Chapter-5

Civilizational Perspective

Nirmal Kumar Bose, as we have seen in the last chapter, is known for having endorsed an approach, quite flexible, in his work especially his thoughts and the writings on the Indian society at large. Starting from his works on archaeology (Bose: 1935a, 1938, 1941,1948-49, 1949, 1952,1953), temple architecture (Bose:1936-37,1938a,1940,1945&1951) to his tribal analysis (Bose:1958,1959,1960) and Gandhian studies (1933b,1934, 1935a,1935b &1935c), we find copious use of an approach where he has resolutely mingled different strata across the continuum. Bose had made an attempt to see how the lower and the upper reaches of the society integrate among themselves to constitute the soul of the civilization. His work, having blended different methods like the quantitative and the qualitative studies, showed how the different layers of the society wove together the threads of the civilizational resilience (Bose: 1959a). He understood, the superior and the imperious echelons of the society are not the absolute forces in the social order but they must work in sync with the otherwise meek and modest components to build up the civilizational whole. Having aborted the evolutionary perspective (Bose: 1929), as we have seen in the earlier chapter, Bose had given an account to celebrate the creative uniqueness of the multiple blocks that complement one another to constitute the civilization.

When western scholar Robert Redfield was all prepared to organize his perspective of civilizational analysis, Bose had by then already published his book, entitled, Hindu Samajer Gadan (Structure of Hindu Society) (1949). The book can be called the hallmark of the civilizational studies since it contained a jazzy and springy account of the processes of accommodation and assimilation that continued for ages. The author had very well shown the integration between the higher and the lower reaches of the civilization. The simple culture complements the complex one and in this way the living soul of the civilization is constituted. By simple culture, Bose does not mean abominable or obnoxious one but that which is technologically self-sufficient and self-reliant (Bose: 1949:56). The one that has its own economic system of production and professes an assured food supply for its members can be termed a higher culture.
Bose thus recognizes the diverse and stratified groups that supplement one another to form the living whole. Another factor which constitutes the scaffold of the civilization is the accentuation of the indigenous aspects of the simple culture and the serious attempt towards retention of such native attributes despite the imperious attitude of the patron and higher culture. Bose argued that having cohabited with the economically developed caste neighbours for long there have been perceptible differences in the life and living of the spatially isolated, technologically retrogressive and economically primeval and underdeveloped tribal populace.

Saratchandra Roy, for instance, noticed a kind of tribe in Ranchi and Hazaribagh called “Jaghi”, the name which connotes the permanent settlers of the land. Roy was surprised that these tribes bore such close resemblance with the peasants that any attempt to distinguish them from the Hindu peasants became difficult and arduous. Even the neighboring tribes of the Birhor community showed fastidiousness in choosing nuptial partners. In no case will they marry their tribal counterparts of ‘uthlu’ or ‘juggi’ community lest they fall prey to the wrath and vengeance of their society. Roy says, this is almost akin to the practice of endogamy which is of monumental importance among the Hindus (Bose: 1971:43).

Not only marriage but the influence of the Hindus has penetrated deep even in their religious customs and norms. The Hindu beliefs of pollution and purity have incredibly affected them so much so that they perform the routine practices of consecration before any of their religious rituals. The bipartite division between the sacred and the profane among the tribes has been seen as a denouement of this rigorous process. Thus Bose tried showing how the lower and the higher reaches of the society constantly interacted among themselves to build up the outer kernel of the living whole which is the civilization itself. The civilizational approach becomes more conspicuous when the interactions among the various strata are located against the backdrop of their vocations. The tribes are segmented society but without any economic sustainability or monopolistic control over the resources. This meant that the tribal societies are devoid of economic impunity or armour that they rightfully deserved and was due to them for long. This economic uncertainty and capriciousness made such communities even more marginalized and border-lined. They hankered for this economic certainty and certitude, the dearth of which produced dismay and dispiritedness among such communities. Deep down their heart
was a latent yearning and craving for such economic security which was reserved only for the caste Hindus.

Bose observed that among the diverse types of blacksmith castes in Bihar, Orissa and Madhyapradesh there have been found differentiations in status pertaining to internal occupational standing. Those carpenters who operate the furnace by their legs edge out the others who run the machine with their hands. The apex part of the body trounced its rear part thus conferring on itself a higher rung in the stratified social order. This is unlikely for a tribal society which for long had boasted a unified non-segregated society where the echelons were only coalesced through age and sex. Such primordial communities thus contacted the genes of stratification from the caste Hindus and tried creating footings and tiers wherever they could. This however became a banal practise among the tribes although they remained incognizant and oblivious for long and are now trying to capture the limelight by claiming themselves to be a part of the larger caste community. An easier way to do this has been the practice of developing expertise and dexterity in a certain field or vocation like the hereditary calling of the caste communities and imposing monopolistic exertion over it.

The cultural whole and its concomitant components

Bose maintained that the structure of the civilization can be better understood with an analysis of the cultural whole that seemed to have been better incarnated with categories like speech, material traits, art, mythology, knowledge, religion, family and social systems, property, government, and war. Any of these components of culture does not by itself, however, form an independent unit, but is closely bound up with the rest through many ties of association (Bose: 1929: 12). Bose, therefore, saw his civilization as the amalgamation of various essences the juxtaposition of which constitutes the living soul of culture. To illustrate the relation between the soul of culture and experiences, Bose deliberates on the history of the castes.

He noted, the epicentre of the ideas do not remain unchanged for a long time but transforms itself in the course of time. He illustrates the matter by an example from the Indian history (Bose: 1930a). The Vedic theory put forward the idea of functional distribution of classes in society. It was believed that the division of the work forces has been done on the basis of temperamental and native ability. The four different
classes, as shown in the Varna system were assigned duties based on their abilities and social hierarchy. The social fragmentation was unquestioned even in the society seething with inequalities. It was only believed that the social differentiation was desirable in retaining the solidarity and integrity of the society at large. But Bose asserts that sometimes later, the refurbishing of the society became an urgent need especially in the era of the indigenous tribes being subjugated and vanquished by the Brahminical society. It was in the wake of adoption of the Brahminical culture, that the problems of reluctance and demurring were realized. The indigenous tribes were not ready to timidly give in to Vedic culture but were rather iron-laced to relinquish their native culture in favour of an otherwise superior but foreign one. It was here that the Vedic mentors thought of applying the four class theory to reconstitute and refurbish the social order (Bose: 1958:43)

The Brahmin chieftains thought of being strategic and sagacious in their approach to tame and persuade the tribes to conform and comply with the higher order. However, they had every doubt in their mind that the natives might be obdurate and stiff-necked in easily and tractably following the higher orders. It was then that the Vedic mentors thought of going slightly slow with the vanquished tribes. Instead of thrusting and stubbornly imposing the Brahminical dictums pedantically on the indigenous men, the former were more complaisant and amiable in their approach. The tribal recruits were left free to follow their own native culture by slightly amending wherever it ran contrary to the dominant one (Bose:1929, 1941a &1949) This was all done to keep a close surveillance on the tribal ways of life lest they escape the Vedic constraints and jurisdiction. In this way, the higher orders of the society carried out their circumspection to constrict and circumscribe the native cult. To corroborate the tribal retention of culture and living, Bose narrates the ritualistic life of the Juangs, inhabiting the district of Pal Lahara in Central Orissa. He described how the headman of the village prepares and performs the religious rituals vigorously for the author. As Bose observes,

The headman had bathed in a river in the morning and put on clean clothes He first lit a small lamp, although it was daytime, and held it up to the sun. Then he said, “In the name of Truth (Satya), in the name of the earth –goddess who is below and of dharma devote (the god of righteousness), who is above, give unto this gentleman, the gift of our language. Give it him quickly”. This was all the prayer. Then offerings
of the sun—dried rice was made to the several deities, including the Hindu goddess Lakshmi. Two black cocks were next sacrificed to the gods and goddesses, and blood sprinkled on the drums preserved in the village common house (Bose: 1929: 157).

As is evident, the tribal people followed the Hindu dictums but with a pinch of salt. Black cocks are never included in the Hindu rituals for they have nothing to do with the piety and sanctity but still they have been retained to showcase an open-handedness and munificence towards the remote natives. On the other hand, the use of such words like Satya (truth), dharma devotees (religious lord), and Satya devote (the truthful God) all underline a strong allegiance to the Hindu ideals. The copious use of rice and consecration of the body before ritual initiations also reveal a strong influence of the caste doctrines on the tribal rituals. Bose rightly observed, Juangs are a tribe cohabiting outside the pale of Hinduism. They have their own distinct language which belongs to the Mundari group. They are not clubbed under any Vaishnava or Brahmin priesthood and so perform their life-cycle rituals independently. Their lifestyles and diet bear such stark contrast with the Hindu castes that cohabitation might seem untenable and incredible. But fighting all odds, the Hindu caste cultures have still broken the invincible tribal boundaries to perforate and invade the indigenous life and living. The Juang’s lifestyle showed that they are shedding their inhibitions and aversions for the Brahminical culture and eagerly advocating the Vedic norms and customs. This affinity for the Brahminical life-world was created also in part for the economic insecurity generated after the tribal vocation for hunting, collecting and Jhum cultivation on the slopes of Malyagiri hills was prohibited by the state. The Juangs are then pushed towards wet cultivation in the valleys between the hills. As Bose notes,

They also work in bamboo and sell baskets, wicker boxes and winnowing fans to the neighbouring people, and with the money earned in this manner they buy cloth or salt or iron and rice when they do not grow the latter. Thus, instead of being economically more or less self-contained, they have now been tagged on to the larger body of Hindu society; they now form only one clog in the wheel of the advanced productive machinery of the Hindus. In the manner of this manufacture of these bamboo articles, the Juangs enjoy virtual monopoly in the state of Pal Lahara and no other caste would willingly engage in that
manufacture for the fear of losing its own social position (Bose:1975:158).

The economic assurance and conviction coming from the Hindu caste system creates such gravitation for the tribal society that accommodation within the caste fold remains compulsive and obsessive for them. The Brahmin leaders also do not obviate and preclude the tribal desire for absorption in the Hindu fold. The Brahmin mentors instead grant cultural autonomy to the indigenous people but remain wary of clipping down its wings if it so necessitates. This happens in case the tribal culture goes overboard and smacks of loud endemic property that seems to thwart the Vedic supremacy. The dominant culture though considerate and shows enough clemency and forbearance for the native culture remains rigid and inexorable in retaining back its own rudimentary remnants so as to bear the insignia of the Brahminalical tradition amidst tribal paraphernalia. The original Brahminic culture is retained and the tribes are asked to succumb and acquiesce to an extent to the Vedic dictates. They asked the tribes, for instance, to yield themselves under the Brahmin priesthood in conducting the life – cycle ceremonies.

The system of caste, therefore, brought together an efficacy in integrating the various reaches of the civilization. Though true it was that the caste system was ideal in creating a semblance between the various reaches, but not in all cases was this equilibrium maintained. The hiatus between the higher and the lower reaches was still lurking and there remained a stigma in associating with the subjugated populace. The regulations of commensality and endogamy magnified with age for the ensuing gulf brought about a social differentiation which the elite culture could smug of. Bose noticed that a cultural trait like the caste system can be handed down over the generations but its ceaselessness and continuity was conditioned by its utility. The caste system therefore traversed adeptly because it was considered a mechanism for blending and creating an equipoise between the conflicting cultures. It thus worked out an equilibrium between the disparate layers thus tempering down the glaring contrast and discord. The civilization, thus steeped in its cultural traits, travelled incessantly in disguise of various forms and shapes.

In 1925, Bose went on to study these Juang tribes, who professed shifting cultivation and lived in the jungles and mountains of Pal Lahara feudatory state. After having
studied the *Juangs* for a few weeks, Bose found that the Mundari language speaking tribal groups were not officiated over by any Hindu priests. They ate beef and meat. There were no dietary prohibitions on them and likewise they were not considered Hindu by the local Hindu castes. But the cultural ideas have deeply invaded the tribal beliefs.

Surajit Sinha wrote, “Bose was struck by the fact that although the *Juangs* were outside the fold of Hinduism, yet there was a clear indication that Hindu religious ideas had penetrated their culture” (Sinha: 1994:6-7). The facts only corroborate the fact that the tribal system was gradually coming to be absorbed within the caste fold. This is especially true because the tribes were losing their self-sufficiency and giving in to the demands of their caste mentors. This is especially true when a relatively weak community comes in contact with its higher and powerful counterpart. The article in which he elucidated the condition of the *Juangs* was perhaps one of the most famous essays of Bose, *The Hindu Method of Tribal Absorption*. The essay was published in 1941 on 3rd January from the anthropological section of the Indian Science Congress.

The main content of the writing, and perhaps the kernel of the perspective concerning civilization spoke of the dialectical relationship between caste and tribe. The nexus between the two though had started from the economic base later on diffused to the cultural superstructure as well. Bose realized that a gravitational force probably worked between the two ethnic groups with unequal power and status. The one with a comparatively greater economic and political potentiality fares much better than its weaker counterpart since culturally the latter gravitates towards the former. Therefore, the cultural attributes of the powerful community traverses fast towards the more economically poor and politically docile group. This tendency of the domineering caste to overshadow the weaker has been going on for ages. This especially happens when the imperious caste is economically robust with a sound technological infrastructure and a strong political ambit. It develops a potentiality to take its toll on the other ethnic communities, that are economically undifferentiated with isolated spatial distributions. Taking advantage of their political instability and economic servitude they became vulnerable enough for the mentor castes to prowl upon. But what sounds interesting is the tolerance of the tribes to relinquish their nativity in lieu of a foreign trait. But the economic boost that shall be gained by them obviously acts

[150]
as an incentive and that should not be undermined. They, therefore, avidly embrace the culture of the Vedic mentors but the mentors remain careful not to unilaterally impose all their terms upon the servile class lest they revolt in desperation.

It, therefore, is a reciprocal strategy of unequal exchange where both the parties are ready to maneuver for a better position and a lucrative settlement. Both the parties tend to have a latent interest in officiating the deal and since the ruling castes also have an equal but overt urge in securing a safer territory for themselves, they try even more to accelerate their chance for dominance and surveillance. This is against a far more covert aspiration of the folk society to advance towards economic differentiation and an assured livelihood. Deep down the belly, the natives also had an urge to emulate the lifestyles of the caste groups who had fed them for ages on an imagined staple idea of an idyllic community. With a ready food supply and a social security that mitigates all other ambitions that a community could think of, the caste group served as their yard stick of an appropriate living and happy nurturing. They had sketched for themselves an ideal framework and the caste group fitted very well into that cage to which the tribes begun to look up with pride and reverence as their reference group. Therefore, both the groups had their respective interests, though for some they were covert while for others it was overt, they nevertheless moved on to bank on each other as well as to act as an interface between one other.

The essay was later on clubbed in his book The Structure of Hindu Society. Surajit Sinha says, that even before Robert Redfield had embarked upon his drive to explore and develop the methods of civilization perspective as a tool of anthropological enquiry, Bose had already started off in this direction (ibid:54). The book mentioned above can serve as a treatise on the proposed anthropological tools to enquire into the social basis of civilization. The book starts with an intonation of the Hindu reformer, Shri Chaitanya and how he marches on through the forests of Jharkhand to spread his sermons to the hill tribes and finally enchants them with the hymns sung in admiration of Shree Krishna. The book then elucidates how the non-competitive Hindu system of varna was voraciously taken up by the unspecialized tribal economy, which we have already discussed above. The book then discusses how the sanskritic norms and canons of the society which have been set, paddles forth to bring about equipoise and semblance in the civilization. It then shows how colonial encroachment lashes heavily against the traditional corpus to disintegrate and decompose the civilization.
This was something that Bose lamented upon because he treasured the virtues of the old varna centric Hindu civilization for its resilience and dynamism and never wanted to part with it. Bose therefore writes,

I believe inequality and dehumanization are related to varna system but nevertheless there was a wit underlying the social fabric. It made men realize that they were finally enslaved by the society. This germinated the idea of division of labour by which people professed various vocations to eke out a living in the society. They look after the society by serving in multiple roles and the society likewise cater to their needs. It is therefore a reciprocal tie where obligations do not hang loose unilaterally but are rather mutual in nature. It also ethically canonizes the differential function of the castes by proclaiming that every caste and even every individual is entitled to his rights to practice his own vocation and he who contravenes it carries with it the fear of moral banishment. These two canons were the scaffolds upon which was affixed the edifice of civilization (Bose: 1949:153-154).

Bose bemoaned upon the disarray of the age-old system because of the intrusion of the European capitalism. But he forewarns us that we should not be blindfolded by the glitters of the capitalistic order and the productive incentives it avows. All lost in oblivion should not be treated with ignominy and disdain for the old still harbor the much coveted treasures disparately located here and there. The contemporary society built upon the mutilated remains of the capitalist structure must recognize and acknowledge the eternal debt to the traditional order. We must convey our gratitude to the mighty civilization for the resources bestowed upon us. The assets that it conferred upon us is unlimited and must be accredited with due reverence. We might do it in our own way but it nevertheless should not be forgotten or done away with.

**Classification of culture into various impulses and drives: a pre-condition for civilization.**

Bose classifies the culture into various impulses that are mitigated for sustenance and survival. *Artha* or economic needs, *Kama* or sexual desires and *Moksha* or the desire for peace through spiritual emancipation from human sufferings and bondages are all the innate drives and urges that go enduringly in the name of culture. To fulfill these impulses human beings are seen following various rituals and customs that are again characteristic of each distinct culture. The culture is therefore interpreted as
following the three–fold dharma (vocation), viz, *Artha*- dharma, *Kama*–dharma and *Moksha*–dharma. The civilization thus is carried down interminably which covertly or overtly carry out one of the dharma or the other. Bose therefore gave an illustration of the civilization and its cultural core by drawing an analogy with the Hindu scriptures. Bose thus contends,

Each of these dharmas acts in four phases namely, *Vastu* or material object, *Kriya* or habitual action, *Samhati* or social grouping and *Tattva* or knowledge. The fourth phase is again divisible into two accordingly as the knowledge is *Vicharamulaka* based upon criticism or *Viswasamulaka* or based upon faith. There are certain items of knowledge which it is necessary to improve by constant criticism. Knowledge regarding the workings of a machine or of human society is of this order... The mere belief in the existence of God is not of this order. The mere belief in the existence of God is enough for the religious man; a critical examination of its evidence is unnecessary, for it does not help a man to live a better life. This is the reason why we should distinguish clearly between two kinds of Tattvas, namely that which becomes more useful through Vichara and that in which Viswasa is the chief element, criticism being to say the least out of place” (Bose:1929:19-20).

Now Bose goes on to show how cultural components of the corresponding vocations, go on to form cultural traits. As cultural attributes between diverse provinces in the country multiply, so do the material traits and the social traits. The units forming each of these traits are absolutely diverse in divergent places. Each of these distinct elements or units is called a trait. The understanding of the cultural trait is the prerogative of the study of civilization since it is the only way of analysing the influence of one culture over the other and examining the extent of its entrenchment and permeation (Bose: 1956 & 1958b). This was how a cultural trait penetrates into and encroaches on the other surreptitiously to form the complex whole of living. The structure of these cultural traits must be studied in details to understand this complex and the amplified living whole which is nothing but civilization. Bose’s civilizational perspective tried fathoming the multiple forms that the civilizations took as one cultural trait migrated into the neighbouring province and took an absolutely divergent meaning which stood disparate in reference to the previous.
The cycle of the cultural traits is mobile and agile since it is a continuing process where the amalgamation is not circumscribed to just one reach of the society but it pervades across all layers leading to a consonance between the various strata. This is how civilizations are formed according to this perspective which makes bountiful space for complimentary and reciprocal ties between various porous cultural traits such that the higher and the lower echelons of the society are brought together under a homologous umbrella by not actually belying but rather fixing up ensuing differences. Even if severe incongruity or inconsonance arises the civilization is resilient enough to restore back its equipoise. The continuity of the civilization therefore depends on various cultural elements and the trait complexes, one inter-weaving into the other. Bose gives illustration of the rice trait and how it is impregnable enough to spread the material traits like the plough and the yoke or its ceremonial traits like caste regulations and beliefs pertaining to the rules of commensality or pollution and purity at large. Such cultural traits are endowed with a liquidity and mobility that are impregnable with chances of massive permeation and percolation. As Bose says,

An article like rice, or it might be a social institution which acts as the vehicle for transmission of culture through the ages. In a similar manner when a culture is transmitted from one tribe to another, the main transmission takes place in relation to a number of material objects or social institutions (Bose: 1929: 24).

Bose notes that this takes us to an important character of trait complexes such as their variability in relation to time and space. So it is pertinent that trait complexes are historical and temporal as opposed to eternality. Not only in the temporal sequence of time and place, cultural traits also change in their passage from one tribe to another. A foreign trait may be aptly taken up by a new tribe or an old trait dropped down by the present tribe owing to its archaic and rickety usage. The new trait then becomes ingrained in the parent culture and is reworked and revamped into a new mould. This way, a new pattern is effused within the established trait complex that perpetuates onward and makes a concerted effort to chisel its own trajectory in the course of time. The naive and the seasoned traits thus mingle among themselves to present a civilizational potpourri where no one outwits the other. Bose therefore says,
As time goes on, the points of difference increase in number as the two cultures proceed along their own courses of historical change. Isolation from one another also helps to widen the gulf of difference (ibid :24-25).

Moving along the line of civilizational perspective, yet another distinguished scholar of this genre is Bernard Cohn. Though writing much later, his words echo the thought of Bose, who probably was one of the harbingers of the approach. Gyan Prakash therefore elucidating Cohn’s forte wrote,

Thus, while placing the village within a larger civilizational framework, describing folk and classical cultures as interacting elements, Cohn adds that the distinction between the two is hard to maintain. Upon closer examination, little and great traditions turn out to be thoroughly mixed up with one another. Such a modification of Redfield’s theory, allows Cohn to move effortlessly between different levels, showing that even the contents of little and great traditions cannot be neatly separated. The practical consequence of this insight is that he is able to bring together the studies conducted by Indologists and anthropologists within a single angle of vision and provide an understanding of different elements that make up Indian civilization (Prakash:2004:vi).

Thus what can be made up from the preceding paragraph, is the true essence of what constitutes the civilizational perspective in a nutshell. It is interesting that Cohn subsumed to a tradition already head-started by Bose, but still the latter’s name did not find for itself a due place in the allied discussions. Pandey was implicating the initiation of a novel and versatile framework that will supposedly ensemble both the anthropological and indological perspectives, but the same had already been proposed quite earlier by Bose. Bose had already accomplished this great task while writing his book, Hindu Samajer Gadan (The Structure of Hindu Society). Therefore, Beteille opining on this book says,

What is truly impressive about this book is its design. It brings together within a single framework approaches which are ordinarily practiced separately by ethnographers, indologists and social historians. Fairly early in his career, Bose recognised the enormous scale----in both space and time-----of Hindu civilization, and he rightly felt that a proper understanding of it would require the anthropologist to go beyond the approaches usually applied to the study of tribal communities in North America, Melasna or Australia. It was in this
sense that Bose saw a kinship between his work and that of the American anthropologist, A.L Kroeber (Betelie: 1975:1-2).

Bose’s approaches, especially those used in explaining the structure of the civilization, had been appreciated by Kroeber himself. He understood what exactly Bose meant by civilization and how it signaled at the give-and –take between the multitudes of cultures and their constant interaction or osmosis. It is interesting that Bose, even on intense deliberations, never defined adequately, the term ‘civilization’ and even used the term sparingly. Instead Kroeber, in public forums, used the word in the presence of Bose, to elucidate what Bose actually had in mind while he used this approach. In such a forum where a discussion was being held, that included stalwarts like Robert Redfield, Milton Singer, Kroeber and Bose, Kroeber made the following remarks in the context of Bose’s civilizational amplification. In respect of a paper, read in the seminar by Bose, viz. East and West in Bengal, Kroeber had this to say in response,

Another point I would like to comment on is one you made toward the end of your manuscript. A theoretical point, that what is characteristic of any civilization is not its being, but it’s becoming. That I would agree with you very firmly. Civilizations are; in their very nature, flows in time-------currents that go along in time. One can of course, make a cross-section, as of a moment of civilization, as of a house or of anything, and for certain purposes it is done. But whenever we do that, when we take a synchronic view of something of the nature of civilization, we should always remember that this is only a view that is valid for particular purposes or at a particular moment. But if we are aiming at the fundamental nature of the phenomena we call civilizations, ultimately it is a diachronic one. It is of their nature that they don’t stand still and as soon as they do their essence evaporates (Bose: 1967:209).

It was true that Bose was talking of a civilization that does not stand still, but goes on in time and space. Civilizations have distinctive characters that are specific to space and context, but as they grow cumulatively, they draw upon colorful admixtures, which lend them a distinct but an altogether different character. Bose’s expatiation of the Holi festival as a reflection of cultural trait, is a testimony to this.
The festival of Holi and the colourful admixture of the cultural traits.

Bose illustrates his idea of trait through the festival of *Holi*, popularly celebrated in different parts of the country. The festival, as Bose asserts initially and originally formed a part of the non- Vedic culture, which have not been much talked about. The festival in accordance to the Brahminical pursuits initiated with a human sacrifice to be successively followed by an animal sacrifice. But when the festival was incorporated in the Hindu fold, it was refurbished accordingly. The human sacrifice which seemed discordant with the Vedic culture was soon replaced by burning of the human or the sheep effigy. Bose thus corroborated his idea of the passage of a cultural trait over time and how it undergoes transformation gradually. The spring festival upon which Bose deliberated in detail is his master piece of contemporary socio-cultural history.

Bose extensively researched on the subject to find out the evolutionary trajectory of the festival. He says that the festival nowhere finds mention in the Sanskrit literature until the middle of the 4th century A.D. He expressed bewilderment upon the fact that even one of the most famous books of the Hindu religion, viz. *Bhagabata Purana*, though composed before the 7th century A.D, does not advocate the issue of the swing festival though it was mainly centred around the story of *Lord Krishna*. So we can infer that either the festival did not exist during that time or it was safely eliminated from the Vedic scripts. The ride of the King of Holi, though considered as one of the most important constituents of the Spring-festival, did not surface up in any of the Sanskrit works composed so far. But surprisingly the festival finds expression in the vivid accounts of the travelers who visited India so far. But the instances of such festivals in the Sanskrit texts are rather sporadic which abort any attempt towards developing a generalized chronology. So Bose said, it was rather hard to determine the relative age of the festival. So it thus stands out that the pre-eminence of a colorful festival like this, though has been overlooked by the Vedic mentors, still propitiates and admires the Brahminical culture. It was for this reason that the festival comprised of a Vedic fire sacrifice by the Brahmin. The festival celebrated mostly among the tribes always showed a deep reverence for their superior cultural counterpart and tried moulding the festivals along the Vedic cast. So we find that the tribal cultures did not concentrate on their festivals in isolation but rather thought of integration with the Brahminical culture. As Bose said,
It is thus seen that the elements of the Holi are distributed in a more intense form, not among the Brahmins proper, but among those who are more and more distantly removed from them in the social scale. Abul Fazl, a writer belonging to the 16th century, corroborated the above conclusion by stating that the Holi is a great festival among the Shudras ....... that Holi was indeed not a part of Brahminical culture is also supported by the earliest known reference to it in Sanskrit literature. In the Savarabhasya of Jaimini’s Purvamimangsa, the Holi is spoken of as a custom the origin of which is lost in antiquity. But the view of the Mimangsa School being that all current customs of the Hindus must have had their roots in the Vedas, it is held that reference to the Holi was also present in them. But as nothing like that could be found, scholars made an attempt to reconstruct a formula which might have stood in the Vedas in support of it. We may interpret this absence of Vedic reference as being due to the fact that the Holi did not form a part of Vedic civilization, but of some other civilization which existed here in previous times. However, as that may be, it is a significant fact, that the Holi exists in its more intense form among the lower Hindu castes, and references to the festival are very meagre in ancient Sanskrit literature and entirely absent in the Vedas (Bose:1961:88).

Bose thus talked of the amalgamation of the two cultures and how the one embraced the other. A civilization might grow independently of the other at its point of inception but in the course of its journey, it intertwines with the civilizations which were not its part. This way the civilization is enriched by its multiple counterparts which cut across a wide diverse panorama thus transcending the gulf between the higher and the lower strata. The civilizations placed away from the apex of the continuum are gravitated toward the higher culture and are thus incorporated within its fold. The lower cultures are not however thrown out of the gear but they confidently celebrate their native distinction. The links between the multiple civilizations become more pronounced with age and the umpteen rituals, festivals and the prevalent customs remain a witness to this collaboration. Bose therefore said,

India has been a land where cultures have mingled after flowing in from both the west and east. But what is original is that new combination has taken place here, and sometimes even new inventions. It is not our present purpose to enter into the depths of cultural history, but to indicate in the beginning of the present series of surveys that
broad regional distinctions are even now discernible in the material culture of India, as well as sufficient proof of their interpenetration (Bose:1961a: Introduction).

The true links of the Holi festival with the lower caste is revealed by a particular custom present among the Konkan. The members of the higher caste are supposed to touch the feet of the lower castes during the festival. This is an act, Bose asserted, people would refrain themselves from during mundane activities. Such an act was believed to immune people from diseases, but this explanation was soon concocted after the genuine explanation was lost in antiquity. The ritual assumes a new meaning especially when it is gradually taken over by another civilization and incorporated with slight modifications. The Holi festival was one such non-Vedic festival and its transition into the Vedic cult served us with one such instance. Thus the osmosis between the various civilizations only revises the original content and makes it accessible across the multiple disparate layers. One such cultural ritual was the human sacrifice to be soon followed by that of a sheep the day after. The sheep used to be hurled in the fire along with the human remnants. When the festival came to be slowly blended with the Sanskrit culture, there were slight revisions in its original corpus. As for instance, the human sacrifice was no longer permitted and was soon replaced by its animal counterpart. Bose therefore contended, “The change might be said to have been due to a changed public opinion or incorporation into a culture in which the ideas associated with the trait could no longer be tolerated (Bose:1929:25).

**The civilization and its concomitant process of acquiring the secondary elements.**

In the same note Bose contends that as the traits take shape, the trait complex involves many such attributes which were initially not the part of the original trait-complex. The diversifications crop up as the complex pitches in for the secondary assemblage. The civilization thus in the course of its formation becomes quite unpredictable and malleable in the sense that it outgrows its original crust. As it sheds its external mould, new traits are formed that sometimes seems out of place. But this process of accretion or acquisition of these secondary elements may be a slow process that continues for a long time. The festival of Holi shows how the ceremony attaches itself to the secondary elements which have nothing to do with the original trait character. For instance, the festival takes a distinctive character in the town of Lahore where one of the rituals involves men masquerading through the streets in disguise of Hindu
deities. Thus we find the secondary elements of a tribal festival spring from the caste attributes and together they form unison to form the kernel of the civilization. Such a tendency seems frequent in other parts of the country as well where secondary elements may digress from the original form to take such colorful shapes. In some parts of Punjab wrestling matches are held as parts of Holi festival. They therefore are gradually transfused in the accretion process to assume the form of secondary character of the mighty festival. In Benaras, gambling acts are seen as an integral part of the festival. As Bose says,

In Bengal, presents are sent to the houses of friends and relatives, these consisting of a special preparation of peas and grams encrusted with sugar and miniature temples made of sugar. None of these elements has any integral connection with the bonfire ceremony, but have just been added to it according to local taste. Naturally they increase with time and become more uniform in character if there is frequent intercourse between people of different provinces where Holi is observed” (Bose: 1961:44).

Thus we find how the civilization develops giving space to the adjoining traits which had been due to them for long. This way the heart of the civilization branches out in many different directions to accommodate several secondary but equally essential traits. In due course, the subsidiary elements while interacting with the main corpus of the civilization become so acclimatized with it, that they get enmeshed with the original whole of the civilization. The civilization does march ahead striding past the plethora of cultures which it does not shun but rather promote and eulogize. Bose was therefore promoting an inclusive character of civilization, where not all components were primary in building it foundation, but they joined much later to participate in the process. In the life course of the civilization, the secondary elements became such significant, that their contribution went on to be counted with the former.

Bose illustrates the case with the history of the sun cult of India which had come to be associated with the cult of Mithra imported by the colonialists from central Asia. It was blended with the worship of the Vedic sun-god here and was eventually established in Orissa between eighth and tenth centuries A.D. The prevailing cult in Orissa at that point in time was associated with the presiding deity of Jagannath. The deity was distinguished by the famous car festival known all over the world. When
the cult of Mithra was properly established in Puri, we find this cult developing traits in connection with the presiding cult of Jagannath there. Imitating the major cult there, the shrine of Konark and an adjoining deity was placed to validate the Mithra cult in Orissa. The Konark temple initiated its own car festival and even its shrines were modeled after the temple architecture of Jagannath. The Konark temple in the course of time developed such a strong identity for itself that at times it stood almost impossible to trace back its connections with the foreign Mithra cult in antiquity. It was difficult to establish the resemblance between the two for the Konark temple stood on a firm and invincible ground. As Bose contends,

The history of the sun-cult of India furnishes a good example of how a trait may be mechanically recast in conformity with a foreign cultural pattern. It may lead to the addition of new elements which may even be organically related to the trait –complex, but still the outstanding feature is the process of recasting with reference to a prevailing pattern. That is the reason why it has been assigned a special category in the transformation of a culture trait (Bose:1961: 45).

The civilization thus evolves through the multiple acts of casting and recasting till the secondary elements have been re-moulded to an extent where the distinction between the original and the foreign traits become blurred and superficial. It is here that the revitalizing and the all-encompassing character of the mighty civilization stand atop defeating all other separatist and divisive tendencies. This virtue of the civilization to integrate and assimilate all despite their disparate potentialities is commendable. Bose believes that it makes our civilization such an enduring and invulnerable whole with an indomitable spirit that stands out with its shining extravaganza that epitomizes unity against the national diversity (Bose: 1969, 1971a & 1971b).

**Civilizational perspective and temple architecture**

The civilizational perspective remains very bright in his works on temple architecture (Bose:1931, 1931a, 1931b, 1931c, 1933, & 1933a). Bose had shown how the higher Sanskritic forms of civilization have been enmeshed with the local folk forms to constitute the methods of temple analysis. In his famous book *Cannons of Orissan Architecture*, (1932), Bose asserted the limitations of the earlier methods which have plagued the archaeological studies. He argued that Ferguson and his followers like Rakhaldas Banerjee had relied upon their personal field-observations. The workers
from Europe and their Indian disciples have learnt from this perspective of giving prior importance to the European schools of thought thus denying the traditional Indian focus. This happened because the architects lost grass root connection with the local craftsmen. They did not know how the original builders were making distinctions between the buildings and temples or that between the various types of temples. As Bose contended,

In other words, what was essential and what was secondary according to the local science of architecture was not known to anyone. This is the reason why, in some historical reconstructions of some Fergusson school, primary matters have given the place of importance to matters of secondary value. Such a shortcoming was however inevitable, in view of the fact that Indian scholars generally followed the western pioneers, instead of trying to restore the original science of Indian architecture, which they should have systematically undertaken (Bose: 1932:1-2).

Bose thus contended that the master-builders of the ancient India have generally transmitted their techniques to their disciples orally, such things have remained out of bound of the western archaeologists who had no access to such oral tradition. The great builders of the yester years did not keep any written records of such intricate details like polishing stones, or mounting rocks to such great heights while carving sculptures on the temple body. Such techniques have remained a mystery for the western architects trying to unveil the mystery of temple archaeology in India. Only the craftsmen had the clue to this eternal mystery since they were the only ones equipped with such know-how. The craftsmen acquired such knowledge through rigorous practical training under their masters. Though they learnt these facts of internal nitty-gritty of temple architecture from their preceptors, such information was recorded in the cryptic forms, which were unintelligible to the common mass. They were preserved in a way which was comprehensible only to the craftsmen or the silpi. Thus Bose writes,

The canonical books of the silpis are therefore of the nature of mnemonic notes and are not intelligible to the one not belonging to the caste of the silpins. This has been the reason, why in spite of the labour of our scholars, our knowledge of the architectural science has not advanced as far as might have been expected (Bose:1932 :2-3).
Thus it can be said that the western method of personal field work experience cannot help but study the vast and the intricate work of temple architecture, especially from the local artisans who have played the most pivotal role in building the umpteen temples of India. Orissa which is said to be one of the largest temples owing states in India had been taken up by Bose because of its rich heritage of architecture which couldn’t have been created had it not been for the herculean and meticulous effort of the indigenous craftsmen. Without trying to fathom the local knowledge therefore, it is futile to plunge in the pedantic study of the scripts and scholarly manuscripts to comprehend the ostentatious and extravagant world of temple architecture. So the integration of the knowledge so derived from mentors well-versed in the Vedic knowledge with that of the native craftsmen familiar with the nitty-gritty of temple designing is advocated. As Bose goes on saying,

The third approach to architectural study in India was initiated in India in the year 1835 by Ram Raz in an essay entitled, “Architecture of the Hindus”. Ram Raz read the Sanskrit text of certain silpasastras with the aid of local craftsmen and employed the knowledge so gained in analysing the architectural forms extant in the Deccan. A combination was thus affected between the craftsman’s traditional knowledge, fieldwork and Sanskrit learning and the results yielded were considerably of a valuable character (Bose: 1932:2-3).

Bose had shown how following this approach, it had been possible to resuscitate back the lost glory of the Orissan architecture. Bose reminds us that his book must be taken as a continuation of this approach where the Sanskritic rules of the Orissan architecture have been interpreted with the aid of the local craftsmen. It is with this indigenous knowledge in mind that intensive field works have been undertaken in Orissa and its different neighboring provinces to comprehend the underlying meaning of the opulent architectural styles.

It is thus following this approach of blending together the mighty echelons of the civilization with its humble counterpart that an attempt has been done to restore the long demolished soul of the Orissan temple structure. The historical analysis thus became a sharp tool for studying the culture and civilization with an insightful penetration. The civilizational perspective when followed religiously, can therefore throw a light on exploring the rightful methods to study continuity and change in the
cultural contours with apt attention. The contours thus sincerely amalgamated both the higher and the lower strata such that one is in sync with the other. Bose reiterated this once again, in his conversation with one of the archaeologist and temple connoisseur, M.K Dhaky. Bose repudiated Dhaky’s preference for Sanskrit jargon in respect of the linguistic terms to be used for temple analysis., Dhaky writes,

I clarified that our preference is for Sanskrit jargon. Prof. Bose, however expressed reservation on this score, (and this was perhaps from the anthropological angle), since the terms one hears in mason’s craft lore is what they actually use in their practical parlance/dialect, stemming as they do from the concerned regional language: why not to use those living terms and build the corpus out of that (Dhaky: 1997: 16).

Dhaky while discussing the contributions of Bose in temple architecture upheld his unique methods to study the historical texts. Bose did a painstaking work to interpret the original essence of the indigenous text Bhuvanapradipa, that deals with temple styles. The work was strenuous because the original Sanskrit manuscript was lost but Bose collected seven manuscripts which had been interpreted in Oriya. Dhaky while describing Bose’s method of interpreting manuscripts said,

Since the phraseology of each manuscript sometimes differed, in terms also of vocabulary and in length, he developed a special method of presenting the text not according to the normally followed methodology of text editing where variant readings are shown in the foot-notes, but by putting the relevant passages of the different manuscripts in serial order, one under the other, and after that he gave the essential summary in English, sometimes with his comments, of the content and the intent of the text (this possibly was the most practical solution to the problem). For comprehending the methods and terms of construction in the living tradition, he had consulted the practising architects and craftsmen...this exposition covered almost the whole range of the formal building traditions (excepting for the door frames), is exceedingly enlightening, and is equally a very useful aid for studying the components and related details of the Orissan temple. The nomenclature used a few Sanskrit terms still surviving in the Orissan living and textual tradition, but the rest of about 100 terms are all Oriya, though for some, it is possible to restore the original Sanskrit form, like Jāṅgha=jaṅghā, kāndha=skandha, kānti=kantha, pālāka=phalaka, khapuri=karparî, rāha=ratha, and so forth (ibid:20).
This shows how Bose had persistently put thrust on the regional and local languages even to the extent of outwitting the ruling dialect of the country to give eminence to the native aspects of the nation. The leniency so portrayed to accommodate the multiple cultures and their corresponding cults across the podium is quite a commendable way of portraying our civilization. It only reveals the resilience and the tolerance of the society to accept the varying and diverse cultural traits within its vast and amiable civilizational fold. The approach which he lent to this work made it such worthwhile that it was readily looked up for reference by such stalwarts on temple architecture like Prof. S.K Saraswati, Dr K.C Panigrahi, Smt Debala Mitra, Dr D.R Das and Tom Donaldson. Here in lies the potentiality and versatility of the perspective. Therefore, the book, Cannons of Orissan Architecture, will remain another encapsulation of the civilizational perspective. Dhaky while eulogizing the book, therefore claims,

It was in essence a Bible for several scholars and outstandingly continues to be so. It has motivated/oriented the scholars to look at the building far more closely than lending the usual superficial appraisal. The students of the medieval north Indian temple architecture are inestimably indebted to Prof. Bose for editing this valuable work (ibid:15-16).

**The confident phase of the civilization**

Bose points out that every civilization passes through multiple phases and each of them is eloquently carved out by its material traits. Of these traits, particularly the architectural remains stand out to be potential bearers of the moods and dispositions of the regime in which it was set up. The remnants of the temple very explicitly bring out either the confidence or the insipidity of the civilization in which they were constructed. As Bose notes that, long before the Konark temple was constructed, there was a tradition followed down for ages by the prosperous kings and their dynasties to construct opulent temples as a mark of their wealth and affluence. Such temples were built up to escalate one’s socio-economic rung in the society so as to further his status and footing on the social podium. But Bose noted that the temples built before Konark were without any meaning or symbolic undercurrent. They were mere mementoes of a king’s ostentatious living and stood out like hollow and superfluous edifices. They were simply artifacts to decorate and embellish the temple structures but without any...
significant meanings. The architects were thus imbecile people eyeing on places where they can lavishly set up a temple with extravagant and elaborate structures. But such structures hardly carried any meaning nor could they remain a witness to the essence and aura of that civilization.

But this was unlike of the Konark temple which refuted the mute and dumb sculptures in lieu of animated and luminous ones which spoke out for themselves. Bose went to the roots of this temple structure to dig into the genesis of its dynamism and vibrancy. The temple was said to be constructed in the era of Ganga dynasty by its king Narasinghadev. The king was known worldwide for his chivalry and prowess. He had conquered nations wide and apart and has proudly annexed them to his kingdom to showcase his strength and gravity. The dynasty thus basked in glory and emancipation and the craftsmen tried capturing the moods in the sculptures they carved. The temple propitiated the sun goddess who stood over the entire universe as the omnipotent and the omnipresent force. The temple thus was chiseled out to remind us of the enduring and overwhelming power of the sun god and the dazzling brilliance of the epoch he ruled upon. The Konark temple stood out for its intricate sculptures that were carved by the craftsmen (Bose: 1930:33).

Bose appreciated the spontaneity and the impulsiveness with which the art and carvings had flown splendidly. He said there was no hypocrisy or cynicism in the works of the craftsmen. The mighty temple and its bountiful but meaningful carvings all narrate the impromptu and ingenious phases of the civilizations. There was no fear or inhibition to constrict the natural and impulsive creativity underlying the sculptures. It was therefore a cheerful and prosperous civilization which boasted of independence and well-being at its base. What sounds even more surprising is the sequence of multiple events sculptured against the temple corpus. The sculptures had reflected the daily mundane activities of the people and their erotic postures that had gradually given in to the more aesthetic and moralistic positions that the craftsmen adapted atop the temple. In this sense the Konark temple remains the epitome of unity amongst diversity in independent India that vaunted of its resourcefulness and equilibrium to garland diverse acts into one thread. Bose extolled the magnitude of the temple and compared it to one of the other huge temple, viz the Khajuraho when he said,
The Khajuraho temple of the middle India also flaunted umpteen idols like the Konark. At times the sculptures surpassed that of the Konark. The way the demurred feminism had blossomed in the carvings seemed unparalleled to its counterpart in Orissa. But the Khajuraho temple could not chisel out an insightful and benevolent mind of a craftsman that the Konark could attend with ease (Bose: 1949: 249-250).

Bose said that the craftsmen of Khajuraho, might be more adept and skilled but their sculptures could not reflect that extemporaneousness and emancipation that came so easily in Konark. The temple structure seemed exhausted of drudgery and it was crippled with fear and hindrance. The drive for power and prestige had been so urgent that it deteriorated the encompassing spirit and soul of the temple. It stood in no comparison to the Konark temple which could boast of its unifying nature and unending synergy. At least in terms of the somber spirit and invincible power, the Khajuraho temple was far behind. Pradip Bose therefore remarked,

In Konaraker bibaran, Bose (1960 [1926]) refers to an expansive and confident phase of Indian civilization. In a larger perspective, Bose considered Oriya civilization no different from other civilizations in being made up of elements derived from many tribes and many lands. He illustrates this through sculptures on temple walls (Bose: 2007: 304).

The other authors on the Konark temple had spoken in unison about the unifying character of the temple structure. As Debala Mitra had suggested in her book Konarak, while discussing the architecture of the temple, that “three of the four divisions again are composed of several elements. All these elements are in perfect symphony with one another and combine harmoniously in a masterly architectural conception as a whole. Some of these elements are named after human limbs. It has been suggested on the basis of these terms that the Orissan architects named the male temple as the pida and the jagantohana as the female (Mitra: 1968:28).

Thus we find that the temple architecture signified a period in which the civilizations came to constitute a conceptual whole which were self- sufficient in themselves. Thus an organic analogy has been drawn between the human body and the temple structure. This was done to show a functional integration between the various elements of the temple that stood in perfect concomitance with one another yet furnished their distinguished identity to constitute the living soul of the temple. The civilizations thus
boasted of such temples which showed judicious symbiosis between the whole and their parts. Therefore, Bose’s civilizational perspective rightly rests on the canons of the structural-functional school of thought, to which he subscribed.

**The epi-center of the civilization remains multiple and undecided.**

To the students of the Indian society and social history, the mighty cultural partition has been the Aryan North vis-a-vis the Dravidian South. Iravati Karve also uses this as her point of reference in her extensive study of kinship. But when Bose writes his traveler’s accounts in his book, *Paribrajaker Diary*, his travelogues blurs this bipartite division. Bose observed that the linguistic divide was based on a number of material traits that blended North West with South Central Asia and south and east continuous with that of southern Asia. Bose later on conducted an extensive survey on the material traits and the distribution of pottery all over India. The study though covertly found out the spatial distribution of the material culture across the Indian subcontinent, nevertheless had a latent vocation.

He wanted to show, trespassing the rigid lingual divide, that the diverse regions furnished commonality in their material culture. In his introduction to the *Peasant life in India: a study in Indian Unity and Diversity*, he proposes a pyramidal imagery of the unity of Indian civilization. Bose therefore said,

What is even more assuring being that, as one considers other spheres of life, namely, things like laws which guide inheritance or define the rights and duties of individuals in a kin group, or if one rises to higher reaches of life confined to ideals or faiths of art, the differences which one has noticed at the material level of life gradually becomes feeble and feeblener. They are eventually replaced by a unity of beliefs and aspirations which gives to Indian civilization a character of its own. The structure of Indian unity can therefore be compared to a pyramid. There is more differentiation at the material base of life and progressively less as one mounts higher and higher. It is needless to say that the implication is not that village people are more different from one another than city people or sophisticated and propertied classes; but that, whether it is a villager or dweller of Indian towns, there is more variety in regard to some aspects of life and less in relation to others (Bose:1961a: Introduction).
It is thus evident that the Indian civilization is a cogent whole with an underlying unifying theme. The material traits, though initially suffer from discord and dissensions, get dissolved in consensus and unison. The pyramidal structure therefore emerges which speaks of regional balance and harmony. This is significant especially at the time when regional chivalry surpasses all to pin down the regionally depressed states to extol its virtues over the others. It does so at the cost of hurtling the micro threads that stitches together the bulky nation. Bose, however, contends that the pyramidal model of the civilization does not intend to do this. It instead teaches us to respect and recognize the innumerable small states and their regional flavor so that they do not get trundled under the heavy thrust of the mighty nation. This is contrary to the European civilization which promotes its contentious and warring tendencies in favor of its national spirit (Bose: 1930). It therefore remains blind to the multiple states and its regional demands. Herein lays the significance of our civilization that encourages diversity of cultural traits and its local aura. But in doing so it does not go reckless because it anchors all the disparate communities into a web of autonomous but distinct economic organizations.

The civilization thus caters to the regional demands in its drive to emancipate the local units from the rigours of its steel laced rein but nevertheless in its bid to render freedom it does not curb its protectionist garb. It nourishes the indigenous drives but at the same time monitors their economic growth lest it goes haywire or gets insecure mid-way.

Thus Bose contends that the stereotyped linguistic divide that has been reiterated for ages has been truncated thus making place for the multiple voices and their individual narratives. This is commendable especially keeping in mind the cultural diversity and the civilizational vow to cultivate a unity in diversity. The economic tradition of the caste system facilitated this unity as the disparate regions became united and the remote areas came within the vicinity of recognition and acceptance. However, Bose bemoans that such unifying power of the caste to bound civilizational resilience is falling short, for he laments,

It has only been in the course of the last two centuries when European influence, attended by higher productive efficiency, has made its influence felt in India that the time has come when the old productive order is dying out.
But the urgency of social change, or one’s inner sympathy in the
direction of economic justice and equality, need not interfere with the
obvious merits of the caste system in so far as they are objectively
ascertainable (Bose:1958b:14).

Besides, various traditional media like folk songs, narratives, fairs, indigenous
poetries and recitation by the wandering sects acted as the spokesperson of the local
culture and dialect. The structure of our civilization therefore swings through the
colourful interplay of little and great tradition giving precedence to both the
indigenous and the heterogeneous encounters, and a common pool of resources for all
to rejoice over, without dissension. This was of course the magic of a plural
civilization that could indulge upon such acts of reconciliation and tolerance, often
acting as an exemplary agent worth emulating, in this gulf ridden society. Bose
therefore writes,

One of the outstanding facts of India’s educational organization,
remnants of which have survived to the present day, has been the role
occupied by her wandering mendicants, as well by Brahminical priests
and story-tellers, belonging to several castes, in the common store of
traditions all over the land....the customs of reading the holy scriptures
or their vernacular renderings during some months of the year in rural
India was also useful in familiarizing the people with stories from epics
like the Mahabharata, the Ramayana, or the Bhagavata Purana. These
readings were often attended by music; and the local open air dramas, as
well as the popular contests between poets engaged in bouts of
extempore composition, had all as their central theme, a set of legends
which the whole Hindu India shared in common (Bose:1967:7-8).

Civilization as portrayed through art

Bose had seen how the different nuances of the civilization had been colourfully
portrayed through various arts and portraits of esteemed artists (Bose: 1940a &1957).
Eminent amongst them had been Ram Kinkar Baij and Jamini Roy. Ram Kinkar Baij
started his artistic career with an inclination for western art. But he was soon
frustrated with his own perceived inability to pick up the western form of art. But
soon he realized staying in India, it is never possible to internalize the tactics of
drawing the western forms. He explained it with the example of *sehnai*, an Indian form of musical instrument which is played by anchoring upon a principal tune to be soon followed by other secondary forms. But readily after this, the complementary tunes restore back to the original form and recline back to the core. Baij compared this with the western civilizations, that always have the initial tendency to stray way from the axis but then soon being exhausted, the elements revive back their normalcy and resuscitate the lost spirit of the civilization. Baij repeated that since the civilizations entail diversities, the recalcitrant parts might initially defy blending with the crust but they soon relinquish to get enmeshed with the core culture. The principal tune of the civilization might change but it must belittle the contentious counterparts to prove its underlying unity. Roy attracted Bose because of his emphasis on the materialist basis of the western civilization for which even Bose had severe aversion. He felt that the consumerist proclivity was so loud in such a civilization that it became reflected in almost every aspect of their life. This was unlike the Indian counterpart where aesthetical and its subliminal areas got equal precedence alongside the materialist and the hedonistic ones. Bose appreciated Roy in the way he churned out the differences in technique of paintings between the eastern and the western civilizations. As Bose said,

"The nature and its vast ambit have not been depicted by the artists as their exact replica, but they have rather been represented in a different way. It is as if the artists have portrayed the nature as they have perceived in their serene and in-depth contemplation and reflection. It was soon understood that the technique they employed did not sketch the mere outline of the fact but rather concentrated on the underlying and the inherent shadow or the penumbra. In their bid to sanctify the essence of the facts they depicted, they poured in all the piety and the holiness that one could have imagined. The western arts were all three dimensional unlike the orient. Here the artist aborted the third dimension to make room for their insightful depiction of the nature and its areas” (Bose: 1930:224-225).

Thus, Bose wanted us to recognize the essential differences between the two civilizations and Baij reminded us that the fulcrum of the difference was laid on the variant approach that the two forms of art advocated. The locus of the thrust or emphasis have been so different for these corresponding forms of art that each of
them can be regarded as an autonomous one existing in its own right. Such is the magnitude and extent of the difference between the two civilizations that the starkness seemed to grow cumulatively with age. Thus Bose was always ready to give an edge to the oriental civilization for the tranquility and the morality it professed while simultaneously furnishing the ethos of consumption and materialism with a considerable self-restraint.

**Civilization as accumulated through the gradual process of diffusion**

Among the methods of anthropology used frequently in academic discourse, the one that deserves a distinct identity is the diffusionist school. Bose subscribed to this school while elaborating on his theories. Perhaps he originally used this approach for the first time in a paper written on the spring festival in 1925, which was later on published in 1929. He used the same method in combination with history when he went on to study the evolution of the north Indian temples on the basis of epigraphic evidence. His study on the growth of the religious centres in Bhuvaneswar as a point of assimilation of the various castes is rightly a study with a strong objective. It did not intend to study just the basis for the accommodation of the multiple castes but also wanted to give an account of the trend of change imminent in the religion and the society at large. Applying the same method, Bose had conducted massive survey on aspects of caste. He wanted to see how the castes govern themselves in Orissa. He did not confine himself just to Orissa but conducted similar surveys in Bengal, Madras, and Maharashtra and so on. The chief idea was to find out the diffused character of the Indian culture so that we can find out in which areas they were regionally differentiated and where it was not.

Yet another work where Bose had generously used this approach was the other work reported upon by the Anthropological Survey of India. The work was entitled as *Peasant life in India: a study in Indian unity and diversity* (1961a). The work was done on the basis of a survey on the regional usage of various material traits like the forms of agricultural implements, oil-presses, food, footwear, bullock-carts, and plans of village and its domiciles, domestic architecture etc. The survey was conducted in 313 out of 322 districts. It was inferred that certain traits especially those related to food or agriculture show a much pan national form such that they cut across the socio-geographical parameters. They also sometimes seem to surpass the linguistic barriers of the country. Therefore, Bose said,
Regionalism in respect of agricultural tools and the like is different from regionalism in language. This has led the survey to enquire not only about differences in respect of caste government, but also village gods and goddesses. When all such information covering extensive geographical areas is pooled together, they are likely to indicate certain relationships which may not be available from other spheres of investigation, limited to narrow regions or small communities (Bose:1961a:46).

Bose knew that such intricate details of life are usually missed out by any such macro survey that intends to pin down only on the more conspicuous and distinctive elements of life. Bose perhaps did not want to do this and he therefore thought upon to survey such minute details of everyday life, like, the husking mortar and pestle, methods of cooking food in oil, men and women’s unstrewn clothes etc. All these indicate that Bose had set for himself, the larger task of exploring the nature of cross-breeding taking place between civilizations and perhaps inspecting the roots of cultural osmosis in the countries. Bose therefore said,

India has been a land where cultures have mingled after flowing in from both the west and east. But what is original is that new combinations have taken place here, and sometimes even new inventions. It is not our present purpose to enter into the depths of cultural history, but to indicate in the beginning of the present series of surveys that broad regional distinctions are even now discernible in the material culture of India, as well as sufficient proof of their interpenetration (ibid: Introduction).

The true meaning of civilization: The Bengal civilization acting as a case in point.

A man, who is so prevalently associated with civilizational perspective, rarely came out with a cogent definition of the term ‘civilization’. Only on rare occasions, did he elucidate on the content of the term, which he was in love with. Nirmal Kumar Bose was thus finally eking out a full definition of civilization, when he said,

The submission is thus made that civilization is a matter of the mind, although it does not exist without its material or organizational shell. And the form of this ideational substructure----which together with the material or organizational components forms that for which one may
reserve the term ‘Culture’---springs and alters according to the needs and experiences of life (Bose: 1967: 278).

Thus it becomes clear enough that he was proposing a mental construct of civilization though he was complementing it with a material crust. His adequate use of culture as material traits clearly signal to this. Nevertheless, he seemed to make culture, the primary ingredient of civilization, and therefore used it in close association with civilization, in whichever form, it might be. At the same time, the organic analogy with the social structure always remained inherent in his theory because he took culture as a variable of needs and experiences of man’s life. This culture went on to build the building block of his civilizations. Bose therefore further added,

Wissler has suggested the hypothesis that there might be a culture-building instinct in man, which compels him to build civilization after a definite pattern, wherever he might be born. That instinct is like the instinct of the bee which compels it to build its hive after a definite general pattern all over the world. In other words, the character is transmissible by heredity and not subject to environmental influences (Wissler:1923: 264, 269) (Bose:1929:11).

True it was, that culture and civilization were complementary terms which went hand in hand to build up a larger perspective and a world-view that became versatile enough to interpret the past and the present with equal dexterity and malleability that only a few perspectives could claim. This way of understanding civilization, was plentifully used to interpret the Bengali civilization. It is perhaps one of the most transient forms of civilization which takes up such different forms, that it eludes the understanding of any intransigent perspective. This is perhaps because of the formidable mixture of the rich traditions and the contemporary changes, that renders to Bengal a distinct civilization. Bose therefore said,

But, in any case, in the history of modern Bengal, we find, on the contrary, idea, organizations, the technological equipment of living, all in logical unconformity with one another. …and…Bengal’s civilization has been subject to many stresses and many changes, which have given no rest to those who have been subject to them. But what shall we call Bengal’s civilization? …in this formidable adventure of cultural recognition, Bengali culture has always been in process of becoming, instead of merely being. By contrast with Western items of culture, items of Bengal’s culture gained added distinctness.
The tendency to become something is the characteristic of any civilization. No civilization perhaps satisfies all the demands of the free and full growth of human life in a perfect manner. But when there is a continuity between aspirations which shape the actuality of cultural life, we are perhaps entitled to regard the two as belonging to one civilization (Bose:1967:278).

Like Bose, Robert Redfield also believed that the case of Bengal’s civilization was distinct and demands special attention. He felt Bose was bringing out the issue with far more intricacies than would meet the surface. Nevertheless, he, too, felt the idea of what really constitutes Bengal’s civilization is still misty. He therefore said,

But if I read Professor Bose correctly, he meant something more than that…as a formidable defender of culture organization, it is not only to be seen as going on through time, but as minds in an effort to restate themselves and their direction of further growth through time. And therefore the question arises, to what extent is this characteristic of mixed civilization? To what extent is it characteristic of a special case, like Bengal, where cultivated minds met, or is it characteristic of all civilization? I think the central issue is unresolved, but provocingly raised: How is this civilization of Bengal to be identified and characterized? Does it have a characteristic identity; and if so, is it to be separated from the West, identified with India, or so different that although spawned by the latter it is also something which has newly new begun? (ibid: 297-298).

Nevertheless, Bose wrote many articles on Bengal and its various gamut (Bose: 1958d, 1958a, 1958c) and tried explaining what he really meant by a civilization. He could definitely be taken as one of the pioneers of civilization studies, for not only just that, his efforts to place Bengal’s civilization a distinct place in national panorama, should not remain un-noticed. He truly was one of the stalwarts of civilizational analysis who carefully paved the way to develop a full-fledged perspective for not only studying civilization, but trying to theorize it across time and space. Not just synchronic interpretations of civilizations, but a well-drawn out plan for a diachronic study to compare apparently dissimilar but inherently similar civilizations remained his forte.

**Conclusion**
Bose therefore wrote avidly on various themes and issues, but nevertheless, his principal theme remained the mighty civilization and its various undercurrents. Bose remained glued to such explanations so that at times he did not adequately expatiated on what he actually meant by civilization. Perhaps his writings swayed across the parent theme of civilization, and hence were disparate and sometimes digressed from one corner to another, thus refusing to come under a single umbrella. However, Bose’s principal approach remained the same, even if there remained a pinch of ambiguity in what he actually meant by it.

His subjects cross bred into multiple combinations to produce such an array of themes and sub-themes, that sometimes the major theme went unnoticed. Nevertheless, if we diligently concentrate upon the subjects he touched, we can sort them out along a common unifying line of order and perhaps garland them with little effort, into a single string. Whatever he wrote, be it temple structures, archaeology, caste structures, social movements, tribal absorption to national resonance or urban sociology, his basic forte had been to integrate the disparate and random elements strewn across the stratified order into a common podium. This is what he wanted to do; he was ready to show that human endeavours are nothing but an on-going circle of reciprocity and exchange where there is nothing big or small. The tide of time encircles around the holistic idea of mankind where all participate in their own rights and struggle hard to acquire that sanctity from the society.

Bose glorified villages and the rural structures and felt that without their all-round participation, urban centres or the very basis of the what we term as society, will be maimed for life. While drawing upon this idea of civilization, he fell upon Gandhian policies of mass mobilization and the ways to woo them through concurrent ways. Bose, like Gandhi, felt that the ancient system of Varnashram, if renovated on an egalitarian line, could go a long way in giving a strong foundational basis to the civilization. Bose’s idea of civilization was not ahistorical but it transcended the way of time. He believed in revivifying the civilization in new ways, but certainly he asserted that the new glitz of the reformed life should not be-dazzle us against the virtues of the old society which must be lapped up selectively. Bose’s way of deciphering the civilization was not conservative either. He did not mind adopting the new ways to refurbish the civilizational base, but only feared that the new society has
not geared up adequately to accommodate the new changes. So building up a civilization was a slow process and not a fortnight sudden endeavour.
References


