Octavio Paz's Assessment of the Evolution of Modern India

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Chapter 3
Octavio Paz's Assessment of the Evolution of Modern India

Octavio Paz, though first and foremost a poet, is equipped with the precise scholastic tools of a master historian as is evident from the second section of *In Light of India*, 'Religions, castes, languages' which gives a brief but insightful survey of Indian history and its amazing society. The third section is 'A Project of Nationhood' which is an in-depth analysis of modern Indian politics, comparing the Islamic, Hindu and western civilizations through the course of history.

Paz's mature and mellow assessment of Indian reality is embodied in his last work, which is his last will and testament of his relation with India - *In Light of India*. In fact it is a veritable mine of seminal observations on the nature of Indian culture and the characteristics of the Indian peoples. With characteristic acumen, Paz observes that in Indian stories genres that are separate in western tradition combine in surprising ways. So he concludes that "it is a characteristic of the Indian people: frank realism allied with delirious fantasy, a refined astuteness with an innocent credulity" (*In Light* 32). India is the land of Puranas and also Patanjali. Paz rightly perceives "contradictory and constant pairs in the Indian soil
like sensuality and asceticism, the eagerness for material well-being and the cult of poverty and disinterest" (*In Light* 33).

Paz makes a pregnant remark on India when he says that the first thing that surprised him about India was 'the diversity created by extreme contrast'. In India modernity and antiquity, luxury and poverty, sensuality and asceticism, gentleness and violence exist side by side. But the more remarkable aspect of India and the one that defines it is the co-existence of Hinduism and Islam. One is the richest and most varied polytheism whereas the other is the strictest and most extreme form of monotheism. Paz observes that between these two religions there is an incompatibility. In Islam the theology is rigid and simple whereas Hinduism contains so many doctrines and sects which "induces a kind of vertigo" (*In Light* 37). The followers of the former faith affirms a creator god whereas the latter envisions "the wheel of successive cosmic eras with its procession of gods and civilizations" (88). Paz sums up: "Hinduism is a conjunction of complicated rituals while Islam is a clear and simple faith" (37). In Islam, there are divisions within itself, but these are not as profound as those within Hinduism which "accepts not only a plurality of gods but also of doctrines (darshanas)" (*In Light* 38).
The religious literary, legal and historical works of the Hindus are poles apart from the similar works of the Indian Muslims. Also there is nothing similar in the architectural, artistic and literary styles of the Hindus and the Indian Muslims. Commenting on the contrasting nature of the two attitudes to life, Paz opines that it is impossible to say whether they are 'two civilizations occupying a single territory' or 'two religious nurtured by a single civilization. Tracing the evolution of Hinduism, Paz says that Hinduism began in India and it has a filial relation with the Vedic religion of the Aryan tribes. "In contrast, Islam is a religion that came from abroad fully formed, with a theology to which nothing could be added". Though the two religions live side by side, the separate identities of the two communities have been preserved. But there are points of contact between the followers of these two religions. As Paz astutely observes" "many things unite them: similar customs, languages, love of the land, cuisine, music, popular art, clothing and . . . history" (38).

Evolution of Modern India

As Paz observes "the first forays of Muslim soldiers into India were in the year 712, in the province of Sind" (In Light 34). What began as looting expeditions became a full scale invasion. In 1206, the Sultanate of Delhi was founded. It was ruled by various dyanasties until sixteenth
century when Babur founded the Mughal dynasty in 1526, ending the Delhi sultanate.

During the days of the Delhi sultanate, life in the villages underwent little changes as the rulers left the social fabric almost entirely intact"(39). But in the cities, Turkish aristocracy superseded the ancient ruling groups like Brahmans, Kshatriyas and wealthy merchants. The Delhi sultanate was 'the center of the entire Muslim world' (40), since it flourished after the sack of Baghdad by Genghiz Khan's troops in 1258. In those days people from the lower castes adopted Islam owing to factors like the new political order, the possibility offered by Islam to free oneself from the law of karma and the work of the Muslim missionaries.

The sixteenth century saw the beginning of a new period in Indian history when Babur founded the Mughal Empire. With the insight of a historian of finest calibre, Paz evaluates:" This is was the height of Islamic civilization in India, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries" (In Light 44). But with the 18th century, a period of decline began.

In the relation between Hindus and Muslims, there was a moment of exceptional harmony' under the reign of the great emperor Akbar (1556-1605). As a sign of religious toleration and conciliation, Akbar commissioned translations of the Atharva Veda, the Ramayana, and the
Mahabharata and built the House of worship (Ibadat Khana) as a meeting place for theologians and priests of different religions. Moreover he issued a decree called Divine Faith, in which he was the arbiter of all religious disputes. 'Din-i-Ilahi' - Divine Faith - was a blend of Islam, Hinduism and other religions. In Europe, those were the days of the Reformation.

The reign of the Emperor Jahangir (1605-27) was a period of the tolerance and coexistence. Paz has this to say about Jahangir: "He had aesthetic leanings and political skill, but he was not inspired by grand designs (In Light 47). Percival Spear, the noted historian says that 'he became a kind of life-president of Indian artists" (A History of India 2: 54).

Jahangir was succeeded by his son Shah Jahan who ascended the throne after assassinating his brother. His reign was 'a period of artistic splendor (In Light 48). the crowning achievement being the construction of the Taj Mahal. As Percival Spear observes: "He was in a special sense the architectural director of his day . . . the great building of his reign, the Taj Mahal, the Delhi fort, and Juma Masjid . . . would not have been what they are without his personal inspiration and direction" (A History of India 2: 54).

The war of succession among the four sons of Shah Jahan led to the ascension to power of Aurangzeb. Paz notes that one of the slain princes,
Dara Shikoh was an intellectual who sought a bridge between Hinduism and Islam. The reign of Aurangzeb, which lasted half a century, had far reaching consequences in that he "proposed the impossible: to govern a vast empire, composed of a majority of Hindus, conforming to the laws of Islamic asceticism" (In Light 49). Though Aurangzeb was an astute politician and a talented soldier, the decline of the Mughal empire was started by his unwise policies and senseless wars. Paz categorically says: "his long reign was a series of terrible mistakes, senseless wars, and useless victories. The decline of the empire begins with him" (49). Aurangzeb died in 1707, fighting the Marathas in the Deccan.

The internecine struggles among the new powers like the Sikhs and the Marathas and the growing weakness of the Mughal empire set the stage for the appearance and domination of the British, the new protagonist from across the sea. They were bent on economic and political domination of the region and not on religions conversion of the people. The conquest of India by the British was a process that lasted more than a century and involved many extraordinary personalities like Robert Clive, Warren Hasting and Lord Wellesley who were 'wise diplomats and remarkable military men" (51). The British came to India as part of the commercial activities of the East India Company. Eventually it became an
instrument of Great Britain's political expansion. It was directed by
Governor General. The administrative set up of the company underwent
changes when it had to face the revolt of 1857. The revolt was crushed by
the company and the Governor General was replaced by Viceroy, the direct
representative of the crown.

In November 1858, Queen Victoria solemnly sanctioned religious
freedom and also granted the right of Indians to serve in the colonial
government. The proclamation of the Queen had far reaching
implications. Religious freedom abolished the connection between religion
and the state consequently the Muslims lost their traditional privileged
position. The right granted by the Queen was, according to Paz, "the seed
for the future independence of India" (52).

According to Paz, what happened in 1857 was not a national revolt
because the idea of a nation had not blossomed in the Indian consciousness.
In the context of India, Paz views nationhood as a modern concept
imported by the British. In two brilliant sentences, Paz sums up this
judgement of the importance of 1857 and 1947 in the history of India:

The revolt of 1857 was a doomed and chaotic attempt to
return things to the way they had been before the British
arrived. The Independence of 1947 was the triumph of
British ideas and institutions . . . without the British (In Light 53).

Encounters and Contradictions: Evolution of Modernity in India

Paz says that 'the independence of 1947 was the triumph of British ideas and institutions . . . without the British" (In Light 53). How is he justified in this judgement? A review of the interaction between cultural, religious and political factors in Modern India will clarify this problem.

The Delhi Sultanate was 'the centre of the entire Muslim world' since it flourished after the sack of Baghdad by Gangling Khan's troops in 1258. Though Muslim intellectual and artists found Delhi as their haven, the sultanate period was not characterized by solid scholarship and study of the sciences, which was the hallmark of Baghdad. Scholars in Baghdad and Cordoba assimilated the classical philosophy and the rich pagan tradition resulting in cultural symbiosis for the benefit of all. But nothing salubrious like that happened in Delhi. In a remarkable sentence Paz expresses that deplorable condition: "Delhi never had an Averroes or an Avicenna" (40). Scholars came to India and found asylum there, but no one of the stature of Averroes or Avicenna emerged out of that cultural interaction.
Paz is quite objective and impartial in his assessment of the period. He says that there were great poets like Amir Khusrau who wrote in Persian and in Hindi. The contact was not without influence: "Indian music deeply influenced that of the Arab world and central Asia" (40). The same cannot be said about architecture and painting belonging to Hindu and Muslim tradition. According to Paz, Ellora and Taj Mahal were inspired by two different visions of the world.

In between the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries, three sufi orders came to India and preached the doctrine of Islam in the pantheistic vein. The Sufis emphasized that all is God, a doctrine that is heretical for orthodox Islam. Nizam ud-din, a famous saint and Amir Khusrau, his friend belong to the Sufi tradition. Paz observes that the end of the Sultanate period saw a fusion of Hindu and Sufi mysticism. In Sufi mysticism there is a pantheistic vein which has some similarities with Hinduism. The Sufis in India influenced Muslims as well as Hindus. Among Hindus there was a movement of popular devotion to personal God which was called 'Bhakti movement'. Paz rightly observes that the "Bhakti movement might have been the nucleus for the union of the two communities and the birth of a new India" (44). The bhakti movement inspired such mystic poets as Tukaram (1598-1649) and Kabir (1440-1518)
both of whom wrote in the vernacular about Rama and Allah. In the poems of Kabir, Tagore saw "the failed promise of what India could have become" (43).

With the Mughal empire in the sixteenth century the relation between Hindus and Muslims entered a new phase. Paz succinctly observers: "The tendency toward fragmentation - a permanent aspect of Indian history, and one that the sultans of Delhi continually faced - was especially pronounced during the long decline of the Mughal Empire" (In Light 44). During the days of Akbar the Great, the relation between Hindus and Muslims was harmonious. Akbar commissioned translations of the Atharva Veda and proclaimed Divine Faith, a fusion of Hinduism, Islam and other religions.

Though the age of Akbar was characterized by religions tolerance, it had its opponent among the orthodox Islamic clergy in the person of Sheik Ahmad Sirhindi who opposed Sufi pantheism. As Percival Spear, a noted Indian historian says, "Sirhindi sought to reconcile Sunni legalism with the religion of the spirit and so to repel the tendency to syncretism with Hinduism" (A History of India 2: 57).

The reign of the Emperor Jahangir was a period of tolerance and co-existence. Jahangir was succeeded by Shah Jahan whose four sons fought
among themselves for the throne. Dara Shikoh, Shah Jahan's eldest son, was an intellectual educated in the Sufi tradition. He was convinced that a bridge could be built between Islam and Hinduism using the philosophy of the Upanishads which he called "the most perfect of the divine revelations. (In Light 48). He disliked Ulemas and mullahs and made fun of the chatter of the clergy in a poem.

In Paradise there are no mullahs
One never hears the racket of their discussions and debates (48).

It is quite clear that Paz too, like Dara Shikoh, doesn't like fanatics and fundamentalists. He calls Aurangzeb a Sunni fanatic and observes: "The decline of the empire begins with him" (49). He states the reason for the decline: "Aurangzeb, a Sunni fanatic, proposed the impossible to govern a vast empire, composed of a majority of Hindus, conforming to the laws of Islamic asceticism (49). Aurangzeb's long reign was characterized by terrible mistakes, senseless wars and useless victories." He restored the hated tax-on non-Muslims. "Under Aurangzeb, the breach between Hindus and Muslims became insurmountable" (50).

In this context Paz mentions how the broadmindedness and the liberal outlook of Dara Shikoh influenced the course of European thought.
In 1657 Dara Shikoh, with the help of a pandit, translated the Upanishads into Persian. A French traveller and Orientalist named Anquetil du Perron, made a Latin version of Dara's translation. This version had a profound influence on three Western thinkers: Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Emerson.

Apart from Hinduism and Islam there are other religions in India like the Christian, Parsi and Jewish minorities and also groups whose beliefs are somewhere between the two religions such as the Sikhs and the Jains. "Sikhism is a compromise with Islamic militancy: Jainism, an archaic heresy, is a compromise with Buddhism" (In Light 54). There are tribes and indigenous communities that live at the margins of Hinduism. Paz, using a striking imagery describes the way in which Hinduism deals with foreign belief and cultures. "Like an enormous metaphysical boa Hinduism slowly and relentlessly digests foreign cultures, gods, languages and beliefs" (55). The reason for this ability on the part of Hinduism is the fact that it is a conglomeration of beliefs and rituals. It has got immense power of assimilation and 'practices, with great success, appropriation" (55).

The co-existence of Hinduism and Islam in India is, according to Paz, "more than a historical paradox" (37). Viewed in the light of the failure of a
syncretic relationship between the two religions, the decline of the Mughal empire is significant. Eventually a new protagonist appeared on the political arena of India - the British. Initially, the East India company confined their activities to business and commerce; but in due course the company became a military and political power. Like the Muslim emperors, the British were also monotheists, but they were bent on economic and political domination of the region and not on religious conversion of the people.

After the revolt of 1857, the crown began to rule India through viceroy. In November 1858, Queen Victoria granted religious freedom to Indians and recognised the right of Indians to serve in the colonial government. As Paz says: "This right was the seed for the future independence of India" (In Light 52).

Modernity was introduced in India by the Western rulers, especially the British. As an attitude, modernity begins with the Reformation and its central characteristic is the freedom of examination. Along with the British, Protestantism came to India and Protestantism insisted on free examination of the Scripture. As Paz observes: "With Protestantism came modern thinking: philosophy, science, political democracy, nationalism" (102).
The English developed interest in Indian civilization and many Indians learned English either for practical purposes or out of a keen desire to know European culture. English system of education was introduced in India in 1835 under the recommendation of Lord Macaulay, the President of the Commission of Public Instruction. The educational reforms created "a class of Anglophilic Indians" in Bengal and also in important cities like Bombay, Delhi and Madras. They used European ideas that they received through English education to purify their traditions. A series of reformers like Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Vivekananda arose in India. The Theosophical society with its dynamic leader Annie Besant was quite influential in the last decades of the nineteenth and first decades of the twentieth centuries. In 1917, Mrs. Besant was elected president of the Indian National Congress.

The religious reforms kindled the ideas of nationalism and in turn, "Hinduism and nationalism became synonymous". (In Light 107). Indian National Congress was a sort of loyal opposition to the colonial administration; later it was divided into the opposing camp of moderates and extremists. With the coming of Gandhi, the political scene suffered a sea change. Both the moderates who stood for reforms and extremists who adopted an intransigent attitude towards the British were disarmed by the
strategy of Gandhi. Gandhi came when the Congress was paralyzed by the split. "In 1920, Mohandas K. Gandhi became a central figure" (111). Gandhi adopted the strategy of nonviolence and friendship with the other religious communities. The secret of his immense influence was in the 'union of act and word in the service of a disinterested ideal'. Commenting on the greatness of Gandhi Paz says; "In an impious century such as ours, the figure of Gandhi is almost a miracle within him, opposites merged: action and passivity, politics . . . at the service of a religion of disinterest" (113).

Paz has penetrating comments on the nature and activity of other national figures like Subhas Chandra Bose, Tilak, Savarkar, M.N. Roy, Patel, and Nehru. About Nehru Paz says: "His attempt to modernize India, which was partially realized corresponds exactly to what he truly was . . . . His waverings were due to the complexities of the circumstances, not to the influence of irreconcilable values and ideas" (124).

Paz mentions Nehru's love for India and his love for Western civilization in relation to rationalism and socialism. In the words of Paz, Nehru was 'as aristocrat who was a socialist' and 'a democrat who exercised a kind of peaceful dictatorship'. Paz sums up his assessment of Nehru:
He was the heir of Gandhi, not his disciple or continuation. In fact, he moved India in a direction opposite to the one preached by the Mahatma: modernity. Nehru was the founder of the Republic, and his legacy may be summarized in three words: nationalism, secularism, and democracy (In Light 125).

Modernity in India - Dilemma, Contradiction and Solution

In this masterly analysis of the evolution of India as a modern nation entitled "A project of Nationhood' Paz critically examines how modernity came to India and the contradictions it has generated in India.

Octavio Paz emphasizes the fact that India doesn't have a monolithic culture. On the contrary the country has got a multicultural and polyglot society with bewildering complexity. Commenting on Sikhism with its fundamentalism and violence in Punjab, Paz writes;

In the past the Indians created a great civilization, but they could never create a unified nation or a national state. The centrifugal forces of India are old and powerful: they have not destroyed the country because without intending to, they have neutralized one another (In Light 30).
Paz, an objective student of India, believes that India is not one nation. One important section in *In Light of India* is entitled 'A Project of Nationhood'. In that section he observes: "India is an ethnographic and historical museum" (*In Light* 75). Here one can see most modern modernity exists alongside with archaism that have survived for millennia. Paz rightly observes: "India is a conglomeration of peoples, cultures, languages and religions". At the same time it is a territory under the domination of a state regulated by a national constitution. Paz in order to clarify his perception of vast reality called India cites Jayaprakash Narayan's words: India is "a nation in the making" (75).

If India is 'a nation in the making' then national questions have to be tackled with care and sensitivity. Here Paz raises a strong criticism against national leaders who resolved the question of national language. Paz astutely observes that the ultra-nationalist groups opted Hindi for Hindustani, the spoken language of the majority of Indians in the north. Its effect was disastrous. As Paz says, "The decision to make Hindi the national language threw oil on the fire of the conflict with the Muslims" (69). For the Muslims the traditional and national language had been Urdu and it was spoken by more people than was in the case of Hindi. Regarding the constitutional Assembly's motion to make Hindi the national
language of India, Paz unhesitatingly observes: "A unwise decision, and one that is impossible to defend: Hindi is a foreign language in the South of India, in the Deccan, in Bengal in short, in most of the country" (69).

In clear terms Paz views the nature of Indian state. India is a state and it is an enormous democracy. But as Paz says,

In reality, from a historical and political perspective, India is a commonwealth, a confederation of union of peoples and nations: one that is always in danger of fragmentation, but which . . . has resisted its centrifugal tendencies. In this senses, the constitution of India was founded on a fiction: it is not a reality but a blue print (77).

In Indian society, caste is a central reality. The all pervading influence of caste in Indian social life nullifies the idea of nation as understood in western sense. Paz is unequivocal in his pronouncement: "the idea of a nation is incompatible with the institution of caste" (110). At the same time, Hinduism, the religion of the majority of people in India and an integral part of Indian culture cannot do away with the system of caste. "The existence of castes is one of the consequences of Karmic law, the central principle of Hinduism" (110). This creates a clear contradiction in the formation of a modern state in India and a profound dilemma in the
life and activities of people who strove in that direction. With rare acumen and brilliant insight, Paz examines the problem in detail.

Paz deals with the institution of caste—a truly unique phenomenon in India. There are more than three thousand castes in India which very well indicates its complexity. As Paz observes:

Castes are . . . social realities: family, languages, trade, profession, territory. At the same time, they are an ideology: a religion, a mythology, an ethic, a kinship system, a set of dietary laws. They are a phenomenon that is explicable only within the Hindu vision of the world and of humanity (56).

The Hindu term for caste is 'jati' which means 'species'. Various qualities define caste such as origin or blood, place where one lives, one's trade or profession, kinship rules, diet which ranges from the strict vegetarianism to the possibility of eating beef.

Paz makes a penetrating analysis regarding the antagonism between caste and the idea of a nation. "Castes are groups ruled by councils that serve a political function in self-government" (98). He comments on the static nature of castes in the following sentences: "Castes were invented not for change but for endurance. It is a model of social organization for a
static society, change destroys its nature" (In Light 60). Paz seems to think that caste system in India made our society a static one and stunted the proper development of the idea of a nation. It has, in other words, 'petrified culture'. Paz is eloquent in stating the negative sides of this unique institution. "The caste system is a-historical: its function is to oppose history and its permutations with an immutable reality". Caste, system stands diametrically opposite to the idea of a nation state. In clear terms Paz states the contradiction between 'caste' and nation. "Castes constitute a reality that is indifferent to the idea of a nation" (60).

With surprising sharpness of judgement and insight, Paz compares European experience with Indian reality and points out why western civilization gained upper hand in its encounter with India on political level. In Europe, owing to the influence of the Renaissance, people could assimilate the valuable aspects of their classical intellectual and artistic tradition. Reformation enabled them to purify their social and religious life of unwanted elements and debilitating customs and practices. Modern Europe is the result of the Renaissance and the Reformation. In India the weakness of Hinduism as well as that of Islam is that both civilizations had no such intellectual movements to reinvigorate it. As a result of that "the
two civilizations were petrified spiritually and in perpetual political and social turmoil" (104).

Modernity was introduced in India by the westerners in the guise of colonisers and administrators. As a result of that, India too has developed a version of modernity and evolved a nation state. Paz analyses how the education reforms undertaken by the colonial rulers shaped modern India. According to him the education reforms of 1835 started by Lord Macaulay were "decisive in the formation of modern India" (105). Macaulay intended to create a class of Anglophilic Indians through English education. This class of people assimilated English and used it to reinterpret their own traditions, thus sowing the seed of the independence movement.

Secondly the introduction of English provided India with a universal language. Indians trained in European languages saw European culture as a way to purify their own traditions. These Anglophilic Indians assimilated some aspects of modernity and tried to see the same condition in ancient Indian social structure and ethos through a sort of cultural and intellectual induction. Paz mentions the case of Ram Mohan Roy's attempts to restore Hinduism to its original purity with the establishment of proof in the sacred texts of Brahmanism that the true Hindu religion
was a monotheism. Paz remarks that "he never realized that he was the creator of a pious fraud" (106).

In 1899 Swami Vivekanda urged the Hindus to return to the ancient rites and beliefs: Hindus should "embrace one another like true brothers" without caste distinctions. With perfect equanimity and with sharp insight Paz passes this comment on the exhortation of Vivekananda:

Apart from his evangelical zeal, this exhortation contained a triple heresy: an embrace between different caste members (a contamination), brotherhood among men (a denial of karmic law), and the postulation of the existence of a creator God (106).

Paz makes an astute observation in this connection. These reformers, according to Paz, christianized Hinduism in order of defend it against the criticism of the missionaries. "Their secret religion was Christianity; without knowing to, they had adopted its value". In Hinduism with its adherence to 'Varna - Ashrama - Dharma' there is no place for the equality of human beings, no scope for philanthropy and no relevance for the concept of a creator God. Paz may sound harsh but he doesn't mince words. He calls a spade a spade.
Paz makes an apparently starting observation about Indian tradition when he says that 'the idea of a just society forms no part of the Hindu philosophical tradition'. Some may say that the concept of dharma is a compensation for this but Paz points out the difference: "dharma is an ethic, not a politics". In Hinduism Moksha or liberation is the work of hermits. They experience joy of beatitude in solitude. There is no collective or social action or sense of communion in this which is diametrically opposite to the Christian ideal of kingdom of Heaven.

As for the place of the idea of philanthropy in Hinduism, Paz analyses the dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna in Bhagavad Gita and concludes: "Krishna preaches a disinterest without philanthropy. He teaches Arjuna how to escape Karma and save himself, not how to save the others" (184).

Which factor makes a civilization as it is? Why is it that modernity and nationalism are not incompatible with European civilization whereas the same produce contradictory effect in India? Paz analyses this complex but illuminating point in detail in the section "The contraptions of Time'. As Paz pronounces: "Every civilization is a vision of time. Institutions, works of art, technologies, philosophies, all that we make or dream is a weave of time" (185).
Paz distinguishes the concept of time in Hinduism and Christianity. In Christianity the concept of time is linear. Adam and Eve committed their sin in Paradise and were expelled from there and they fell into history. Through the sacrifice of Christ and through the exercise of his freedom, man is capable of saving himself. So for Christians "time is not only a life sentence, it is also a test". In Hinduism time is illusory, it is maya. It is impermanent and changing. So for the Hindus, 'time in itself is evil'. Paz defines the concept of time in Hinduism in poetic vein. It is "a lie with charming appearance that is nothing but suffering, error, and finally the death that condemns us to be reborn in the horrible fiction of another life that is equally painful and unreal" (In Light 186).

Time has no meaning in Hinduism, In other words it has no meaning other than 'its obliteration by total Being'. The absence of a historical consciousness among Hindus stems from this concept/contempt of time. Though India produced great poets, philosophers and architects, until modern times, there had not been a great historian. In Hinduism there are two modes of negating time. One is metaphysical negation which prevented the growth of the genre - history. The second is the social negation with the institution of the castes. It immobilized the society and
petrified the culture. As Paz emphatically argues: "the idea of a nation is incompatible with the institution of caste" (*In Light* 110).

With the rare insight of a deep student of Indian culture, Paz comes up with this observation on contending nationalisms in India: "In India many nationalisms live together, and they are all fighting with one another (126). Paz mentions Hindu nationalism that wants to dominate the others and a nationalist movement in Kashmir that wants the state to unite with a hostile nation, Pakistan.

Paz analyses tendency of disintegration that exists in Indian society and comes up with the solution to resist disintegration: secularism. With no state religion, separation of temporal and religious power, equality before law, freedom of belief, secularism involves a concrete policy which implies impartiality. True secularism is dependent on two conditions: the separation of powers and governmental prudence. According to Paz, prudence is cruelly absent in modern democracies without which good government is impossible.

Paz quotes the words of Jean Alphonse Benard: "the political problem of India . . . is not the irreconcilable conflict between tradition and modernity . . . but the excessive polarization of power at the top" (128). At
the same time, there is the traditional tendency toward separation and fragmentation. Paz overviews the problem down the ages in cryptic style:

This is the reality that had to be confronted equally by the Maurya and Gupta empires, by the Mughals and the British. It is a history of two thousand years of struggle between separation and centralism. (128-29).

A fusion of modernity, with its emphasis on democracy and separation of powers, with traditional centralism can resolve the conflict between a central authority and local powers. In this context, Paz finds an element in the Indian project of nationhood as original in that it 'attempt to avoid the danger of depotism with the only known remedy: democracy" (129). Paz is aware of the limitations of democracy. Democracy also can be tyrannical and the dictatorship of the majority can be odious. But with separation of powers and a system of checks and balances', democracy becomes 'an instrument for introducing a little justice into our terrible world" (131). Paz's concern for the humanity rings true in these words.

Democracy is inevitably allied with secularism. Paz is emphatic and unequivocal in this context: "A non-secular democratic state is not truly democratic; a non-democratic secular state is a tyranny" (In Light 130). Paz finds secularism and democracy as the two complementary aspects of the
legacy of Nehru that suffered serious damage on account of political corruption, contending nationalisms and regionalisms.

Paz is aware of the levels of poverty in India that are simultaneously pitiful and infuriating' which when coupled with population explosion, makes a mockery of democracy and secularism. But, according to Paz, democracy is a way to ensure that progress is not realized at the expense of the majority" (131). The paradox of the Indian state is that democracy and secularism function in societies that are 'to a large extent still traditional. However there are favourable factors like a central administration, a common law, a political democracy that rules the entire country and national network of economic and commercial interests and activities. The national economic interests are the allies of the secularism of the state in the struggle against separatism. Paz calls the revival of nationalism and fundamentalism as fanaticism and observes: "although Hindu fanaticism is strong in the north . . . it is weak in the south. I believe that heterogeneity will work in favor of secularism and against the hegemonic pretensions of Hinduism" (133).

It is not possible to predict the evolution of events in future. Perhaps Fate is always at work. Nevertheless, Paz points out dialogue as 'the surest method for resolving conflicts': As Paz observes: "Talking with our
adversary, we become our own interlocutor. This is the essence of democracy. Its preservation entails the conservation of the project of the founders of modern India" (In Light 134).

From the illuminating way in which Paz analyses the evolution of modern India and the introduction of modernity and nationalism, it is clear that Paz, is deeply informed about the undercurrents in Indian society that make it vast, complex and richly fascinating. Paz observes how the institution of caste negates the idea of a nation and analyses the factors that hinder the blossoming of life giving movements like the Renaissance and the Reformation.

In spite of the handicaps, India is a nation in the making that has resisted the tendency of disintegration. Paz astutely observes that democracy and secularism can lead the nation to stability and prosperity. Paz hits the bulls eye when he remark that both secularism and democracy belong to the legacy left by the intervention of the West in India in the form of colonialism from the seventeenth century to the middle of the 20th century.

Paz is not blind to the limitation of the Western tradition with its absolute faith in the superiority of science and technology and a drive for limitless development. At the same time, he is conscious of the moral
superiority of the western tradition owing to the belief in, unlike the Indian tradition with its rigid institution of caste, human equality and the need for justice in human interaction which has pragmatic and humanistic value than what the concept of 'dharma' has in Indian ethos. Paz keenly observers that there is no scope for philanthropy in Indian tradition with its concept of the endless cycle of birth and rebirth and belief in karmic law. His remark that the concept of 'dharma' is an ethical idea is a razor sharp distinction as he distinguishes justice as a political concept. Thus, always Paz strikes us as a keen, unbiased and balanced thinker who has the lyrical gift of poet even when he deals with complex issues in culture and society. Paz is a historian among poets and a poet among historians. *In light of India* is solid achievement and a rich testimony to his gift as a thinker and historian. Paz brings his gift as a poet while dealing with subtle issues in culture and society thereby making it a treatise of exquisite charm and incomparable excellence.