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Self, Other and the Challenge of Culture

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In its essence, literature is concerned with the self; and the particular concern of the literature of the last two centuries has been with the self in its standing quarrel with culture... This intense conviction of the existence of self apart from culture is, as culture knows, its noblest and most generous achievement. At the present moment it must be thought of as a liberating idea without which our developing idea of community is bound to defeat itself.

- Lionel Trilling (1955), *Beyond Culture*, p.118.

The essential view of culture was modelled on an essentialist view of *person*, both of which assume a monolithic identity defined in terms of *difference* vis-a-vis other cultures and other persons. The essentialist concept of "culture" was, so to speak, an expanded version of the western person, i.e., an identity concerned in terms of invariance, boundaries, and exclusion. Paradoxically, a truly "postmodern" personhood means a radicalized individualism, in that it implies greater openness, i.e., a greater capacity to "bracket" one's own reference points and to relate to *specific* others in creative, non-stereotyped ways.

- Alf Hornborg (1994)
"Encompassing Encompassment:
Anthropology and the U-Turn of Modernity," pp.234-235 (emphases in the original).

...the theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualizing an *inter*national culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's *hybridity*. To that end we should remember that it is the 'inter'—the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between* space— that carries the burden of the meaning of culture...And by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves

-Homi K. Bhabha (1994),
The Location of Culture, p. 39 (emphases in the original).

The Problem

We are now in a paradoxical situation in both theory and practice vis-a-vis the work of self, other and culture in our lives and our reflections on these. Self, other and culture are significant categories now; they are not merely categories of analysis but are emotionally loaded vehicles for us in as much as they deeply structure and affect our identities and differences and their multiple constructions today. The contemporary world of thought in many ways revolve around the questions of self and other, identity and difference. But contemporary reflection is not sufficiently reflective about the paradox and challenge in which we are vis-a-vis the questions of self and other and in this paper I aim at mapping this field of discourse with its inherent contradictions.

First, let us take up the question of self. Some commentators now draw our attention to the rise of a "reflective self" in what they call late modern times or in the condition of postmodernity (Dallmayr 1985; Giddens 1991; Inglehart 1990). For them, the "reflective self" is not the same thing as the "modern aggrandizing individual" (Giddens 1991:209); it is not a minimalist self but an actor which is critical of itself and appreciative of the other. But these commentators do not critically analyze the distinction between individual as a product of society and occupant of role identity and the reflective self as a historical process and an ontological question. Building upon their work, it is tempting to think about recent traditions in self, society and culture in such terms; if modernity was characterized by a preoccupation with "possessive individualism", then postmodernism is a movement for the discovery of the self[1]. But these commentators do not realize that the articulated shift from the "possessive individual" to "reflective self" is an evolutionary challenge and an ideal for us which requires multi-dimensional struggle in self and society, at least paralleling the struggle that involved the birth of the individual from the wombs of all-consuming and all-encompassing communities during the birth of modernity. In this paper, I present a scheme of the transformative self that can potentially invite us to realize the distinction between us as sociological individuals and reflective selves. I present the ontology and cosmology of the "reflective self"—its webs of interlocution as well as its non-discursive constitution, its ideal universalism and interactive commitment drawing on the seminal works of two important interlocutors of our times, Govind Chandra Pande (1982, 1989) and Charles Taylor (1989).

I present the scheme of an ideal self at somewhat great length because I believe that insufficient attention to it and inadequate realization of it has colored the way we relate to the other. On the one hand, contemporary movements of thought which radicalizes differences give us an impression that now we are

more sensitive to the other, rather than just being preoccupied with ourselves. But these moves which emphasize difference represent a reversal of move from self to the other without realizing that mere sensitivity or invitation to the other is not enough, the question is what is the nature of this invitation and what is the nature of the self[2]. Thus without work on self and without the transformation of the individual from an egotistic monad to a reflective self is it possible realize that the non- self is also part of the self? I address this question in my subsequent meditation on the challenge of the other in our contemporary times. I discuss contemporary efforts to systematically erase the other for the sake of self and the accompanying politics of resentment in the name of identity and difference. Building upon the seminal work of William Connolly (1991), I argue that it is a capacity for ethicality on the part individuals which can help us come out of the paradox of simultaneous rhetorical valorization of the other and its systematic social annihilation in our present times.

The paradox that we face vis-a-vis the questions of self and other is accentuated when we confront the predicament of culture. On the one hand, contemporary thought celebrates the present age as an age of appreciation of cultural diversity. But in reality, new boundaries and new rhetorics of exclusion are now being created in the name of culture (Stolcke 1995). In Europe, North America, and many parts of the world immigrants and aliens with a different culture are the targets of attack and exclusion. In the present paper, I map this field of discourse but I argue that the contemporary "fundamentalism of culture," as Stolcke characterizes the new practice of exclusion, cannot be solved by electoral politics and state action alone; it also requires a reflexive mobilization of self as the actor of culture and its creative embodiment.

Sources of Self

What is the meaning of self in this presentation? It is that depth and reflective dimension within oneself which has the capacity to critically look at the given of social and cultural life and create a good society. It is that dimension within individual life which "generates programmes of actualization and mastery" (Giddens 1991 : 9) and becomes an agent of criticism, creativity, and transformation. The nature and source of this reflective self has been recently described for us by Charles Taylor. Taylor's self is not simply a sociological individual, an occupant of social roles whom Ralf Dahrendorf had characterized as "Homo Sociologicus" long ago.[3] For Taylor, ".... we are selves insofar as we move in a certain space of questions, as we seek and find an orientation to the good. Our orientation in relation to the good requires not only some framework(s) which define the shape of the qualitatively higher but also a sense of where we stand in relation to this" (Taylor 1989: 35, 42). For Taylor, "the modern aspiration for meaning and substance in one's life has obvious affinities with longer-standing aspirations to higher being, to immortality" (Taylor 1989: 43). The work of self is characterized by a "radical reflexivity." Presenting the thoughts of St. Augustine, Taylor thus writes: "....radical reflexivity takes on a new status, because it is the 'space' in which we effect the turning from lower to higher" (Taylor 1989: 40). Self also has a depth dimension which is described by Taylor thus: "The inescapable feeling of depth comes from the realization that there is always more down there. Depth lies in there being always, inescapably, something beyond our articulating power" (Taylor 1989: 390). Thus an enquiry into self is "not only a phenomenological account but an exploration of the limits of the conceivable in human life, an account of its transcendental conditions" (Taylor 1989: 32).

In social thought the view that self is born of interaction has a long tradition and probably one of its most distinguished articulators in modern times has been George Herbert Mead who argues that the self is born of and realized in interactions with others. But though self is born of social interaction, Taylor argues that it nonetheless has a transcendental dimension. It is its transcendental dimension which enables the realization of what Mead himself states: "What is essential to communication is that the symbol should arouse in oneself what it arouses in the other individual" (quoted in Habermas 1987: 15). But a stress on the depth dimension or the non-reducible dimension of self cannot ignore its crucial dependence on interaction with the other either. In Taylor's view, the view of self as containing the universe but "bypassing any necessary relation to other humans" "do nothing to lift the transcendental conditions" (Taylor 1989: 39)

Taylor urges us to pay adequate attention both to the "webs of interlocution" or webs of interaction and the non-reducible transcendental dimensions in the sources of the self. Some protagonists of self such as the Romantics and the American transcendentalists define themselves explicitly in relation to no web at all. But Taylor argues that even though we may "sharply shift the balance in our definition of identity, dethrone the given, historic community as a pole of identity, and relate only to the community defined by adherence to the good, this doesn't severe our dependence on webs of interlocution. It only changes the webs, and the nature of our dependence" (Taylor 1989: 39). For Taylor, "...a common picture of the self, as (at least potentially and ideally) drawing its purposes, goals, and life plans out of itself, seeking "relationships" only insofar as they are 'fulfilling,' is largely based on ignoring our embedding in webs of interlocution" (ibid). But at the same time, to reduce self only to webs of interlocution is to miss a great

deal about the nature of the self. One important locus of self lies in its detachment from webs of interlocution as well. For Taylor, such a locus has been emphasized in the spiritual traditions of western civilization, which "have encouraged, even demanded, a detachment from the second dimension of identity as this is normally lived, that is, from particular, historic communities, from the given webs of birth and history" (Taylor 1989: 36). "In the writings of the prophets and the Psalms, we are addressed by people who stood out against the almost obloquy of these communities in order to deliver God's message. In a parallel development, Plato describes a Socrates who was firmly rooted enough in philosophical reason to be able to stand in imperious independence of Athenian opinion" (Taylor 1989: 37).

This detached aspect of self has not received adequate attention in modern social thought. True, scholars such as Jurgen Habermas (1990a) speak of the capacity of taking a hypothetical attitude to culture on the part of an individual but they do not explore the deeper sources of the self which makes this detachment possible (see, Giri 1995).[4] For Habermas, a critical insight of cognitive distantiation is born of one's participation in rational deliberation on the problems of life. The similar is also the approach of a scholar such as Seyla Benhabib. In her project on self, Benhabib (1992) states that the challenge is now to work out the agenda of an "interactive universalism," an important aspect of which is "the vision of an embodied and embedded human self whose identity is constituted narratively" (Benhabib 1992: 6).

But does the narrative of the self exhaust its sources? Probably not. Apart from interactive universalism, to talk of the self is also to talk of ideal universalism. This is a point emphasized by Indian philosopher Govind Chandra Pande. According to Pande, "It is only a self which is conscious of its ideal universality that can distinguish values from appetites, pleasures, and selfish interests and become the moral subject. It is the notion of the ideal self which is the source of the moral law on which social unity and coherence depend. The being or reality of person is in self-consciousness which contains within itself a tension between ideality and actuality.xxx The ideal self is not an abstract model designed in the interest of social usefulness but the ultimately real transcendental subject in which immediacy and coherence on non-contradiction both coalesce" (Pande 1982: 113-114). The idea of ideal universalism is a "powerful ideal for us" even in modern times; though by no means it takes us out of the "original situation of identity-formation", it nevertheless "transforms our position within it" "however little we may live up to it in practice.." (Taylor 1989: 37).

Pande stresses on two aspects of "ideal universalism" as an attribute of the self, which deserves our careful consideration. First, though "an ideal is neither an actual thing nor a mere thought nor a logical form," yet its reality in society and history is "undeniable" (Pande 1982: 101). For Pande, "The socio-historical world would be inconceivable without the moving force of ideals" (ibid). Second, Pande urges us to realize the non-discursive dimension of self which is usually thought of as a product of discourse. Pande argues that the non-discursive dimension of self has been most poignantly articulated in the Indian philosophical tradition. Pande begins with an acknowledgment that the view that "knowledge and reality belong to several corresponding levels and that the way to the highest is prepared by philosophy as a dialectical examination of ideas is common to western idealism, as exemplified in Plato and Hegel, and the Indian traditions of Buddhism and Vedanta" (Pande 1982: 103). But while in Plato and Hegel self consciousness remains "continuous with human social experience" the Indian philosophical attitude, on the other hand, "interprets the absolute level of reality to correspond to non-discursive knowledge in which the sense of social difference is overcome by spiritual unity" (ibid). "Social reality thus corresponds to an intermediate level in the dialectic of consciousness, a level where the self is not seen as a mere object nor is the object seen as merely self" (ibid). Thus for Pande, contra-Habermas, self is not constituted of language and discourse alone. Self is constituted of the dialectic between immanence and transcendence, silence and language, eternity and history, ideal universalism and interactive universalism.

How does such a self relate to the other? A self guided by ideal universalism considers it its duty to overcome the distinction between self-regarding activities and other-regarding activities.[5] In pursuing one's self-interest, a self conscious of its ideal universality and responsive to its interactive community, also helps or becomes a medium in the realization of the interests of the other.

The Challenge of the Other

Such a view of a reflective and transformative self is now crucial for dealing with the problem of the other. The other was once banished from the aggrandizing agenda of modern individualism. The colonialist self of the modern individual could only register the other in its map at the moment of conquest. But now because of decolonization and democratization as the colonialist self is slowly transforming itself into a sharing self, the other now refuses total incorporation into the self. To put this in the words of Derrida, differences now are transforming themselves into "differences" in as much they resist total incorporation into the system through a process of deferral (see, Barnett 1989). Postmodernism is supposed to be a

moment of celebration of the other, a moment of inviting the other into the self.[6] But despite the self-congratulation of postmodernism, the other at present is still being incorporated into a colonizing self and being erased from the face of the earth. The new racism in Europe, anti-immigration movements in North America, and ethnic fratricide in almost all parts of the world are vivid reminders of the unfinished task before us insofar as the question of inviting the other into self is concerned.

The other is still being systematically erased now and, what is more, democratic politics is contributing to this erasure. William Connolly provides us a graphic portrayal of the systematic erasure of the other in the political theater of late capitalism. Welfare recipients and terrorists are the most prominent others in the "culture of sacrifice" that politics in late-capitalist state creates (Connolly 1991: 210). In advanced industrial societies, the failure of welfarism "provides an outlet for generalized resentment" which electoral politics exploits. The welfare class becomes an other in the electoral politics of the state which becomes the object of erasure. In the words of Connolly: "The welfare class thus becomes a permanent demonstration project on the theatricality of power" (Connolly 1991: 208). "It becomes a dispensable subject of political representation and an indispensable subject of political disposability" (ibid). Similar is also the approach to the other "Other" in late capitalist discourse, namely the problem of terrorism. Terrorism as an other "provides domestic constituencies with agents of evil to explain the vague experience of danger, frustration, and ineffectiveness in taming global contingency" (Connolly 1991: 207). As Connolly argues, "Terrorism, as the other constituted by the state system, allows the state and the interstate system to protect the logic of sovereignty in the international sphere while veiling their inability to modify systemic conditions that generate violence by non-state agents" (ibid). "The moral isolation of non-state violence from other modalities of violence produces multiple effects..... it deflects attention from deficiency in state efficacy with respect to environment, inequality, and co- existence with third-world peoples" (ibid).[7]

Anti-welfarism, which aims at erasing the internal other from the space of attention and significance in advanced industrial societies, and anti-terrorism, which aims at erasing the external other, gives rise to a politics of resentment.[8] In such a situation, "Electoral politics contains powerful pressures to become a closed circuit for dogmatism of identity through the translation of difference into threat and threat into energy for the dogmatization of identity" (ibid). One significant instance of this dogmatization of identity is the recent anti-immigration law in California which debars state benefits in health and education to the children of the illegal immigrants residing there.

If such is the incapacity of electoral politics to deal with the problem of the other what is required is a moral politics of the self which grants legitimacy to the needs and aspirations of the other. Jurgen Habermas's analysis of the problem of poverty and disadvantage in advanced industrial societies leads to such a suggestion. For Habermas, while in the classical phase of capitalism capital and labour could threaten each other for pursuing their interests, today "this is no longer the case" (Habermas 1990b: 19). Now the underprivileged can make their predicament known primarily through a "protest vote" but "without the electoral support of a majority of citizens...problems of this nature do not even have enough driving force to be adopted as a topic of broad and effective public debate" (Habermas 1990b: 20). In this context, a moral politics of self is the answer as Habermas argues: "A dynamic self correction cannot be set in motion without introducing morals into the debate, without universalizing interests from a normative point of view" (ibid). The same moral politics of self is required in dealing with the problem of terrorism as the other "Other." Terrorist violence may represent some sub-national aspirations within a state-system which calls for sympathetic understanding of the systematic indignity that terrorists have gone through which is one of the factors for the rise of terrorism. It is a moral politics of self which is required in addressing other global contingencies such as environmental disaster, world poverty, and the inequality between the North and the South. In the words of Habermas: "The moral or ethical point of view makes us quicker to perceive the far-reaching, and simultaneously less insistent and more fragile ties, that bind the fate of an individual to that of every other making even the most alien person a member of one's community" (ibid).

We are indeed now in a paradoxical situation insofar as the problem of the Other is concerned. The paradox is that "we cannot dispense with personal and collective identities, but the multiple drives to stamp truth upon those identities function to convert differences into otherness and otherness into scapegoats created and maintained to serve the appearance of true identity" (Connolly 1991: 67). For Connolly, ethicality—an ethicality whose main motive is an appreciation of difference—can disturb the self-closure of identity. By encouraging bonding through differentiation, ethicality can transform the demand for an "all embracing identity," leading to the loss of the power that a fixed moral code exercises over the self (Connolly 1991: 167). Connolly also believes that democratic politics can disturb the self closure of identity too. But given his own discussion of the degeneration of democratic politics into a politics of erasure of difference, what has to be stressed is the ethical problematization of the fixation of identities and the denial of differences. What is more, development of certain technologies of self can contribute towards a

relativization of one's absolute identity. As Connolly argues: "Most people have experienced gaps between the identity ascribed to them and subversive orientations to life that press upon them...Attention to these gaps can encourage the cultivation of genealogical history, and genealogical histories can accentuate the experience of contingency in identity" (Connolly 1991: 183).

In this context, Connolly himself speaks of the need for the emergence of an "overman" in us. Connolly argues that in the contemporary condition, the "Overman" is not a special caste or a social type but is a voice within the Self fighting with other voices including the politics of resentment. Overman is a creative dimension in all of us which is critical of the motive to dominate, erase, and annihilate the Other. Overman is not the Nietzchian Superman but the higher Self in us and is not a vehicle of the "aesthetics of empowerment" (cf. Unger 1987; also, Harvey 1989) but the vehicle of an "ethics of obligation" (Drucker 1993). At the same time, the Overman is the universalized person in us which can help us develop a reflective stance towards our ego and an appreciative stance towards the predicament and possibility of the Other. Moreover, the Overman is that dimension in the Self which provides us the capacity for self-sacrifice and renunciation — a capacity without which not only the primitive societies and their world of gift and exchange cannot function but also contemporary advanced societies. As Roberto Unger (1987) tells us, without the personalist program of sacrifice and renunciation which is a program of a creation of a "good society" (Bellah et al. 1991), the program of democracy is doomed to fail. But for Unger, a citizen renounces his need for security not only because of "the guarantee of immunity afforded by a system" but because of a spiritual commitment to transformation. "Its higher spiritual significance consists in the assertion of transcendence as a diurnal context smashing " (Unger 1987:579). It is no wonder then that in outlining his agenda of reconstruction and transformation Unger speaks of two kinds of sacred order—the social and the transcendental—and argues that once the social loses touch with the transcendental then we are bereft of our capacity for criticism and creativity. The social order then becomes a devil's world where God chooses to go into hibernation (Giri 1994; Hebermas 1981; and Sri Aurobindo 1950).

Unger's outline of a reconstructive movement points to the spiritual foundation of our critical reflection and collective action in the context of the contemporary predicament of the Self and the Other. In my reading of Unger I would like to draw this lesson for the problem at hand that without spiritual work on the self it is difficult to accept the Other as part of the Self or to realize that the non-self is also self. Thus we have to rethink our identity as the sociological individual and discover the transcendent and the universal dimension within ourselves.

The Predicament of Culture

If such is the predicament and possibility with regard to self and other, then what about the contemporary predicament of culture? On the one hand, contemporary changes urge us to recognize cultural difference which is articulated by Clifford Geertz thus: "Imagining difference remains a science of which we all have need" (Geertz 1986: 120). For Geertz, now that, "foreignness does not start at the water's edge but at the skin's", "there is need for a certain readjustment in both our rhetorical habits and sense of mission" (Geertz 1986: 119). But on the other hand now there seems to be a new process of creation of the other in the name of culture at work. Anthropologist Verena Stolcke tells us how new boundaries and new rhetorics of exclusion are now being created in Europe in the name of culture (Stolcke 1995). Stolcke characterizes it as a new racism which works through the logic of what she calls "cultural fundamentalism" and is different from the "old racism" which emphasized physical inferiority (Stolcke 1995: 4). In her view, "From what were once assertions of the differing endowment of human races there has risen since the seventies a rhetoric of inclusion and exclusion that emphasizes the distinctiveness of cultural identity, traditions, and heritage among groups and assumes the closure of culture by territory" (Stolcke 1991: 1). This creation of exclusion in the name of culture is most evident in the anti-immigration rhetoric and law in Europe. According to one commentator, "Immigrants threaten to "swamp" us with their alien culture and if they are allowed in large numbers, they will destroy the 'homogeneity of the nation'. At the heart of this new racism is the notion of culture and tradition" (Barker quoted in Stolcke 1995: 3). While earlier racism inferiorized the other, the new racism, in the name of culture, can even assert the "absolute, irreducible *difference* of the "self" and the incommensurability of different cultural identities (Stolcke 1995: 4).

Stolcke argues that contemporary cultural fundamentalism's rhetoric of exclusion and its reification of cultural difference draws, for its argumentative force, "on the contradictory 19th- century conception of the modern nation-state which assumed that the territorial state and its people are founded on a cultural heritage that is bounded, compact, and distinct..." (Stolcke 1995: 12). A way out of the erasure of the other in the name of culture requires going beyond such politicization of culture and the accompanying conflation between society and culture and state and culture. According to Stolcke, "Genuine tolerance for cultural diversity can flourish without entailing disadvantages only when society and polity are democratic and

egalitarian enough to enable people to resist discrimination (whether as immigrants, foreigners, women, blacks) and develop differences without jeopardizing themselves and solidarity among them" (Stolcke 1995: 13). But it is instructive that Stolcke herself writes in the very next line of her essay: "I wonder whether this is possible within the confines of the modern nation-state or, for that matter of any state"(ibid). Thus Stolcke is sensitizing us to the limits of the state-centric approach in dealing with the problem of the other and the fundamentalism of culture though others characterize her diagnosis as utopian.[9]

It is precisely the utopian dimension in self and culture that needs to be retrieved, articulated, and lived by at the contemporary juncture. The tendency to erase an "other" because of difference of culture cannot be fought only at the level of State and now creative responses to it has to be explored in the domains of self and culture. Earlier in this essay while dealing with the problem of the erasure of the other, I have argued that the problem of the other[10] cannot be solved unless we also work on self—understand its depth dimension, and transform ourselves from mere "role identities" to "reflexive selves". Now I want to make a similar argument vis-a-vis culture. To creatively confront the predicament of culture, there is also a need to revitalize the reflective self as the creator of culture and as its creative embodiment. Every culture has a dimension of "beyond"[11] within it which resists its absolutization and political fixation and it is important to understand this ideal dimension of culture in order to be able to respond to the contemporary predicament of culture. Every culture has and ought to cultivate a "metaculture" which can radicalize both culture and self (Bidney 1967; Hannerz 1990; Robertson 1992; & Nandy 1995).

Culture can play a transformative role in overcoming the distinction between self and other and in confronting the challenge of fundamentalism. But the significance of culture in the realization of freedom has not received much attention in the works of Connolly, Unger, and Taylor. For this, we would have to turn not to anthropologists who have abandoned their own ancestor Edward Sapir's distinction between "genuine culture" and "spurious culture" in the name of cultural relativism (see, Bidney 1967; Giri 1992) but to the normative seekers of culture who look at it as a process of spiritual praxis or *sadhana*. Such an outline of culture is found in the seminal work of Govind Chandra Pande. According to Pande, "The awareness of culture begins with the discrimination of the ideal and the actual, of what is appropriate to the self or authentic and what is merely given or appears forced upon the self. It is the awareness of an ideal order which constitutes a worthy end or goal of man's authentic seeking. The ideal is not given or importunate like the actual, limiting human freedom since freedom lies in the voluntary choice of ends worthy of realization" (Pande 1993: 23).

As we proceed with the challenge of culture as a transformative seeking, it has to be noted that culture always has had two meanings— culture as a lived practice or a pattern implicated in a field of power and culture as a domain of seeking of values. As Edward Said argues, "Culture' means two things in particular. First of all it means all those practices, like the arts of description, communication and representation, that have relative autonomy from the economic, social, and political realms. Second and almost imperceptibly, culture is a concept that includes a refining and elevating element, each society's reservoir of the best that has been known and thought as Matthew Arnold put it in the 1860's" (Said 1993: xiii). Explicating the second meaning of culture, Said tells us: "Culture palliates, if it does not altogether neutralize, the ravages of a modern, aggressive, mercantile, and brutalizing urban existence. You read Dante or Shakespeare in order to keep up with the best that was thought and known, and also to see yourself, your people, society, and tradition in their best lights" (ibid). But these two meanings are not mutually exclusive; in fact every lived culture contains within it a dimension of ideal seeking vis-a-vis self-realization, modes of intersubjectivity, and the constitution of a good society. It is this dimension of meaning of culture which is in urgent need of recovery and reconstruction today to face with the challenge of the self and the other, a task in which we get enough resource and inspiration from Pande.

Continuing the reflective engagement with culture, Pande argues that "all cultural experience includes not merely a subjective but an intersubjective reference as well as a dimension of valuation" (Pande 1982: 22). "The sense of identification or alienation, appreciation or rejection, a sense of concern for what is significant for the self are pervasive ways of culture experience, which could be described as an experience of self-realization in some form" (ibid). Pande believes that "not only can one not tell the dancer from the dance, but the spectator must forget and rediscover himself in the spectacle" (ibid). For Pande, "The thinker incarnates himself in his thoughts, even the cook would be hurt if his cooking were not treated as representing him appropriately. Genuine participation in culture is a process in which the 'the subject is realized, the object idealized'" (ibid).

Reminding us of Taylor's "radical reflexivity," Pande argues: "It is only with reflective consciousness that the subjective-objective world of culture can be apprehended" (Pande 1982: 23). This reflective consciousness is characterized by a capacity to discriminate— "to discriminate right from wrong", "higher from lower emotions" (ibid). The "discriminative critical character of the consciousness" makes cultural

seeking dialectical. Culture, for Pande, is a dialectical process of value seeking. In the words of Pande, ".. to seek a value is to seek progress in infinite direction, for it is in the nature of value to be a standard of perfection which judges all attainments to fall short of ideal. Thus where as Nature has no history, culture as value-seeking is inherently historical as it is bound up with a social and symbolic tradition within which its dialectical and 'developmental' process operates" (Pande 1982: 25).

For Pande, "Value implies seeking, choosing, approving" (ibid). "Value seeking.. tends to be a dialectical and progressive process where ideally one moves towards a perfect and infinite realization in which the immediacy of feeling and cognitive certitude would be found together. Such a state would be the unity of being and knowledge, in which the Self or consciousness realizes itself fully... From the lower realization of the self in terms of finite accidents (upadhis) to their complete transcendence in pure self-experience, the human seeking follows a process of dialectical evolution" (ibid).

Pande urges us to realize that the "dialectic of value- seeking is the dialectic of self-transformation through the interaction of vision and praxis. It implies not merely progress within a plane of consciousness but a change in the plane of consciousness" (Pande 1982: 26-27). Indeed this change in the plane of consciousness is in fact the promise and challenge of culture. Let us hear Pande in greater details: "All praxis is designed to subordinate or sacrifice the lower to the higher so that the object to be used by the ego and ego itself are offered to and become the vehicle of a higher consciousness. Insofar as the lower is used to reveal the higher, it may be said to assume the character of a symbol. The primary origins of cultural traditions, thus, lie in the revelation or discovery of new meanings in phenomena given at various levels, a process which begins in individual psyche but enters social tradition creatively as a symbol" (Pande 1982: 28).

Pande argues that "Culture as a pervasive moral order binds society and civilization and gives them a characteristic identity and direction" (Pande 1982: 28-29). "Whether it is the order or immediate affective relations as in a family or the cooperative and quid pro quo of the techno-economic order, or the legal-political order backed by force, the moral order is pervasive. Without an immediately felt but objectively recognized, coherent order of duties and obligations no society or civilization can even survive, let alone develop. This moral order presupposes the formulation of the vision of the good into a path of praxis leading up to it... It is as moral faith which mediates between vision and praxis that culture animates society and civilization" (Pande 1982: 29).

Confronting the Challenge

Pande's outline of culture as a dialectical, transformative, and transfigurative seeking of values suggests a creative way out of the impasse revolving around the politics of identity and difference, and the predicament of the self and the other. But in order to appreciate the work of self and culture as transformative factors in our lives we need to be reflective about both nationalism and individualism which share the same "epistemology of entivity" and boundedness (Foster 1991). We have to give radically new meanings to familiar categories of self, other, and culture in both theory and practice. Revitalizing the reflective dimension in all these through the work of criticism and creativity is essential to take us out of the impasse in which we are today. This cannot be done by essentializing either the self or the other but discovering what Ashis Nandy (1995) calls "the other within" and Clifford Geertz (1986) calls our "variant subjectivity."

Culture is important from many different ends today. Culture plays an important role in the dynamics of the economy at present. As Scott Lash and John Urry (Lash & Urry 1987) argue, culture is not simply an object of production now, production itself is becoming increasingly cultural. Thus it is no wonder then that the production of aesthetically beautiful and lofty apartments is a vital part of the speculative regime of late capitalism today. But Lash and Urry do not analyze the human cost of such an economy and the enormous problem of homelessness that the shift of capital from production to speculation in lofty real estate creates. Their account of the shifting trajectory of capitalism and its increasing cultural turn is devoid of a normative criticism. We here need a cultural criticism of contemporary capitalism as an institutional regime. As Alf Hornborg argues, "The counterdrive to total commoditization is the cognitive discrimination we know as culture" (Hornborg 1993: 317). Here again Pande's project of culture as a dialectic of "self-transfiguration" can be of immense help to all of us who believe that the task of social and cultural analysis is not merely to describe the systems which govern our lives but to provide them a transformative direction.

To speak of culture and the contemporary condition without speaking of the communications revolution underway in the present-day world would be an incomplete exercise. Now television is a household reality for many of us in all corners of the world. Television has helped to dissolve the distinction between the "high culture" and "low culture" and we must not fail to acknowledge the democratizing potential in this

dissolution. But at the same time we have to realize that television has made us consumers of culture, making us believe that the vicarious consumption of culture is the same thing as its creation (see, Das 1984, 1993). But if many of us become consumers of culture when culture means soap operas, media-steered system images and advertisements for the system of money and power then what is the fate of culture as a source and process of transformation?

A contemporary meditation on self, other and culture cannot absolve itself of the obligation of what I would like to call criticism and creativity. The challenge for us is to continue to create culture in an age where culture itself has been made an object of consumption and commodification. When consumption of what on an average is understood as culture seems to be our new weltanschauung—our new *yugadharma*—the task for us is to recover the ground where cultural creativity as a *sadhana* of self and institutional transformation becomes a powerful ideal in our individual lives and in our public sphere. It is needless to mention that the realization of such a task requires multi- dimensional effort at both individual and collective levels.

Creation of culture is a work of *sadhana*. It is a work of silence. But the culture of TV is the culture of the bombardment of words (Miller 1988). So the first step is to learn to be silent in our age of communications revolution. Silence would help us realize that if we watch television four hours a day or even two hours a day then even God cannot help us from being slipped into what Baudrillard calls the "silent majority" and Toynbee called "the uncreative majority." But this desired silence may not come so spontaneously. The struggle for the meaning of culture in the next century may begin with the breaking of television sets which would complete the unfinished agenda of transformation inaugurated by the Luddite breaking of the machines of industrial production in the last century.

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Endnotes:

1. Developments in social thought in the modern West in the past three hundred years demonstrate an oscillating preoccupation with the questions of self and other. The birth of modernity was characterized by the birth of the individual from the wombs of all-consuming and all- encompassing communities. Modern thought was intensely preoccupied with the problem of the individual --- his genesis, her development, his autonomy, and her freedom. Modernity was a moment of the celebration of individualism. In this celebration there was very rarely a distinction made between individual and the self; it was assumed that individual as an occupant of social role identity exhausted the sources of the self and its design of becoming. In other words, modern thought confused the individual as a product of society with self which is something reflexive in nature. It is only with the case of some thinkers such as Marcel Mauss that we find a description of the work of the self in the project of modernity. Mauss tells us how modern western self has arisen in the context of many critical religious movements such as anabaptism. Mauss does not reduce self to the sociologically determined individual and gives it a critical dimension -- a creative and transformational dimension. But this stress of Mauss is not emphasized in the later commentaries on Mauss, especially by the contributors of *The Category of Person* and by Andre Beteille (1992) who also discusses Mauss's thought on the subject in his essay, "Individual, Person, and Self as Subjects of Sociology."

2 But in such moves of reversal, when the other is invited, who invites the other is still a "possessive individual" or a bourgeoisie individual whose main interest lies in the valorization of his own interest and power. Let us consider, for instance, certain developments in anthropological imagination which are called postmodern and reflexive. Postmodern developments within anthropology plead for listening to the voices of the Other and narrating that story without the control of the "ethnographic authority" of the anthropologists. But if the anthropologist himself does not have capacity for otherness, then the whole project of an anthropology inviting the other would fail. As Adam Kuper tells us in a recent critique: "The first wave of post-modernist ethnographies was largely about the ethnographer's own experience of cultural dislocation, inspiring the joke.. in which the native pleads with the ethnographers,

'can't we talk about *me* for a change" (Kuper 1994: 542). Therefore an adequate attention to the reality and the needs of the other requires a transformation of ourselves--from the individual to the self.

3 The distinction between individual and self that I make in this paper is parallel to the following distinction between individual and person that Tim Ingold makes:

> ..to regard the human being simply as an individual culture-bearer is to reduce his social life to an aggregate of overt behavioural interactions, which serve to reproduce the elements of culture just as the phenotypic behaviour of organism results in the reproduction of elements of the genotype. But if he is regarded as a person, that is as a locus of consciousness, then social life appears as the temporal unfolding of consciousness through the instrumentality of cultural forms. Whereas the individual is a vehicle for culture, his mind a container for cultural content, the conscious life of the person is a movement that adopts culture as its vehicle. Thus, culture stands, in a sense, between the person and the individual; worked by one, it works the other (Ingold 1986: 293)

4. In this context, the following critique of the Habermasian approach to self is important for the purpose of our inquiry here:

> Unlike Freud, Habermas does not start with the demands of the self against society, but rather with *political* problem. His question is: What must we demand of the self *if* we wish our political life to be governed by talk rather than coercion xxx. It is from this perspective that Habermas reaches into the self, but it is *only a reaching*, only an interest in those competencies that might best fit the demands of the self with the demands of political life which we have no a priori way of knowing to be the same. To the contrary, we must suspect that fit cannot be perfect; that because of their inherent demands for universality, public expressions can never exhaust the self. Public life stops where the inarticulate begins; a complete self, a healthy self, will always go beyond language (Warren 1995: 194-195).

5. Such a description of the work of the self is now available to us from the traditions of "deep ecology" as well. The following description of the work of "ecological self" by a sympathetic commentator calls for our attention here: "where interests are essentially connected and you desire someone else's flourishing for their sake, what is involved is not abandoning your own interest, because in pursuing the other's interest you also pursue, *non-accidentally*, your own" (Plumwood 1993: 153).

6. Zygmunt Bauman puts this supposed postmodern temper quite succinctly: "a postmodern ethics would be the one that readmits the other as a neighbor into the hard core of the moral self.. an ethics that recasts the Other as the crucial character in process through which moral self comes into its own" (Bauman 1993: 84).

7. For Connolly, "The production of terrorism protects the identity of particular states and the state system as a whole more than it reflects an ethical imperative to apply general principles to distinctive instances on violence" (Connolly 1991: 207)

8. In the words of Connolly, "A circle of representation is formed here. The state receives a fund of generalized resentment from those whose identity is jeopardized by the play of difference, contingency and danger; it constructs objects of resentment to protect identities it represents; and then it receives a refined supply of electoral resentments aimed at the objects it has constituted" (Connolly 1991: 210).

9. For instance, Jonathan Benthall, in his comments on Stolcke's essay writes: "The last seven words of Stolcke's lecture suggest that she wants all state power to be weakened which sounds utopian" (Benthall 1995: 13)

10. It is in this spirit that we can critically interrogate Derrida's famous statement, "God is the wholly Other" (see Barnett 1989). But God is not wholly other, God is also part of the self.

11. In another way, E. Valentine Daniel, discussing the challenge that violence poses to the practice and project of culture, makes a similar point. Discussing the problem of violence and ethnic fratricide in his Wertheim memorial lecture, Daniel writes:

> The counterpoint of which Wertheim wrote almost twenty years ago was a counterpoint of hope and human emancipation. xxx The counterpoint of which I have spoken today is one [i.e. violence] that resists all evolutionary streams, be they of action or of thought. It will and should remain outside of all (C/c)ulture, if for no other reasons than to remind us that (a) as scholars, intellectuals and interpreters we need to be humble in the face of its magnitude, and (b) as *human beings* we need to summon all the vigilance in our command so as to never stray towards it and swallowed by its vortex into its untouchable abyss. The first is a sobering point

that concerns observation, the second is a cautionary one that concerns participation: the twin terms that, hyphenated, consisted the sine qua non of the anthropological method. It is time for cultural anthropology to lose both its Hegelian conceit and Malinowskian innocence (Daniel 1991: 16)

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