

MIDS WORKING PAPER NO. 210

**Rethinking the Human and the Social:  
Towards a Multiverse of Transformations**

**Ananta Kumar Giri**

*Associate Professor*

*Madras Institute of Development Studies*

**mids** Madras  
**s** Institute of  
**d** Development  
**s** Studies

MIDS Working Paper No. 210, September 2010

*Rethinking the Human and the Social:  
Towards a Multiverse of Transformations*

by Ananta Kumar Giri

Rs.25.00

Madras Institute of Development Studies  
79, Second Main Road, Gandhi Nagar  
Adyar, Chennai 600 020  
Tel.: 2441 1574/2589/2295/9771  
Fax : 91-44-24910872  
pub@mids.ac.in  
<http://www.mids.ac.in>

## **Rethinking the Human and the Social: Towards a Multiverse of Transformations<sup>1</sup>**

### **ABSTRACT**

*Our understanding of the human and the social, as well as realization of these, are in need of fundamental transformations as our present day use of these are deeply anthropocentric, Eurocentric and dualistic. Human development discourse looks at human in an adjectival way, so does the social quality approach the category of the social, and both do not reflect the profound rethinking both the categories have gone through even in the Western theoretical imagination (for example, critique of humanism in philosophy and critique of sociocentrism in sociology). In this context, the present essay explores the ways these two categories are being rethought in Western theoretical imagination and discusses non-anthropocentric and post-anthropocentric conceptualization and realization of the human which resonates with non-sociocentric and post-social conception of society. The essay also opens these two categories to cross-cultural and planetary conversations and on the way rethinks subjectivity, sovereignty, temporality and spatiality. The present essay addresses the following issues: how do we talk about and realize being human now? How does it relate to transcendence and nature? Is being human only an epistemic project or it is also an ontological project going beyond the dualism between the epistemic and the ontological in modernity? How do we realize social now—only as a member of nation-state and fearful follower of an angry God? How do we realize human security and social quality—security of the satisfied pig or the dissatisfied Socrates?*

---

<sup>1</sup> This is the revised version of a paper first presented in the panel, “The Human and the Social: What Can Human Development and Human Security Discourse (s) and the Social Quality Approach Offer Each Other,” 2008 Conference of the Human Development and Capability Association, 11-13 September 2008, New Delhi. The author thanks Professor Des Gasper of Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, and the convener of the panel, for his invitation and subsequent comments and help in revising this essay.

*My heart leaps up when I behold  
A Rainbow in the sky;  
So was it when my life began  
So is it now I am a man  
So be it when I grow old  
Or let me die!  
The child is the father of Man;  
And I could wish my days to be  
Bound each to each by natural piety*

— William Wordsworth

The whole planet can suffer no greater torment than a single soul.

— Ludwig Wittgenstein

We should not ask: what does a person need to know or be able to do it in order to fit into the existing social order? Instead we should ask: what lives in each human being and what can be developed in him or her? Only then it would be possible to direct the new qualities of each emerging generation into society. Society will then become what young people, as whole human beings, make out of the existing social conditions. The new generation should not just be made to be what present society wants it to become.

— Rudolf Steiner (1985), *The Renewal of Social Organism*, p. 71

In the relations between the individual and the group, this constant tendency of Nature appears as the strife between two equally deep-rooted human tendencies, individualism and collectivism. On one side is the engrossing authority, perfection and development of the State, on the other the distinctive freedom, perfection and development of individual man. The State idea, the small or the vast living machine, and the human idea, the more and more distinct and luminous Person, the increasing God, stand in perpetual opposition. The size of the State makes no difference to the essence of the struggle and need make none to its characteristic circumstances. It was the family, the tribe or the city, the *polis*; it became the clan, the caste and the class, the *kula*, the *gens*. It is now the nation. Tomorrow or day after it may be all mankind. But even then the question will remain poised between man and humanity, between self-liberating Person and the engrossing collectivity.

— Sri Aurobindo (1962), *Human Cycles*, pp. 272-273.

#### INTRODUCTION AND INVITATION

The human and the social are both adjectival terms and rethinking these invite us to realize both of these as verbs of ongoing and unfolding processes of co-realizations which strive to transcend many taken-for-granted dichotomies such as human and animal, human and divine, individual and society, nature and society, and society and transcendence. There are germs of aspiration towards a new way of conceptualizing and realizing the human and the social in both human security approach and the social quality approach—the former talking

about need for integration and the latter about a holistic approach beyond fragmentations of many kinds including policy fragmentation and disciplinary fragmentation. This aspiration for integration and holism can be a creative source for foundationally rethinking the human and the social as well reconstituting these conceptually as well as in new practices.

As we move further in this task of rethinking it is helpful to have a brief glimpse of the concerns of these two approaches—human security approach and the social quality approach. Human security approach is part of the broader discourse of human development which emerged in the 1980s but among the family of human discourses such as human development and human rights, it focuses much more on the issues of security and vulnerability not only of groups but also of individuals. As Gasper et al. write: human security in its broad ‘United Nations’ formulation, “means the security of people against important threats to the fulfilment of their basic needs” (Gasper et al, 2008). It treats security “as more than just a problem of the state but also as one of care and psycho-social requirements” (ibid). “The term ‘human security’ conveys a message about basic life quality (and quantity) and a claim for its priority in policy.” The social quality approach emerged in the late 1990s within the European Union, seeking to find new ways to change the conventional asymmetrical relationship between a dominant (nowadays neo-liberal) economic policy and all other public policies, that distorts the daily life of citizens in the EU and indeed indirectly the lives of people around the world. Initiated with the first book on social quality in 1997 (Beck et al. 1997) and the Amsterdam Declaration on Social Quality, which was signed later by 1000 European scientists, social quality work became institutionalized with the creation of the European Foundation on Social Quality, located in The Netherlands. By focusing on the concept of the social, “the social quality approach has sought a new meta-theoretical basis to connect different sciences in order to address social and economic changes in Europe in a comprehensive way. Through collaboration with Asian scientists in recent years efforts are being made to develop a common social quality approach between Europe and Asia.”

Now continuing our task of rethinking the concept of the social and the human, Gasper et al’s recent essay on the subject does explore some of the pathways of rethinking and reconstitution. They write: “[...] social is realized in the interplay between processes of self-realisation and individual beings and processes leading to formation of collective identities” (Gasper et al. 2008: 15). Social in this latest stage of reflection

in the social quality approach is linked to “processes of self-realisation” (ibid: 18). Gasper and his colleagues recognize that “social quality approach has developed within fortress Europe” and discuss the need to overcome Eurocentrism in our conceptualization of both the social and the human. Social quality approach is being extended to Asia but at present it seems much more an extension of the taken-for-granted conceptual frame in Europe and exploring and applying in the Asian context rather than a foundational examination of the meaning of the social in Asian traditions such as China and India. Nevertheless, social quality approach does have this potential to go beyond and be part of cross-cultural, global and planetary conversations and interactions “involving co-learning and co-transformation among persons” (ibid: 22). They write that Asian scholars may “inherit an ontology or ontologies which accord different meanings to notions of state, human, social and security” which suggest the need for more planetary conversations and cross-cultural and transcultural work on these terms. In this essay, I focus on only two—the human and the social.

**RETHINKING THE HUMAN AND THE SOCIAL:  
A PRELUDE TO PLANETARY CONVERSATIONS**

Though there is no unitary Asian conception as there is no unitary Chinese or Indian perspective on these terms nonetheless in Asian conceptions the human is part of nature as at the same time it does contain the divine inviting us to realize human as an evolutionary field holding three autonomous but overlapping and criss-crossing concentric circles of non-human, human and divine. But the conception of the human in Human Development and Human Security approach (from now onwards HDS) is one-dimensional and it does not explore how insecurities such as violence and cruelty may be caused partly by the existing continuance of animal in us. The compassion that is at work even in situations of extreme violence and that we need to cultivate more as suggested in the Ogata & Sen (2003) report on human security may be partly because of the interpenetrative work of Nature, human and divine in us. The social quality approach critiques the individualist premise of HDS approach but it does not go far enough, for example, it does not realize that there is a transindividual dimension to the work of the human and the individual just as there is an individual dimension. Vision and practice of the human and individual in Buddhism does suggest this and transindividuality here carries the traces of both Nature and *Anatta* (no Self). John Clammer finds this in the work of Buddhist thinker and Thai social critic Sulak Sivaraksa and invites us to be engaged in a transcultural conversation about our presuppositions:

In much the same way that Louis Dumont has argued that Western individualism has its roots in Christianity and that the consequences of this individualism are profound for the arrangement of society and assumptions about how relationships within it work, so Sulak is arguing for a ‘trans-individualism’ that arises from Buddhist roots, and which has profound implications for the ordering of society (2008: 31).

Clammer also tells us how Asian conceptions look at self as fields and this is born out in *Srimad Bhagvad Gita*, a key text in Indian spiritual tradition which talks about the yoga of the field, *kshetra*. Such a field approach to self has a potential to go beyond a fixed, a point-imprisoned, and one-dimensional conception of the human, individual and self and realize their inescapable multidimensionality. In my recent works I have been exploring a multidimensional conception of individual / self as simultaneously consisting of techno-practitioner, unconscious and transcendental (cf. Giri 2006; Also see Faubion 1995). Though in modern Western conceptualization of the self the transcendental dimension is missing or it can only be allowed in the form of what Habermas (2002) calls “transcendence from within”, creative cross-cultural encounters, conversations and confrontations can lead to memory work where we in the West also can realize that in our traditions of philosophy, literature, spirituality, mysticism and alternative social practice there is also a rich reservoir to realize the transcendental dimension of both the human and the social.

Daya Krishna, the pre-eminent philosopher from India, tells us: “Society need not be considered the last term of human thought. The centrality may be restored to the human individual who, then, may be viewed as the nucleus of the social cell from what all creativity emanates or originates. In this perspective, then, society would be conceived as a facilitating mechanism so that the individual may pursue his trans-social ends. Instead of art, or religion, friendship or love being seen as the lubricating oil for the functioning of the social machine, the machine itself would be seen as facilitating the emergence and pursuit of various values [...]” (Krishna 1993: 11).

In many cultures, including the Indian, the social does not have the same ultimate status as it has in modern Western society and socio-religious thought. The social in Indian thought does not have a primal significance: it is considered an intermediate field and an ideal society is seen as one which facilitates our realization of potential as *Atman*, soul. Daya Krishna calls it *Atman*-centric approach and contrasts this with the socio-centric approach in not only the modern West but also in religious traditions such as Christianity. But one also finds a socio-

centric approach in certain aspects of Confucianism which accords primary significance to social relations and not to the same extent to processes of self-realization. Both *Atman*-centric and socio-centric approaches have their own limitations: what Daya Krishna calls the “two predicaments”— the *Atman*-centric predicament and the socio-centric predicament. The socio-centric predicament does not give enough space to self-realization while “*Atman* centrality leads a people’s attention away from an active concern with society and its betterment” (ibid: 23). Rethinking the human and the social calls us to overcome the one-sidedness of an *Atman*-centric approach and socio-centric approach and Daya Krishna links it to a new realization of freedom. Sri Aurobindo, as suggested in the opening paragraph of this essay, links it to evolutionary transformation, transforming the very constitution of the individual and the social beyond their present-day dualistic constitution.

From the point of view of this aspiration to overcome *Atman*-centredness or self-centrality and socio-centeredness we can look at Asian traditions in new ways. We can here take, for example, the case of Buddhism and Confucianism—two major traditions of discourse and practice from Asia. In its reflections on humanity Confucianism focuses on webs of relationships while Buddhism emphasizes the need to transcend the limits of social relationships, particularly anthropocentrism. But both the traditions have gone through many inner debates as well as contestations among them giving rise to movements such as Neo-Confucianism which urges us to pay simultaneous attention to webs of relationships as well as nurturance of self-realization in our quest of human realization (cf. Dallmayr 2004: 152-171). According to Tu Wei-ming, Neo-Confucianism involves a “continuous deepening of one’s subjectivity and an uninterrupted broadening of one’s sensitivity” (quoted in Dallmayr ibid). It also involves a “dynamic interplay between contextualization and decontextualization. Hence, the self as a ‘center of relationships’ finds itself simultaneously in the grip of an ongoing decentering or displacement [...] Just as self-cultivation requires self-overcoming, so cultivation of family and other relationships demands a transgression of parochial attachments such as ‘nepotism, racism and chauvinism’ and ultimately a transgression of narrow ‘anthropocentrism’ in the direction of the ‘mutuality of Heaven and man and the unity of all things’” (ibid: 164).<sup>2</sup>

#### **RETHINKING THE HUMAN AND THE SOCIAL: CRITIQUES OF HUMANISM AND SOCIO-CENTRISM**

Broadening and deepening the meaning of the human and social by being engaged in cross-cultural, transcultural and planetary

conversations can also be nourished by critiques of humanism and socio-centrism in Western critical thought. Both HDS and the social quality approach do not sufficiently base themselves upon critique of humanism and suspicion of both the concepts of the human and the social. In their recent work, Gasper et al. do not take an oversocialized conception of the human but their work can be further fruitfully deepened and enriched by building upon critiques of both humanism and socio-centrism and moving forward.

Critique of humanism in critical thought in the West urges us to be cautious in our valorization of the human and realize the violence that humanism has created. Gasper et al (2008) talk about the need for a new “political humanism” in the context of Europe but this now needs to be based upon a foundational realization of the critique of humanism and the need for learning to be human in a “post-human” way.<sup>3</sup> Being human in modern West is intimately linked to a power-model of the human condition and a new humanism which is simultaneously social, cultural, political and spiritual has to overcome this primacy of the political and nurture new modes of conviviality such as *sraddha* or reverence for life.

We are also invited for critical genealogical work, for example, reflecting upon the images of the human in modern Western moral, social and spiritual traditions. As a case in point here we can invite the *weltanschauung* of Martin Luther and Erasmus. Luther has a much more power-driven view of the human where critique of religious authority surrenders to the authority of the kings to the point of killing those who oppose this new alignment of the church and the state<sup>4</sup> but Erasmus looks at human as embodiment of *sraddha*, or reverence and this has close kinship with the perspective of the human coming from Bhagvad Gita where humans are looked at not only as characterized by hunger for power but also hunger for *sraddha*, love or reverence (cf. Giri 2009; Wilfred 2009).

Critique of humanism urges us to be engaged in a foundational critique of the telos of power as it also invites us for a foundational critique of a nation-state centered view of the the human and the social. Our conception of humanity in modernity was confined to a nation-state bounded conception of self and citizenship and the current processes of manifold globalization and cosmopolitanization challenge us to overcome such a bounded conception of humanity and realize a global humanity facilitated by post-national transformations and the rise of varieties of transnational public spheres and communities of feeling (cf. Ezzat 2005).

Our existent conception of humanity, including much of the anti-humanist declarations in certain postmodern masters, is anthropocentric as well as Eurocentric but the called for new humanism which is “post human”—both politically and spiritually<sup>5</sup>—challenges us to overcome anthropocentrism, transform the relationship between the human and non-human through acknowledgment of shared suffering<sup>6</sup> and realizing what Martha Nussbaum (2006) calls “cross-species dignity” and Donna Haraway (2006) calls “companion species.” It is also confronted with a foundational rethinking of the human not only as agents of immanence but also as seekers and embodiment of transcendence—in fact of immanent transcendence— but such a realization challenges us to go beyond a Eurocentric Enlightenment<sup>7</sup> which arbitrarily cuts off<sup>8</sup> the human and the social world from its integrally linked relationships with transcendence.<sup>9</sup>

Our rethinking of the human and the social can also creatively build upon critique of sociocentrism in Western sociology. In contemporary societies, especially the Euro-American ones, there is a recognition of the limits of the social in many spheres of life such as education, love and ethics (cf. Beck 2000; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 1995). The ideal of society is now being foundationally rethought as providing a space for self-development of individuals. For example, Andre Gorz (1999) argues that the educative relation is not just a social relation.<sup>10</sup> Similarly ethics is not just acting in accordance with social conventions but acting in accordance with post-conventional awareness and realizations where, as Habermas says, conventional norms of society often turn out to be “instances of problematic justice” (Habermas 1990: 108). Morality is not just obeying pre-given commands from either society or a benevolent dictator or a wise master but acting according to one’s conscience (Giri 1998). It is probably for this reason that Touraine writes in his recently provocatively titled essay, “Sociology after Sociology:”

One of the main themes of sociology is therefore the reversal of the conception and role of institutions. These were defined by their function in the integration of a social system. They defined and imposed respect for the norms and instruments for the defense of individuals which enable them to defend themselves against norms. Our society is less and less a society of the subjected and more and more a society of volunteers (Touraine 2007: 191).

The field of society is also a work of ontological sociality which is not confined only to contemporary late modern or individualized societies. It is a reality and possibility in all kinds of societies though

degrees may vary (cf. Touraine 2000). In this context what Michael Freitag tells us deserves our careful attention: “Contrary to a misguided reading of Max Weber’s well-known texts, the ontological aspect—the immanent normativity of human / social and historical being is primary, and an understanding of it involves another break with the Weberian heritage: the idea of an ontological reciprocity of individual and society should replace methodological individualism” (Freitag 2001: 2). But acknowledging the ontological aspect of society does not mean only acknowledging its normative dimension but also its “subjective existence” (ibid). In recent social experience this ontological dimension of society—creativity of self, return of the actor, and self-production of society—comes into play in the work of varieties of social movements. Some scholars of social movements suggest that in social movements we get a glimpse of the pathways of an alternative sociality which can be called ontological sociality, the basic ontological relationship characterized by interpretative action. As Martin Fuchs argues: “Humans not only refer to their self and their social environment, the sociality or polity they live in but to the world as a [...] latent ‘surplus of meaning’, as exceeding. The basic (ontological) relationship would be interpretative action. This broadens the reference of human action and interpretation or, rather, transcends the idea of a specific referent [...] Instead of seeing subjectivity as constitutive of the world [...] we have to see it] as open to the world” (Fuchs 2004)

We get glimpses of an ontological sociality going beyond subject-object dualism also in classical formulations of society. For example, building on both Indian and Greek traditions, philosopher Binod Kumar Agarwala (2004) tells us that play was central to Greek and Vedic imagination of society. Central to the practice of play is that the actor or subject loses himself in the play. Furthermore, “The mode of being of *lila* [play] does not permit the *jiva* [person] to behave towards the *lila* as to an object”; “the self-understanding of *jiva* is inevitably involved in understanding of *lila* in such a way that the medium is not differentiated from it” (Agarwala 2004: 263). This suggests an ontology and epistemology of participation which are important components of a reconstituted imagination of the social but Agarwala urges us to be open towards the dimension of beyond or transcendence in this ontology and epistemology of participation. Self-consciousness here cannot be completely dissolved into self-knowledge: “*There is always a remainder, an excess of what we are beyond what we know of ourselves*” (ibid: emphases added).

Society as a field of ontological sociality<sup>11</sup> can be understood in

conjunction with other recent efforts. For example, many contemporary sociologists point to the need for thinking about sociology beyond society. John Urry and Karin Knorr-Cetina point to this which has a much wider currency than acknowledged by anxiety-stricken sociologists of our times.<sup>12</sup> Writes John Urry in his *Sociology Beyond Societies*: “New rules of sociological method are necessitated by the apparently declining power of national societies (whether or not we do in fact live in a global society), since it was these societies that had provided the social context for sociological study until the present” (Urry 2000: 1-2). Urry looks at the emergence of “natural-social” hybrids for contemporary citizenship and explores whether “notions of chaos and complexity” can assist in the “elaboration of a ‘sociology beyond societies’” (ibid: 190).

Social theorist and sociologist of science Karin Knorr-Cetina takes further this exploration of a sociology beyond society. Writes Knorr-Cetina in her provocatively titled essay, “Postsocial relations: Theorizing Society in a Postsocial Environment:” “Sociality is very likely a permanent feature of human life. But the focus of sociality is nonetheless changing—in conjunction with concrete historical developments” (Knorr-Cetina 2001: 521). And one of the most important aspects of the contemporary development is “the loss of social imagination, the slow erosion of the belief in salvation by society” (ibid: 523). The post-social environment today not only consists of subject-centred imagination but also objects and the non-human world which challenges us to go beyond anthropocentrism. The very beginning lines of Knorr-Cetina (2001: 520) deserve careful attention from the point of view of overcoming the tight-grip of anthropocentrism in our thinking:

[..] we take it for granted that social reality is the world of human affairs, exclusively [...] Luckman raised the issue from a phenomenological perspective arguing that the boundary we see between the human social and the non-human, non-social was not an essential structure of the life-world. One reason for this was that our sense of humanness itself is not an original or universal projection but arises from revisions and modifications of other distinctions, for example that between living and non-living beings.

So even in sociological explorations there is now much more a nuanced understanding of the place of the human and social in the context of non-human and nature which inspires us to look at cultures and societies beyond a conventional understanding of “forms of life.” Conventionally building upon Wittgenstein we look at both human and the social as forms of life but this invites us to reflect further on the

meaning of life and not only feel secured with the formality and typology of forms.

Veena Das building upon Stanley Cavell shares some insightful reflections here which can be helpful in rethinking both the human and the social:

When anthropologists have evoked the idea of forms of life, it has often been to suggest the importance of thick description, local knowledge or what it is to learn a rule. For Cavell [Stanley Cavell, the noted contemporary philosopher] *such conventional views of the idea of form of life eclipse the spiritual struggle of his investigations*. What Cavell finds wanting in this conventional view of forms of life is that it not only obscures the mutual absorption of the natural and the social but also emphasizes *form* at the expense of *life* [...] the vertical sense of the form of life suggests the limit of what or who is recognized as human within a social form and provides the conditions of the use of criteria as applied to others. Thus the criteria of pain do not apply to that which does not exhibit signs of being a form of *life*—we do not ask whether a tape recorder that can be tuned on to play a shriek is feeling the pain. The distinction between the horizontal and vertical axes of forms of life takes us at least to the point at which we can appreciate not only the security provided by belonging to a community with shared agreements but also the dangers that human beings pose to each other. These dangers relate to not only disputation over *forms* but also what constitutes *life*. The blurring between what is human and what is not human shades into blurring over what is life and what is not life (Das 2007: 15-16; emphasis added).

Our earlier critique of sociocentrism gets a new depth in John Clammer's pathways of a "deep sociology" resonating with pathways of deep ecology (2009). Clammer invites us to explore pathways of a deep sociology going beyond continued "epistemological Eurocentrism" (2009: 333) and taking the philosophical dimensions of globalization seriously. Clammer also urges us to realize that "an oversocialized and overculturalized notion of self cannot provide the foundation for an adequate sociology of the real world, as the sociology of the body demonstrates" (ibid). Clammer urges us to transform the "existential shallowness, culturalism and anthropocentrism of conventional sociology with the possibility of a rich and transforming engagement with the issues and approaches to life that artists, spiritual seekers, poets and deep ecologists have long pioneered and the absence of which is both the source of so much of aridity of sociology and the crises that

global society and environment now confront” (ibid: 344).

Contemporary rethinking of the human and the social also can creatively build upon savants of an earlier generation such as Sri Aurobindo and Rudolf Steiner who provide a foundational critique of both humanism and sociocentrism in their works such as *Life Divine*, *Human Cycles* and *Renewal of Social Organism* and urge us to realize that human beings are not only rational and human, they also have a spiritual dimension to their very existence.

**RETHINKING HUMAN SECURITY AND SOCIAL QUALITY:  
HUMAN BLOSSOMING, PRACTICAL SPIRITUALITY AND  
THE CALLING OF A NEW *PURUSARTHA***

The vision of *purusartha* (i.e. of the four main aims of life for humans) in Hinduism urges us to realize how human development calls for realization of *dharma* (right conduct), *artha* (wealth), *kama* (desire) and *moksha* (salvation) in the life of individuals. But this has not been thought of and put into practice at the level of society. Here both the human security approach and social quality approach can help widen the traditional conception of *purusartha* to the level of society—local, national, transnational and planetary.<sup>13</sup> Such an extension and deepening calls for both new political, economic and spiritual transformations as *purusartha* at the level of society involves creating a space for universal self-realization consisting of elementary blocks of functioning and capacities, human securities, social qualities and spiritual awakening.

But in order to do this we would have to overcome an isolated constitution of elements of *purusartha* and look at them instead in a creative spirit of autonomy and interpenetration. Much of illness and ill-being both in traditional societies as well as in our contemporary ones emerges from isolation of these elements for example, *artha* (wealth) not being linked simultaneously to *dharma* (righteous conduct) and *moksha* (salvation).<sup>14</sup> In this context, Sen’s creative connection to the field of human development of the question that Maitreyee had asked to Yajnavalkya is helpful:

It is not unusual for couples to discuss the possibility of earning more money, but a conversation on this subject from around the eighth century B.C. is of special interest. As that conversation is recounted in the Sanskrit text *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, a woman named Maitreyee and her husband, Yajnavalkya, proceed rapidly to a bigger issue than the ways and means of becoming more wealthy: How far would wealth go to help them get what they want? Maitreyee wonders whether it

could be the case that if “the whole earth, full of wealth” were to belong just to her, she could achieve immortality through it. “No,” responds Yajnavalkya, “like the life of rich people will be your life. But there is no hope of immortality by wealth.” Maitreyee remarks, “What should I do with that by which I do not become immortal? (Sen 1999: 1)

Maitreyee’s question is a question of *purusartha* urging us to ask the question of relationship between *artha* (wealth) and *moksha* (salvation). It has layers of symbolic and worldly meaning but Sen, worldly bound as he confesses, does not explore its symbolic meaning. He translates its worldly meaning in this way: “If we have reasons to want more wealth, we have to ask: What are precisely these reasons, how do they work, on what are they contingent and what are the things we can ‘do’ with more wealth” (Sen 1999: 2). Sri Aurobindo (2000) in his *Thoughts and Aphorisms* has said there are different kinds of eternities<sup>15</sup> and similarly Maitreyee’s concern with immortality refers to different kinds of immortalities which can be translated into visions and practices of creating a more dignified society which would nurture self and social immortality of a temporal kind, for example enabling us to overcome our physical and spiritual morbidity, illness and quick breakdown. With the spirit of Maitreyee and in the context of our engagement with creating a more secured humanity and qualitatively rich social life we can also ask: What do we have to do with that kind of life, society, humanity and pursuit of wealth which does not ensure human development, human security, human blossoming and social quality? So we need a new *purusartha* where elements of it such as *kama* (desire) and *artha* (wealth) transcend their boundaries and are creatively interpenetrated by other elements such as *dharma* and *moksha* and vice versa.

Practical spirituality is a multi-dimensional struggle for *Anna* and *Ananda*—food and bliss—which can help us make creative links between practical issues of human development and spiritual issues of ends for which we live (cf. Giri 2006b). Practical spirituality embodies striving for beauty, dignity and dialogue in self, culture, society and the world. Practical spirituality can help us realize such a new *purusartha* at the level of self and society embodying a spirit of integration and continued quest for realization of connections. It can also help us transform the cult of sovereignty at both the levels of human and the social and realize both of these as works of shared sovereignties emerging out of their multiplanar existence beyond dualisms such as human and natural, and social and transcendental. Practical spirituality can transform the discourse of human development to one of blossoming and this transformation resonates with contemporary concerns in development

studies with themes such as happiness and well-being. But happiness can be too shallow and practical spirituality here invites us to realize blossoming at the level of self and society as a continued quest for realization of *Ananda* (bliss). There is an integral link between *Anna* (food) and *Ananda* (bliss) as suggested in Taitreya Upanishad and practical spirituality strives to realize Ananda in ensuring human security and social quality for us, in the process transforming these very terms of discourse and modes of realizations.

Practical spirituality involves new value formations both at the levels of self and society. Along with the values of compassion that Ogata and Sen (2003) talk about in their work on human security, practical spirituality pleads for values of voluntary poverty, voluntary sharing and voluntary insecurity. Today we are realizing that just structural interventions for the eradication of poverty is not enough unless the middle class and upper class undertake voluntary poverty.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, transformation of the contemporary conditions of risk and insecurity calls us to undertake voluntary insecurity. Some of our fellow beings do it when they go to Iraq, Afghanistan and offer their bodies on the line. An exemplary example of voluntary insecurity is the life and martyrdom of Rachel Corrie who faced the bulldozers in Gaza in solidarity with people affected by it and gave her life under the wheels.<sup>17</sup> But even though all of us may not go to conflict zones like Rachel and offer our bodies and souls we can put ourselves imaginatively in the bleeding bodies, souls and hearts of many of our fellow beings and realize what it means to be subjects and objects of many insecurities in the world today. Such voluntary insecurity would create an ontological and social basis for transforming contemporary conditions of insecurity. Voluntary insecurity also helps us realize that some amount of chosen insecurity, which is not imposed upon us by structural conditions, can be a source of creative breakthroughs and new realizations in the lives of self and society.<sup>18</sup> Voluntary insecurity thus puts our concern with security in place, including opening up our craving for security to a fundamental Socratic dissatisfaction and Maitreyee-like *purusartha* question: what do we need security for? What kind of secured life do we wish to lead—secured life of a satisfied pig or that of a dissatisfied Socrates? (Das 1989; Giri 2002).

The new *purusartha* of practical spirituality goes beyond a gendered fixation and helps us realize that our *purusartha* lies in being creative mothers. There is a feminization of spirituality now where spiritual realization lies in our capacity to be mothers to ourselves, each other and society. Human development as human blossoming, collective

self-realization and planetary realizations calls us to be mothers including making our society and state a space of mothering where society and state provide a space for self-realization as mothers and do not function only as spaces of control. This involves a reconstitution of both space and time as today much of our insecurity also emerges from an anxiety about time and being helpless victims of spaces of capital. A new *purusartha* of practical spirituality reconstitutes space and time as our mothers but this reconstitution calls for transformation of capitalism and a new spiritual realization of our own capacity to generate time as mother and not only selling our time in the media of money and market. The new *pursuartha* of practical spirituality transforms human security and social quality in the directions of human blossoming, inclusion of the other and planetary realizations.

#### NOTES

- 2 In his recent insightful reflections on Confucian path, Dallmayr (2007b: 14-15) explores common aspirations in Confucius, Gandhi and John Dewey which deserves our careful consideration:
 

[.] the Confucian “way” or “tao”—akin to Gandhian *swaraj*—involves an “unceasing process of self-transformation as a communal act,” and thus a linkage of ethics and social engagement whose seasoning effect “can free us from the constrictions of the privatized ego.” [.] Despite his deep modesty, Confucius himself can be seen, and was seen, as an “exemplar” or “exemplary person” (*chun-tzu*) who taught the “way” not through abstract doctrines but through the testimony of daily living. At this point, the affinity with Deweyan philosophy comes clearly into view—a fact which is perhaps not surprising given Dewey’s extended visit to China after World War I. As in case of Gandhian *swaraj*, leading a responsible life in society involves self-restraint and the abandonment of domineering impulses. In Confucius’s own words, humanness or to be properly human (*jen*) means to “conquer oneself (*ke-chi*) and to return to propriety (*fu-li*).
- 3 Escobar writes in almost the last sentence of his much discussed book, *Encountering Development*: “For what awaits both the First and the Third World, perhaps finally transcending our difference, is the possibility of learning to be human in post-humanist (post-man and postmodern) landscapes” (Escobar 1995: 226). But what is the meaning of posthuman here? Should Foucault’s critique of humanism be taken at face value or should we explore the link between Foucault’s critique and the humanistic strivings of savants such as Erasmus especially as Erasmus urges us to move beyond a power-model of the human condition and cultivate *sraddha*, reverence for life. It is Foucault himself who has written: “[.] for Nietzsche, the death of God signifies the end of metaphysics, but God is not replaced by man and the space remains empty” (Foucault quoted in Carrette 1999: 85).
- 4 A case in point is Luther’s support to the kings suppressing peasant revolt for freedom and the subsequent execution of Thomas Muntzer, one time follower and critic of Luther’s tilt towards the kings.
- 5 In this context, Dallmayr (2007a) talks about an “Other Humanism” beyond a

“high tide of old-style humanism” and embodying a “tentative resurgence of subdued, self-critical and non-Eurocentric (that is, non-hegemonic) view of human.”

- 6 In this context, what Derrida writes referring to Bentham’s question vis-à-vis animals “Can they suffer?” deserves our careful consideration: “the question is not to know whether the animal can think, reason or speak, etc., something we still pretend to be asking ourselves (from Aristotle to Descartes, from Descartes, especially, to Heidegger, Levinas and Lacan) [...] but rather to know whether animals *can suffer*” (Derrida 2008: 27).
- 7 Here we must note that such a cutting of, as Des Gasper comments was true of Descartes and his followers rather than Wordsworth and Goethe (personal communication).
- 8 Here we must note that such a cutting of, as Des Gasper comments, was true of Descartes and his followers rather than Wordsworth and Goethe (personal communication).
- 9 It must be noted here that many contemporary thinkers such as Habermas (2002) and Nussbaum (1990) are comfortable with some conception of internal transcendence but they would like to confine themselves only to the shores of immanence. Consider here what Nussbaum writes in the chapter on “Transcending Humanity” in her *Love’s Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*: “[...] there is a great deal of room for transcendence of our ordinary humanity... transcendence, we might say, of an *internal* and human sort [...] There is so much to do in this area of human transcending (which I also imagine as a transcending by *descent*, delving more deeply into oneself and one’s humanity, and becoming deeper and more spacious as a result) that if one really pursued that aim well and fully I suspect that there would be little time left to look about for any other sort” (Nussbaum 1990: 379).
- 10 Gorz (1999) writes the following about education which embodies a critique of society-centered sociological reasoning and signature of an ontological sociality:

This can not be *taught*; it has to be *stimulated*. It can arise only out of the affective attachment of children or adolescents to a reference group who makes them *feel* deserving of *unconditional* love, and *confident* of their capacity to learn, act, undertake projects and measure themselves against others—who gives them, in a word “self-esteem.” The subject emerges by virtue of the love with which another subject calls it to become a subject and it develops through the desire to be loved by that other subject. This means that the *educative* relation *is not a social relation and is not socializable*.

In this context, what Touraine (2007: 191) writes below also deserves our careful attention:

The combination of economic participation and cultural identity cannot be realized at the level of society; it is only at the level of the individual that participation in the global economy and the defense or formation of a cultural identity—legacy or new project—can combine. That is why, in both family and school, we are seeing the triumph—despite resistance—of the idea that it is the child or the pupil who must be at the center of the institution. The protracted debates in France between advocates and opponents of the so-called *college unique*, the system in which all students attend the same middle school, lead us to the conclusion that the preservation of the latter is not possible without substantial individualization of the relations between the teachers and the taught.

- 11 Gasper here says that social quality approach does have a concept of ontological sociality building upon Bhaskar.
- 12 This seems to be the case with Anthony Giddens whose very title, *In Defence of Sociology*, suggests this anxiety. It is no wonder that Giddens laments the disappearance of the “capacity of sociology to provide a unifying center for the diverse branches of social research” (Giddens 1996: 2). To be fair to Giddens he is surely not alone, traces of this anxiety are to be found in Andre Beteille (2002) as well. An anxiety to defend one’s discipline is not confined to sociology. Habermas (1990) seems to be worried that one day philosophy may be replaced by cultural anthropology and Sidney Mintz (2000) is worried about this being replaced by cultural studies.
- 13 For Daya Krishna: “The development of new *purusarthas* in the history of a culture or civilization would perhaps be one of the more important ways of looking at man’s history as it will emphasize ways of making his life significant in the pursuit of new ends of a different kind. [...] The emergence of any new *purusartha* on the horizon of human consciousness should be seen as a breakthrough in human history, providing the possibility of a new kind of pursuit not available earlier” (1997: 25).
- 14 For Daya Krishna, “The oft-repeated traditional theory of the *purusarthas* [...] is of little help in understanding the diversity and complexity of human seeking which makes human life so meaningful and worthwhile in diverse ways. The *kama*-centric and *artha*-centric theories of Freud and Marx are as mistaken as the *dharma*-centric thought of sociologists and anthropologists who try to understand man in terms of the roles that he plays, and society in terms of the norms of those roles and their interactive relationships. For all these theories, the independent seeking of any value which is different from these is an illusion, except in an instrumental sense. [...] Fortunately for the Indian theory of *purusarthas*, it has postulated the ideal of *moksa* which is tangential to all the other *purusarthas*. But it too has no place for the independent life of reason as a separate value, or for that matter for any other life which is not concerned primarily with *artha*, *dharma*, *kama* and *moksa*” (Krisna 1991: 204-205).
- 15 In the words of Sri Aurobindo (2000: 31): “There are lesser and larger eternities, for eternity is a term of the soul & can exist in Time as well as exceeding it.”
- 16 In his recent reflections on religion and democracy Robert Bellah, the pre-eminent sociologist of our times, has reflected upon the calling of voluntary poverty for our times. For Bellah (2005), earlier voluntary poverty might have been confined to monasteries as exemplified in the vision and life of saints such as St Francis of Assisi but now we are all invited to live a life of voluntary poverty. To live a life of voluntary poverty is to live with what is needed and not to run after wealth. It also means to reduce our consumption including our consumption of energy. For Bellah, “[...] a life based economically on a sufficiency rather than the expectation of ever increasing income is, in today’s world, a form of voluntary poverty” (ibid: 31). “Thinking of a life based on sufficiency instead of wealth frees us up to take on all kinds of work that serves others, not just ourselves” (2005: 31). At the same time, a life of sufficiency does not just give us opportunity to serve others, it also gives us time and space to blossom ourselves. Bellah links a life of voluntary poverty to the issue of creativity. For Bellah, “Genuine creativity requires leisure, which, in its original meaning, is not absence of work, but the possibility of a fulfilling form of life [...] a life of sufficiency, of, in modern times, voluntary poverty, might not only have the benefit of allowing one to undertake a life of

service to others, it might also allow time for genuine creativity in art or thought or whatever field” (ibid: 32).

- 17 Rachel was a young student from the US working with people of Gaza. Her email to her family just days before her supreme offering is heart-touching:

When that explosive denotated yesterday it broke all the windows in the family’s house. I was in the process of being served tea and playing with two small babies. I am having a hard time right now. Just feel sick to my stomach a lot being doted on all the time, very sweetly by people who are facing doom [..]. Honestly a lot of time the sheer kindness of the people here, coupled with the overwhelming evidence of the wilful destruction of their lives, makes it seem unreal to me. I can’t really believe that something like it can happen in the world without a bigger outcry about it. It really hurts me, again, like it has hurt me in the past, to witness how awful we can allow the world to be.

It must be noted here that recently Gaza freedom fortilla has followed the supreme sacrifice of Rachel. Gaza freedom fortilla consists of ships trying to carry humanitarian aid for the people of Gaza which has been blocked by both Israel and Egypt. On 31 May 2010, the freedom flotilla consisting of six ships, was moving towards Gaza but it was attacked by Israel in international waters resulting in killing of six activists from Turkey.

- 18 In his inaugural lecture on human security at Free University Amsterdam Thomas Hylland Eriksen builds upon his native Norwegian wisdom, especially the work of Ibsen in his *Peer Gynt*, and asks such a question. He tells us how Peer Gynt is not happy with security of home and accepts the insecurity of the road and the sea. This is also the story of many migrants in modern history. From the other side of the world, Chitta Ranjan Das (2009) talks about divine discontent and the need to cultivate aspiration which is not bound to the status quo and seeks to transform existing condition of self and society in the direction of mutual dignity, beauty and co-realization.

#### REFERENCES

- Agarwala, Binod. 2004. "Humanities and Social Sciences in the New Millennium: Theorizing in / for Society as Play." In Ananta Kumar Giri (ed.) *Creative Social Research: Rethinking Theories and Methods*, Lexington Books, pp.253-272
- Beck, Ulrich. 2000. *The Brave New World of Work*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Beck, Ulrich. 2002. "The Cosmopolitan Society and its Enemies", *Theory, Culture and Society* 19 (1-2): 17-44.
- Beck, Ulrich & Elizabeth Beck-Gernsheim. 1995. *The Normal Chaos of Love*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Beck, W., L. J. G. van der Maesen, A.C. Walker (eds.). 1997. *The Social Quality of Europe*. The Hague, London. Boston: Kluwer Law International (Reprinted Bristol: Policy Press, 1998). *et al* 1997
- Beck, W., L.J.G. van der Maesen, F. Thomese, A.C. Walker (eds.). 2001. *Social Quality: A Vision for Europe*. The Hague, London, Boston: Kluwer Law International.

- Bellah, Robert. 2005. *The Place of Religion in a Democratic Society*. Pamphlet for Fetzer Institute.
- Beteille, Andre. 2002. *Sociology: Essays on Approach and Method*, Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Carretto, Jeremy (ed.). 1999. *Religion and Culture by Michel Foucault*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Clammer, John. 2009. "Deep Sociology." Special issue on "Beyond Sociology," *Asian Journal of Social Sciences* 37 (3): 332-345.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2008. *Diaspora and Belief: Globalisation, Religion and Identity in Postcolonial Asia*. Delhi: Shipra.
- Dallmayr, Fred. 2004 *Peace Talks: Who Will Listen?* Notre Dame, Indiana: U. of Notre Dame Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2007a. *In Search of Good Life: A New Pedagogy for Our Troubled Times*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2007b "Liberal Democracy and its Critics: Some Voices from East and West." *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research* XXIV (4): 1-24, October-December.
- Das, Chittaranjan. 1989. *Shukara o Socrates* [The Pig and Socrates]. Berhampur: Pustaka Bhandar.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2009. *Se Prastharu E Prasthaku: Ma Bahira Sannidhyare* [From that Dimension to this: In the Light of Sri Aurobindo's The Mother]. Bhubaneswar: Pathika Prakashani.
- Das, Veena. 2007. *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Derrida, Jacques. 2008. *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Ezzat, Hebba. 2005. "Beyond Methodological Modernism: Towards a Multicultural Paradigm Shift in the Social Sciences." In *Global Civil Society 2004/2005* (eds.) Helmut Anhelier et al. London: Sage.
- Faubion, James D. (ed.). 1995. *Rethinking the Subject: An Anthology of Contemporary European Social Theory*, Boulder, Co: Westview Press.
- Frietag, Michel. 2001. "The Contemporary Social Sciences and the Problem of Normativity", *Theses Eleven*, No. 65: 1-25.
- Fuchs, Martin. 2004. "Articulating the World: Social Movements, the Self-Transcendence of Society and the Question of Culture", in Ananta K. Giri (ed.) *Creative Social Research: Rethinking Theories and Methods*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books
- Giddens, Anthony. 1996. *In Defense of Sociology: Essays, Interpretations and Rejoinders*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

- Giri, Ananta Kumar. 1998. "Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action: From Discourse Ethics to Spiritual Transformations." *History of the Human Sciences*
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2002. "Socrates and Pig." In idem, *Conversations and Transformations: Towards a New Ethics of Self and Society*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2006 "Creative Social Research: Rethinking Theories and Methods and the Calling of an Ontological Epistemology of Participation." *Dialectical Anthropology*.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2009. (ed.) *The Modern Prince and the Modern Sage: Transforming Power and Freedom*. Delhi: Sage.
- Gorz, Andre (1999) *Reclaiming Work: Beyond the Wage-Based Society*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Habermas, Jurgen. 1990. *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2002. *Religion and Rationality*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard U. Press.
- Escobar, Arturo. 1995. *Encountering Development*. Princeton.
- Eriksen, Thomas Hylland. 2005. "Risking Security: Paradoxes of Social Cohesion." Inaugural Lecture, Free University, Amsterdam. 15 March.
- Gasper, Des *et al.* 2008. "Human Security and Social Quality: Contrasts and Complementarities." Paper.
- Krishna, Daya. 1993. *Social Philosophy: Past and Future*. Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1997. *Prolegomena to Any Future Historiography of Cultures and Civilizations*. New Delhi: Project of History of Indian Science, Philosophy and Culture & Munshiram Manoharlal.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2006. "Rgveda: The Mantra, the Sukta and the Mandala or the Rsi, the Devta, the Chanda: The Structure of the Text and Problems Regarding it." *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research* XX111 (2): 1-13, April-June.
- Knor-Cetina, Karin. 2001. "Postsocial Relations: Theorizing Society in a Postsocial Environment." In *Handbook of Social Theory*, (eds.), George Ritzer & Barry Smart. London: Sage.
- Mintz, Sidney W. 2000. "Sow's Ears and Silver Linings: A Backward Look at Ethnography." *Current Anthropology* 41 (2): 169-189.
- Nussbaum, Martha. 1990. *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*. NY: Oxford U. Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2006. *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard U. Press.

- Ogata, Sadako & Amartya Sen. 2003. *The Commission on Human Security Now*. NY: United Nations.
- Sen, Amartya. 1999. *Development as Freedom*. NY: Alfred A. Knof.
- Steiner, Rudolf. 1985. *Renewal of Social Organism*. London: Anthropocentric Press.
- Sri Aurobindo. 1962. *Human Cycles*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram
- 1970 *Life Divine*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2000. [1958] *Thoughts and Aphorism*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram.
- Touraine, Alain. 2000. *Can We Live Together?* Cambridge: Polity Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2007. "Sociology After Sociology." *European Journal of Social Theory* 10 (2): 184-193.
- Urry, John. 2000. *Sociology Beyond Societies: Mobilities for the Twenty-First Century*, London: Routledge.
- Wilfred, Felix. 2009. "Play of Power and Struggle for Freedom in Renaissance Humanism: Erasmus Between Scylla and Charybdis." In *The Modern Prince and the Modern Sage: Transforming Power and Freedom*.(ed.), Ananta Kumar Giri. Delhi: Sage Publications.

\*

## MIDS Publications

- Gender Inequalities:  
Neglected Dimensions and Hidden Facets  
by *Bina Agarwal* Rs.60
- State, Households and Markets in Education  
by *Jandhyala B G Tilak* Rs.60
- Whither the Indian Village?:  
Culture and Agriculture in "Rural" India  
by *Dipankar Gupta* Rs.60
- Cultural Politics of Environment and  
Development: The Indian Experience  
by *Amita Baviskar* Rs.60
- Dalit Studies as Pedagogical Practice:  
Claiming more than just a 'Little Place' in the Academia  
by *Sharmila Rege* Rs.60
- Globalization: Its Portents for Indian Culture  
by *U. R. Anantha Murthy* Rs.20
- Development as a Human Right or as Political  
Largesse? Does it make any difference?  
by *Upendra Baxi* Rs.60
- Growth of a Wasteland  
by *Amit Bhaduir* Rs.20
- Lineages of Political Society  
by *Partha Chatterjee* Rs.20
- The Poer of Uncertainty: Reflections on the  
Nature of Transformation Initiatives  
by *Mihir Shah* Rs.20
- அவல நிலையில் தமிழக ஆறுகள்  
தொகுப்பாசிரியர்: எஸ். ஜனகராஜன் Rs.95
- திராவிடச் சான்று:  
எல்லிஸும் திராவிட மொழிகளும்  
தாமஸ் ஆர். டிரவுட்மன் Rs.150
- ஒரு நகரமும் ஒரு கிராமமும்:  
கொங்குப் பகுதியில் சமூக மாற்றங்கள்  
எஸ். நீலகண்டன் Rs.150