therefore, evolution. In literary context modernism is the character, tendencies, or values with adherence or sympathy to the modern while maintaining estrangement or divergence from the past in arts and literature occurring especially in the course of the twentieth century and taking

form in any of the various innovative movements and styles.³ Modernism activates a rationalistic critique of what has been traditionally followed feudal superstructure in the form of political, religious and moral systems and its conceptual framework. Besides the historical and chronological connotation of the term 'modern' there is above all, the sense it bears now as 'something valuable and worthwhile, not just the latest and the imported, that it is a process rather than a static condition of human living itself.'⁴

True modernity is an active involvement of an individual and a society in its time and its characteristic features and a positive acknowledgement by them of the same. This does not imply a blind and uncritical support and imitation of something alien or extraneous. Such an attitude consists in one's being aware of the difference of the present time and its rationally-founded convictions in contrast with the preceding or traditional or sometimes even dogmatic ones. It is the consciousness of a different sensibility and of a fresh perception of environment. It does not need to oppose unreasonably the perennial values and paradigms of aesthetics, morality and rationally-founded sciences. Modernity may be understood to be an acute sense of originality of a particular culture in a specific phase of space, time and environment. This contemporary originality may be meaningful in its relationship to the originality of past cultures, traditions and symbolism which is to be appropriately assimilated and regenerated in its present form. Modernity understood this way can not be compared with amnesia, because something cannot be measured as different, original, and innovative to that which is forgotten. "Modernization as a form of cultural response, involves attributes which are basically universalistic and evolutionary; they are pan-humanistic, trans-ethnic and non-ideological. It symbolizes a rational attitude towards issues, and their evaluation from a universalistic and not particularistic view point."⁵

Modernization in India begins mainly with the western contact and influence, especially after the initiation of the establishment and expansion of the British rule in India. Significantly, the Western or the British tradition at that particular temporal phase had itself gone fundamental transformation through the Industrial Revolution and several other rational reformations. It is only after the Company's rule that many modern cultural institutions and the forms of social structures were introduced in India. In its early manifestations, an insatiable urge for independence or awakening of anti-colonial consciousness were not instruments of mere politics but they were dynamic and constituent elements in the formation of new ideology and cultural modernization presupposing a national identity of integral nature. The first expression of this vibrant consciousness appeared in the form of social and religious reform movements. There were at least two phases of the impact of modernism that emerged amongst Indian people of that era: one led to an attempt at reconstructing Indian society on the basis of Western ideas inspired by the Enlightenment and Liberalism, and another that wanted the reconstruction to take place on the basis of reformulation and reinterpretation of ancient Indian scriptures and traditions. The modern period in Indian history begins, as J L Mehta remarks, with Rammohun Roy (1772-1833) in the first half of the nineteenth century with our 'unwilled' involvement in the events of French and English political history. The beginnings of this social revolt can be easily identified in Roy's thought who vividly criticized the degraded state of Indian society and prevalent evil cults and

practices. Meanwhile he also acknowledged the virtues of Western modes and patterns of learning along with concepts of social and liberal legal-institutions. He aimed at cleansing Hindu culture and society of its weakness and dogmatism. To realize these objectives he founded the *Brahmo Samāj* in 1828 at Calcutta. Main thrust behind it was to transform Hinduism in the mould of modernity. The assumption was that Hindu society could only be healed of its social evils if it adopted the rational rejection of ancient religious cults of polytheism and idolatry. The *Brahmo Samāj* intended to restructure Hindu culture in terms of modernity. Roy campaigned for the removal of *sati-prathā* until Governor-General Lord William Bentinck enacted it in 1829. His revolt against the living Hindu society and his appeal to Hindus to purify their religion and reform their social institutions was the most positive impact of modernization. Undoubtedly, Roy helped the people and the society a lot and has had secured a place in the history for himself. But his reform-work and the formation of the modified new society could not affect the great tradition of the Hindu culture as such and without bringing a lasting and comprehensive change to its intrinsic perennial nature (*Sanātana svarūpa*) could leave a partial and temporal impact only. Nevertheless, the extrinsic blemish on the religious and social faces of great Indian culture could get washed out. As it appears to me, the words 'modernization' and 'Westernization' are not to be equated as one could be modern without being western. The exclusive Westernization of India has not been the modernization of the latter. Even W. C. Smith was not ready to acknowledge the presence of the state of perfect modernity in the West. To be modern means, according to Smith, *moving in the direction of an increase in our awareness, so that possibilities open up, alternatives of choice emerge, where formerly we lived within a relatively closed horizon*. The knowledge of what is possible—an ever widening knowledge of ever new possibilities—and technique of implementing the same constitute the modernity.⁶ Thus, in original sense of the word, modernity does not treat any traditional, religious or regional factors of conditionality as indispensable obstruction raised on the way towards open and rational thinking.

Let us explore whether there were several welcoming notes from the Indian side as regards this modernizing tendency or that-it was all unwilling full. Mahatma Gandhi, an uncompromising believer in and advocate of the fundamental universalistic human values, not favouring the isolation and exclusion of a singular culture, acknowledged the possibility of synthetic or assimilative approach towards the alien cultural influences. Once he said:

'I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the culture of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any. I refuse to live in other people's houses as an interloper, a beggar or a slave.'⁷

The Indian culture of our times is in the making. Many of us are striving to produce a blend of all the cultures that seem today to be in clash with one another. ~~No culture can be taken as an exclusive~~ What does interest me is the fact that remote ancestors blended with one another with the utmost freedom and we of the present generation are a result of that blend.'⁸

Sometimes one could find out that several cases of multiculturalism and interculturism are the outcome of modernization. Gandhi also appears to have

Analyzing the needs and social role of modern Indian philosophy, several philosophers hinted at the incompetence of the typical Indian mentality engaged in the process of confronting the overshadowing effects of Western civilization. Whether a person was suffering from the complex of inferiority or there was another who is a victim of the superiority complex with reference to the attractive features of modernism, both of them were at loss. Professor D M Datta explicitly remarks:

A nation that is alive possesses, like a living organism, the power of assimilating from outside what is beneficial to it and also of rejecting what is harmful. Long foreign domination ~~created~~ our self-confidence. Cultural confidence is a mark of a living nation. When we lost it, we blindly imitated the West –particularly Great Britain. We lost faith in our unique inheritages, including even the best achievements of Indian philosophy. An ~~assimilation~~ foreign ideas and customs came to ride on a deep undercurrent of indigenous ones. There arose the morbid psychological phenomenon of a split personality. A reaction, equally blind, has now set in among a section of our people. They would have nothing from the West. It is a ~~cultural syndrome~~ ~~self-seek~~ ~~complex~~ that would not only impoverish our culture, but also hamper international understanding without which no nation can prosper at the present age.¹²

The cultural ingredients are so deep rooted in our existence as such that any unsuitable or unwanted domination over them may cause the psychologically worsen cases of identity-crisis in the form of split personalities or even suicide. Most philosophers of this era of religious orientation appear to be of the firm belief that the Indian culture is essentially spiritualistic. W.C. Smith remarks, ‘the effective history of India even today is its religious history.’¹³ Human being has a mind and beyond or even higher than that. Actually, that *beyond* something is the eternal source of creative and visionary aspect of culture (*Sanātana Sanskṛti*). The intuitive (*prātibh*) creative visions come from there only. Technically it is also called the ideational stage of consciousness (*paśyanti*). Immediately before the intuitive form is expressed either in the linguistic symbolization or the pictorial one, consciousness has it inside itself in the state of an idea only. It is not essential that such inspiring visions presuppose a *sādhanā* or sublimation of the soul through some esoteric practices. There have been several visionary persons in the history of Indian culture and civilization who were instrumental in bringing forth the revolutionary changes in social, religious and cultural dimensions of human life without being involved in so-called esoteric practices. These forms and visions of higher inspirational origin also constitute the foundation of Indian culture. One of the most important reasons why the Indian civilization, which is the oldest of the existing civilizations, is still alive and vibrant is perhaps that these essential elements have continued to exist in the minds, finest as well as general, of Indian people as something basic and vulnerable. Other non- essential or temporal aspect of this very culture has been modified or even removed to keep in tune with the changing times and environment. While looking back into the tradition one can explore two modes or dimensions of presupposition or truth functioning behind the formation of Indian culture and thought: one that is based upon the essential and *sanātana* nature of human being and its foundational spiritual aspirations. It also represents the meaning of human existence and its destiny or that, in other words, it explores the ontological and teleological implications of the human existence as such. The other dimension of basic presuppositions encompasses the beliefs and conditions about local circumstances,

environment, social, legal and political institutions of the period, its historicity and so on so forth. Accordingly, there are two sets of scriptures in Hinduism (also in several other communities of non-Indian origin residing and flourishing in India since a long time)—primary and secondary. The first class of presuppositions is chiefly embodied in the primary scriptures (*Śruti*), and the second in the secondary scriptures (*Smṛiti*).¹⁴ Throughout the evolution of the Indian worldview, it is found that for all periods, the primary scriptures are the final goal and authority, and if the secondary scriptures differ in any respect from the primary scriptures that part of the secondary scriptures is not to be treated as indispensably significant or it may even be put forward for the deletion or modification. The secondary scriptures may convey sometimes somehow different imports. Whereas one secondary scripture might hold that, this is the custom, and this should be the practice of a particular age in a particular situation. Another one may differ from the earlier one. As one of the most glorious and divine doctrine the body of eternal and foundational truths in the form of *sanātana dharma*, being based upon the inner most core of human being, is believed to remain unchanging so long as human being lives. However, the secondary scriptures speak generally of local circumstances, of duties suited to different environments and ages, and they are destined to change in the course of time. K. Satchidananda Murty, one of the great open-minded living scholar and philosopher of the present time, expresses some revolutionary and non-dogmatic views regarding this issue as much as he holds that a scripture may not contain all truths; in fact may not be free from all the errors and signs of imperfections. Even the divine revelations are considered by him *progressive and continuous*.¹⁵ The existing customs and practices as the outer form of a specific periodic culture have been changed several times in past. Likewise the contents and directives of a tradition also change. As we know, the scriptures along with their readings i.e. their interpretations are the constituent factors in the formation of a tradition. Nevertheless it is also true that a tradition plays greater role in determining the mode of interpretation. Those readings will continue changing for ever, and other interpretive traditions along with their unique beliefs will come forward. Emergence of the modernity is one of the examples. This is one of the foundational facts of the Indian culture, that the primary truth being eternal will be the same throughout all ages, but the secondary truths in the form of directive principles will have an end or at least a destiny of reformation. As time rolls on, more and more of the secondary beliefs or scriptures will go, visionary and leaders will come, and they will modify, sometimes superficially and sometimes radically, and direct society into newer channels, into duties and into paths and ideals that accord with the demands and conditions of the age.

Discussions pertaining to culture presuppose identity issues.¹⁶ Let me correlate it with the extrinsic and intrinsic elements of Indian culture as a whole. We have here *mystical* as well as *mundane* approaches for determining the identity of the individual. Beginning with the intrinsic or foundational ones, (still continued hence called *sanātana*) the implications of the *mahāvākyas*: *tattvamasi*, *aham brahmāsmi* etc. are yet to be explicated and interpreted along the phases of development of traditions. The issue of essential mystical identity begins with the dawn of the creation about which there is an interesting description in the ***Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad***:

Verily, in the beginning this was Brahman. It knew itself only as 'I am Brahman.' Therefore it became all. And whoever among the gods became awakened to this- he indeed became that. And the same was the case with the ~~Asur~~ ^{Asur}, the same with men. Seeing this indeed, the ~~Asur~~ ^{Asur} Vamdeva knew himself, 'I was Manu, and I was the sun too.' It is so even now. Whoever knows, 'I am Brahman', he becomes all, even the gods cannot prevent his becoming his for he himself has become their Self. (II.1.4)

It is precisely the primordial oneness that makes differentiation intrinsically possible. It shows that the individual self is also valuable as itself, because all generic and ontic differences are originating and getting resolved with the mystical Universal Self. This is the basic and mystical source of multiple identities thereafter. In view of the mundane approach to the issue of the human or social identity, it is realized that we live in the world of others. It is in relation to 'others' – to the society and environment in which one lives – that one's own mundane identity is formed or determined. With reference to both mystical and mundane view points, man is not an isolated being but a representative of constitutive and complex relationship. He is believed to be spiritually, rather essentially related with the universal or eternal Self and culturally with other selves who are temporal, or in other words, parts of his time and tradition. Apart from mystical and esoteric approach the spiritual identity can also be determined with reference to the whole spiritual-cultural heritage of the person and the society. It is an important factor of one's cultural involvement. Since there is a plurality of the little traditions of different geographical, regional, tribal and communal as well as religious origins in India, we have to take into account the identities of various types. Such identities including the *ethnic*¹⁷ one form the temporal aspect of Indian culture, so it may be lost sometime or become a victim of identity-crisis in the course of cultural changes of radical types. It is significant, provided one believes in the scriptural dictum of mystical identity of the human self with the divine-universal Self and which can be described as the essential or spiritualistic identity, that the identity of essential and spiritualistic origin does not exclude the *other* as much as the *other* is also constituted of the similar intrinsic element. This is the foundational notion of identity described with reference to the nature of human existence as such, explored, *largely* believed and well defined in the great tradition of Indian culture. We are here ignoring the minor traditions who think otherwise. The *śravan*, *manan* and *nididdhyāsan* of the concerned scriptural aphorisms or some other way of realization can give us solace during the moment of anxiety and crisis. It is important that such identity does not exclude the other forms of identity determinable in the mundane terms. It simply denies their foundational and eternal status and is able to integrate them within itself.

A certain dialectic or complementary relationship between pluralism and syncretism seems to pervade the colourful fabric of Indian civilization. Three interrelated themes of this dialectic may be delineated¹⁸: (a) pan-Indian, (b) within the fold of Hinduism, and (c) the regional context. The pan-Indian, civilization-dimension of cultural pluralism and syncretism encompasses racial diversity and admixture, linguistic heterogeneity as well as fusion, and variations as well as synthesis in customs, behaviour patterns, beliefs and rituals. Pluralism has been one of the quintessential features of Hinduism both at the metaphysical as well as socio-cultural level. At the metaphysical level, sometimes truth

was asserted pluralistically. For instance, if two *Śruti* traditions are in conflict, both of them are held as imperative resulting in two or more parallel little traditions. One great tradition integrates different beliefs at once. That is why great Indian cultural heritage is called magnanimous in its nature and perhaps richest in its content. Consequently, two or more little traditions are started at once. Thus, as in this case, two or more exclusive religious communities or little traditions are being formed owing to varying interpretation of single scriptural truth or one identical spiritual heritage. The inherently pluralistic *ethos* of Hinduism is reflected in the divergent range of beliefs, convictions, customs and behaviour patterns. The survival of pre-Aryan deities, rituals and ceremonies in the distant segregated groups of people, for instance in different tribal communities, proves the syncretism. The epic tradition bears the seeds of pluralism. For instance, the *Ramakathā* and the *Paurāṇik* symbolism have several variants or versions, each equally recognized. The process of acculturation and integration has been extensively at work, especially at the regional level. Though each community implies a distinctive identity and *ethos* of its own, it has some social relevance and functionality. Rather, one can say, it forms a sector of the comprehensive and dynamic network. Some interaction, exchange and integration exhibit inter-community relations. The sharing of space, regional *ethos* and cultural traits minimizes the religious and sectarian differences and binds regional community together.¹⁹

There is always an instrumentality of several other thinkers of creative orientation intuitively awakened and devoid of any esoteric involvements in the perceiving of a new vision pertaining to culture. The creative field of art and literature is being constantly enriched by them. Yash Dev Shalya, for instance, one amongst them, seems eager to explore those avenues of enriching experience afresh through his journey within the *Srijanātmaka Pratyānmukhatā* (सृजनात्मक प्रत्यङ्मुखता) of the consciousness. Shalya defines this period of the impact of modernity as '*ātmanavīkaranātmaka*' (आत्मनवीकरणात्मकता) and '*ātmasarjanātmaka*'.²⁰ Immediately after the spread of modernity in Indian subcontinent there emerged a series of thinkers either persons coming from a purely spiritual lineage or those of exclusively creative temperament who showed utmost interest in the review of the tradition and also in a fresh creative envisioning of the direction and destination of a new cultural idea. In any case, the spirit of assimilation along with a well-thought appropriation²¹ of the alien culture and beliefs was alive and active even in the post-independence Indian thought in social and cultural contexts. S. Radhakrishnan, for instance, has already expressed in his ***Eastern Religions and Western Thoughts*** that India has performed in its history, several times, quite successfully the tasks and experiments of the fusion of the divergent races and cults and philosophical beliefs. With reference to the *sanātana* or essential aspect of Indian cultural heritage and the tendencies of assimilative and integrated development, vibrant and active within itself, one cannot justifiably think of the periodic cultures of exclusively ethnic variety to form singularly the much debated concept of national identity. Whether it is the temporal impact of modernity or the expression of local or ethnic elements, all are transient phases in the bosom of a great culture of eternal or *sanātana* nature. The most significant factor that one can notice during the so-called phase of modernization of Indian culture consists in the involvement of the finest minds of the nation in the process of transformation of cultural forms already available inside the two traditions-ours as well

as alien; intuitive as well as deliberate envisioning of new forms and assimilation of what is beneficial and worth accepting within the modernity through and appropriation. This could happen only because those minds were open. Such openness has already been acknowledged as the essential feature of modernity. There are many noteworthy thinkers who accept that even during these moments of rather invading effects of modernity, the foundational and *sanātana* or basic and perennial aspect of great Indian cultural tradition could keep itself intact and assimilated whatsoever it evaluated as significant in the alien thought. Let me quote Milton Singer:

The weight of the present evidence seems to me to show that, while modernizing influences are undoubtedly changing many aspects of Indian society and culture, they have not destroyed its ~~sanātana~~ *sanātana*. They have given Indians new alternatives and some new choices of lifestyle but the structure is so flexible and rich that many Indians have accepted many modern innovations without loss of their Indian ness. They have, in other words, been able to combine choices which affirm some aspects of their cultural traditions with innovative choices.²²

Until and unless we accept that there is something *sanātana* or eternal, inherent in the Indian culture, keeping itself identical and intact through out the ages and revolutionary changes, we cannot hold the view that it (the Indian culture) assimilates in itself, through the process of appropriation of whatsoever it could find suitable. This may be called a national identity or the spirit of the Indian culture or simply a cultural identity of India.

Self-understanding precedes every other form of understanding as much as it also determines the modes and orientations of our perceptions and the presuppositions of the interpretations. The phenomenology of understanding of a transformation of traditional forms and that of envisioning of new forms on the basis of either a purely creative intuition or a rational/reactionary response to historical and environmental influences or an illumination mystically made available to a saintly person (*sādhaka*) during the moments of supramental meditation is very interesting and somehow thought provoking. Every cultural formation has a vision behind it. Even if such culture is a resultant factor of a revolution, that revolution itself is an outcome of an inspiring intuition. The Upanishads are abundantly rich in stories of states of indecisions and the dialectics through which the conclusive judgment is arrived at. After a long chain of dialogues it was the *rishi*, the seer of all possible perspectives and the judge of the right one, who used to give the most appropriate answer possible in a particular situation of doldrums. A person of a pure spiritual orientation may have a first hand knowledge of the alternative possibilities and capabilities of complex-free judicious choice. Every thought expressive of different ideologies whether it is materialistic or spiritualistic or pertaining to some other forms of Hegelian speculation and dialectic, takes birth, nurtures and gets maturity in the consciousness itself. The *Tantric Scripture* says: '*tadbhūmikā sarvadarśana sthitayah*'²³ implying that the positions of various systems of philosophy are only roles of specific consciousness pertaining to different platforms and perspectives. The *Āgamas* hold, and as Sri Aurobindo has also propounded, the consciousness which is arranging itself in the microcosmic human beings, identically structures and determines its formation in the macrocosmic level.' *Yad pinde tad brahmānde.* It implies that creative envisioning is a natural conscious choice beginning at the microcosmic level; every other thing including ideologies and institutions is simply expressive of our creative conscious concentrations.

We find somehow similar mode of thinking in Sri Aurobindo. Assigning much significance to and following the line of integral interpretation of the Indian text and tradition, he suggests a *creative formation within the self of whatsoever one finds worth suitable and inspiring outside*,

Spiritual and temporal have indeed to be perfectly harmonized, for the spirit works through mind and body. But the purely intellectual or heavily material culture of the kind that Europe now favours bears in its heart the seed of death; for the living aim of culture is the realization on earth of the kingdom of heaven. India, though its urge is towards the Eternal, since that is always the highest, the entirely real, still contains in her own culture and her own philosophy a supreme reconciliation of the eternal and the temporal and she need not seek it from outside.....the novel formation must be ~~new self-expression or self-creation, a new way~~ it must be characteristics of the spirit and not servilely borrowed from the embodiment of an alien nature.²⁴

If there is any doubtful and dangerous situation in the form of an identity crisis envisaging invading alien cultural influences, one can have recourse to its spiritual remedial measures already available in the *Śruti* or as the finest minds within tradition have had exhibited in their lives—‘*mahājano yen gatah sa panthah*’. Nevertheless the directives pertaining to ‘openness’ as an important element of modernity are also evident in our ancient tradition of Vedic origin. Surprisingly, during this specific period of the impact of modernity in India, there were a great number of scholars and saintly persons (*sādhakas*) of the Indian as well as alien origins, who wrote exhaustively, experientially, comparatively and sometimes even creatively about great Indian traditions of *Vedic* or *Tāntric* origin for the sake of its regeneration. This endeavour could help the people know and assimilate the deepest, universally-understandable import of their old traditions and scriptures in the modified new environment and characteristic openness of rationality. Their interpretations are sometimes radically different from what had been done centuries back by the scholars of the tradition. But those differences and suggestions in terms of radical modifications can neither put the great Indian cultural traditions to an end nor make it remain segregated. Such new interpretations were rather convincing. Consciousness of the particular age (*yuga*) reflects in the consciousness of the individual who ever attempts to understand a text or a tradition and this is perhaps the reason why the people of that particular era readily follow those interpretations. In spite of their minds’ openness towards scientific inventions and other innovative ideas that emerged in social, economic and political spheres of human activities during that period, those new interpreters could do justice to the text, tradition and their self-understanding and this way enriched the cultural heritage and great tradition of India on the one hand and made it relevant, of course in modified forms, for the people on the other. Most of them attempted a creative synthesis and assimilative appropriation of some of the contemporaneous and useful elements of modernity in their envisioned, intuited and experienced form of expression. Nevertheless, it was neither a breaking with the past nor a substitution of a radical nature but simply an appropriate modification. Some scholarly-saints even enriched the so called official language of the modernism adding new terms to it along with creative connotations of intuitive (प्रातिभ) origin. This I consider a *Sanātana Sanskriti* which remains *modern* through its novel and culturally appropriated interpretations, and creative formation of new visions. Let us listen to somewhat similar resonance in the view of C.P. Ramaswami Aiyer who discusses about

the presence of essential continuity within the traditions of divergent interpretations and highlights the element of *sanātanatā*,

“However unhistorical as those traditional methods of exegesis no doubt were, they nevertheless had the advantages of ~~nevertheless coming to the original sources to the~~ development from the original sources to the contemporary school; thus, though the path might have taken many a turn, it was never entirely detached from its outset.”²⁵

While reading K. Satchidananda Murty’s views and analyses regarding culture as expressed by him in his ***Ethics, Education Indian Unity and Culture***, I could find several supporting arguments for the statement of this article. First of all, he agrees upon the continuity and antiquity being the distinctive feature of Indian culture. This aspect may be compared with what we call *sanātanatā*. Professor Ramamurty, in his article entitled “*The Indian Spirit—An Exercise in Philosophy of Indian Culture*”²⁶ has discussed the issue of importance of the spirituality and the concept of Indian culture and life with reference to the views held by K. Satchidananda Murty on the one hand and that propounded by several great philosophers and saints of the contemporary India such as Swami Vivekananda, S. Radhakrishnan, Mahatma Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo and Tagore on the other. Murty’s view is not in full agreement with the views held by the others, mentioned above, who identify spirituality as the meaning or essence of Indian life and culture. He attaches much importance, according to Professor Vohra²⁷, to the ‘cultural regeneration’ as far as the all round development of a country is concerned. This cultural regeneration “becomes possible only through an assimilation of the national tradition.”²⁸ The cultural regeneration consists in the awakening of the national identity, consciousness and pride. The concept of assimilative appropriation can only be justified when one accepts some doors remaining always open within the continuity and identity of our culture. This sanction one may find in Murty’s conception of culture in general and that of the Indian culture in particular. No culture, including the Great Indian one, is perfect, static, superior and closed. According to him, “---no society so far has developed a culture which is perfect”.²⁹ Naturally, there is no use of talking about ‘modernity’ or any other change in culture as such if the so called great cultures are considered perfect and closed. Murty has assigned much importance to the anthropocentric and environmental factors in modifying and shaping or the culture. He regards culture as a result of ‘corporate human effort over generations’. (***Ethics***.p.4) Murty openly discusses the prospects of assimilating the impacts of other cultures. Let me quote Prof. Vohra: “According to Murty, being “steeped in our own culture” and a “mooring in one’s own culture” is a precondition for grasping fully the import of other cultures and “achieving boundless communication with other cultures”. For him, an awareness of our own cultural presupposition, on the other hand, and our understanding of a foreign culture, on the other, are reciprocal and interdependent. Our understanding of the beliefs and practices of other cultures is closely linked with our critical consciousness of our own beliefs and practices. It is only by means of the latter that we come to grips and can ‘handle’ meaningfully the former.”³⁰ To finish this discussion rather abruptly I must quote one appropriate statement delivered by Professor K.S.Murty that reflects not only the back ground of the tendency of assimilative appropriation prevalent during the period of the impact of modernity in India but appears to be a symbolic representation of the *mood of*

modernity as such on the one hand and our ancient Vedic wisdom of “*ā no bhadrah kratavo yantu vishvatah!*” (**Rig-Veda**, I.89.1) on the other:

“---rooted in our own tradition we should always keep our horizons open”.³¹

Notes and References:

*This paper has been presented by me and discussed in the **ICPR** sponsored **National Seminar** on **Modernity and the Problem of Cultural Identity** organized by the Department of Philosophy, H.S. Gaur University, Sagar during January, 2005.

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2. ***The New College Latin & English Dictionary***, ed. John C. Truman (New York, Amsco School Publications, 1966): 185
3. ***Webster's Dictionary***: 1236
4. **Mehta**, p.230
5. Yogendra Singh, ***Modernization of Indian Tradition***, Thomson Press, Faridabad, 1973, p.61
6. Discussed in **Mehta**, p.231.
7. ***Young India***, 1-6-1921, p.170
8. ***Harijan***, 9-5-1936, pp.100-1
9. ***Ibid***, 17-11-1920, p.6
10. ***Young India***, 30-4-1931, p.38
11. ***The Foundations of Indian Culture***, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1959, p.439
12. 'Modern Indian Philosophy: Its Needs and its Social Role', ***Facets of Recent Indian Philosophy***. Vol.2, Gen. Edt. R. Balasubramaniam, ICPR, 1996, p.217-18 (the italics-effects are mine)
13. Quoted in **Mehta**, p.233
14. We find another version of the classification of the *Śāstras*: “The Hindu *Śāstras* are classified into *Śruti*, *Smṛiti*, *Purāna* and *Tantra*. The three last all assume the first as their base, and are, in fact, merely special presentments of it for the respective ages.” (Sir John Woodroffe, ***Principles of Tantra***, Part-I, Madras, 1986, p.35)
15. K. Satchidananda Murty, ***Ethics, Education, Indian Unity and Culture***, Ajanta Publication, 1991. Hereafter mentioned as ***Ethics***, op.cit. p.89
16. The incident of deciding the identity of Satyakama Jabala is somehow worth mentioning. (***Chhāndogya Upanishad***, 4.4.1-5)
17. The word “ethnicity” in a modern sense was first used by W. Lloyd Warner during the Second World War (Sollors, 1996) and appeared in the ***Oxford English Dictionary*** in 1972 for the first time (Glazer & Moynihan, 1975). It has been defined and understood in relation to the situation at that time (Eriksen, 1993)
18. Momin, A.R., ‘Cultural Pluralism, National Identity and Development-The Indian Case’, ***Interface Of Cultural Identity Development***, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi. 1996
19. K.S. Singh. ***The People of India: an Introduction***, pp.96-101.

20. “भारत का नये युग में प्रवेश आत्मनवीकरणात्मक, आत्मसर्जनात्मक था। इसमें मानव और जगत का तत्त्व अंवेष्ट था, अनुभव और साक्षात्कार सत्य के प्रमापक थे और भौतिक समृद्धि तथा ऐन्द्रिक संतोष के बजाय भाव और विचार की समृद्धि और आध्यात्मिक संतोष अंवेष्ट थे। यह था नवयुग जिसमें भारत जागा था और जिसका कारण यूरोपीय संस्कृति से भारत को चुनौती मिलना था।”(*Samaj: Darshanik Parishilan*, Rawat Publications, New Delhi, p.174)
21. Datta describes this phenomenon as ‘judicious assimilation’, ‘Modern Indian Philosophy: Its Needs and its Social Role’, *Facets of Recent Indian Philosophy*, Vol.2, p.218.
22. “Social Organization of Indian Tradition”, op. cit., p.111 (Quoted in *Modernization of Indian Tradition* by Yogendra Singh, p.14)
23. *Pratyabhijñā Hrdayam*, sutra-8
24. *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, p.8-9
25. Ramaswami Aiyer, C.P., “A Resolution for Renovation of Indian Culture”, *Facets of Recent Indian Philosophy*, Vol. IV: The Philosophy of Life, edited by S.P.Dubey, Indian Council of Philosophical Research, New Delhi, 1998pp.66-80. Italics, however, are mine.
26. Ramamurty, “The Indian Spirit—An Exercise in Philosophy of Indian Culture”, *The Philosophy of K. Satchidananda Murty*, pp.241-253
27. Professor Ashok Vohra has contributed a serious chapter entitled, “Murty’s Notion of Culture: An Appraisal” to *The Philosophy of K. Satchidananda Murty*(edited by Sibjiban Bhattacharyya and Ashok Vohra, ICPR, New Delhi, 1995) and elaborated, rather critically, what Murty really intended.
28. *Ethics*, op.cit., p.89
29. K. Satchidananda Murty, *The Indian Spirit*, Andhra University Press, 1965, p.v
30. “Murty’s Notion of Culture: An Appraisal”, p.257
31. *Ethics, Education, Indian Unity and Culture*, p.3

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