CHAPTER I

WHAT IS A WORLD VIEW
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I

The total constellation of assumptions, concepts, theories and opinions derived from tradition and experience by which a community understands and interprets life and destiny is called its 'world view'. Sometimes we can speak of the world view of a particular period, as the sum of the knowledge and assumptions of that period or age combined in a particular way of looking at the human situation. We affirm that there is such a thing as a world view of the people referring to the general content and range of their ideas. Every tribe has a world view that functions to permit and shape thinking, consciousness and memory. In this, one tribe is not different from another. But the content and range of assumptions, concepts, theories and opinions upon which one's mind goes to work, constitutes a specific world view, and produces in the individual or in the community a characteristic mentality. The world view as it were forms the backdrop against which the tribes or communities intellectual, moral and emotional life take shape and proceed.

A world view is also the way in which a people cha-
racteristically look outward upon the universe. It suggests how everything looks to them. A world view certainly starts with a man who is a viewer, thus includes some idea of the self. It includes also a recognition of other people, of the qualitative differences between them (e.g., as between older and younger people, males and females, between friends and strangers etc.). It also defines all things and creatures that are not human. Every world view includes ideas of space, time, extension and periodicity. It explains how one should respond to birth, puberty, maturity, old age and death. It also confronts that which is not seen and defines the invisible.

A world view is not just a matter of beliefs. It forms each society's basic model of reality from which the conceptual and behavioural forms such as linguistic, social, religious and technical structure find their unified meaning. A world view explains how and why things exist, continue or change. It evaluates which forms are proper or improper. It systematizes and orders the varied conceptions of reality in the society into an overall integrated perspective. Thus a world view is not just a matter of doctrines, beliefs of systems, it is the whole model of reality which is held and practised by a society. So if we merely try to discredit certain world views we will neither understand them, nor
the role they play in the society.

A world view is thus the collective consciousness of the people. Its expression is hardly ever in a straightforwardly cognitive mode. It makes use of symbolic forms whose meanings are naturally open to a variety of interpretations, myths, legend, tales of various kinds, poetic devices and so on. A community's understanding of its own world view is never wholly explicit. There is a powerful element of givenness about it and a mature intelligent adult of the community is able to move about in it with ease and without having to question the givenness of it. The contrast between a world view and a purely intellectual system such as a metaphysical system or a scientific system is therefore very clear.

The world view is the central systematisation of conceptions of reality to which the members of the culture assent and from which their value system originates. The world view lies at the very heart of the culture, touching interacting with, and strongly influencing every other aspect of the culture. The world view of any given culture presumably originates in the series of agreement by the members of the community concerning their perception of reality and how they should regard and react towards that reality. The world view like all other aspects of cultures, would
undergo constant change so that it would be possible to see the difference to a greater or lesser extent from the original world view and from other extant world views that have developed from that common ancestor world view: A world view is imposed upon the young of a society by means of familiar processes of teaching and learning. In this way, youngsters reared in a given culture are conditioned to interpret reality in terms of the conceptual system of that culture.

If a person's culture conceives of a relationship between the universe and humanity as a dominance-submission relationship in which persons simply submit uncomplainingly to circumstances without seeking to gain dominance over them, those persons will ordinarily learn to perceive their relationship to the universe in these terms. If a person's culture conceives of disease as the result of activities of personal malevolent spirits, that person will ordinarily learn to perceive any disease in his or her experience to be so caused.

The model given above explains the world view of a culture as a kind of central control box of that culture. With respect to the organisation or patterning of the culture, the world view may be seen as the organiser of the conceptual system taught to be employed by the member of that culture.
With respect to the behaviour or performance of the participants in the culture, the world view may be thought of as that which governs the application of the culture's conceptualisations of their relationships to reality. Almost everything in the patterning and the performance of culture lies in this central conceptualisation. The centrality and the consequent importance of the world view become very clear when one considers the centrality to life of the functions served by the world view of the culture. Therefore, a people's world view is their basic model of reality.

Some of the important functions of any given world view:

**Explanatory Function** — One of the most specific functions of the world view is the explanation of how and why things got to be as they are and how and why they continue or change. The world view embodies for a people, whether explicity or implicity, the basic assumptions concerning ultimate things on which they base their lives. If the world view of a people conditions them to believe that the universe is operated by a number of invisible personal forces largely beyond their control, this will affect both their understanding of and their response to reality. If, however, a people's world view explains that the universe operates by means of a large number of impersonal, cause and effect operations
which if learned by the people, can be employed by them to control the universe, the attitude of these people towards reality will be much different.

These ideas are customarily articulated in the mythology of the people. The term 'myth' is here used in its technical sense to denote any story that is employed to unfold support, or explain a part of the world view of the people. Mythology takes a variety of forms from culture to culture. In the large number of cultures one would look to fables, proverbs, riddles, songs and other forms of folklore for indications of world view. In more complex societies one finds in addition to the folklore, printed literature which often philosophizes the mythology of, for example, science, religion, politics, etc.

**Evaluative Function** — The other important function of a world view is evaluational in character-judging and validating function. The basic institutions, values and good of a society are evaluated ethnocentrically, and therefore, sanctioned by the world view of their culture. Very often one finds that in most of the cultures of the world the ultimate ground for these sanctions is supernatural. It is by the God or gods that most people understand their world view and their culture as a whole to be validated. As with its explanatory function, the evaluational function
of people's world view is integral to every aspect of the life of the society. All important and valued behaviour, whether classified as economic, political, social, educational, is judged in terms of a culture's world view assumptions, beliefs, values, meaning and sanctions.

**Psychological Function** — The world view of the people also provides psychological reinforcement for that given society. At points of anxiety or crisis in life it is to one's conceptual system that one turns to for the encouragement to continue or the stimulus to take further action. Crisis times such as death, birth and illness and transition times such as adolescence, marriage, etc. — all tend to heighten anxiety or in some other way requires adjustment between behaviour and beliefs. And each tends to be dealt with in a reinforcing way by the world view of a society. Often this reinforcement takes the form of rituals or ceremony in which many people participate, for example, funeral, marriage ceremony. In such ways the world view of a group provides security and support the behaviour of the group in the world that appears to be filled with uncontrollable forces.

**Integrating Function** — The world view of the culture systematizes and orders the perceptions of reality into an overall design. In terms of this integrated and integra-
ting perspective, the people of any culture conceptualise what reality should be like and understand as well as interpret the events to which they are exposed. A people's world view establishes and validates basic premises about the world and man's place in it, and it relates the strivings and emotions of man to them. Thus, in its explanatory, evaluational, reinforcing, and integrating functions, world view lies at the heart of a culture, providing the basic model for bridging the gap between the objective reality and the culturally agreed upon perception of that reality. The world view formulates for the members of the social groups the conceptualisations in terms of which they perceive reality.

**Adaptational Function** — A group's world view does not completely determine the perception of all its members at all times. Though there is characteristically a very high degree of conservatism to such conceptualisation, there is change in this as well as in all other areas of culture. People do on occasions, shift in their perceptions of reality. They come to see things in ways slightly or drastically different from the ways that their world view has conditioned them to perceive of them. They change one or more of their conceptual models and reinterpret their conceptions. And such shift in perception, especially if engaged in and repor-
ted by socially influential persons, may be accepted by other members of the social group. This results in the group's altering their conceptual structuring of the modes of reality.

Thus over a period of time groups such as the ancient Hebrews moved from belief in many gods to a strong concept of monotheism. Likewise large segments of western culture have moved through renaissance, industrial revolution, and American frontierism from a belief in the supremacy of the Judeo-Christian God to a belief in the actual or potential all sufficiency of the technological human.

Ordinarily, such conceptual transformation takes place slowly. Sometimes though, the pressure for rapid change is great. Particularly in the face of such pressure we observe another function of a people's world view which relates directly to the more disintegrative aspects of culture change. That function may be labeled 'adaptational'. Inherent in world view is the ability to reduce internal structural contradictions that occur in the process of culture change. People, by adjusting their world view, devise means for resolving conflict and reducing cultural dissonance. That is, in circumstances of cultural distortion or disequilibrium there is a resilient quality to world views by means of which people reconcile hitherto apparently irre-
concilable differences between old understandings and new ones. If a society gets into ideological difficulty it may be far easier to reinterpret values than to reorganise society. In extreme cases this adaptation to changing perception calls for major replacement and revitalisation. But short of such drastic cultural surgery the adaptational quality of world views is constantly in evidence in all sorts of culture-change situations, whether these be mild or intensive.

**Different world view assumptions lead to different conclusions**

There is a good bit of similarity to human behaviour in spite of cultural differences. There is even a considerable body of evidence to suggest that human reasoning processes are essentially the same no matter what one's culture is. For this reason it has been stated that humans differ not so much in the processes by means of which they reach their conclusions as in their starting points. The fundamental processes of reasoning of all peoples are essentially the same, but the premises on which such reasoning rests and basic categories that influence the judgement of different people are somewhat different. That is, members of different culture arrived at different conclusions concerning reality because they have started from different assumptions.
If a particular world view assumes that the natural universe is predictable, understandable, and scientifically describable, it will also attempt to understand and describe 'causes' or at least the factors involved in such phenomena as natural calamities (e.g., storms, earthquakes etc.) or sickness and health, misfortune and success. If something happens the people of this given world view are determined to at least find out how it happened, whether or not one could explain why. This determination to probe, to analyse, to explain comes naturally to them because their world view assumes that it can and should be done so. But people of another different world view would start from other assumptions concerning the universe and of course, came out with very different conclusions. Their logic may be just as good as that of the other one and the way they reason from assumptions to conclusion may be similar to the way the other would do it, but their basic world view or assumptions may be very different. Their assumptions, too, may be just as valid as ours, but focussed on a part of the data that the other would ignore. For example, there is a great deal about the universe that defies neat description even when the most precise western scientific techniques are applied. Sometimes a world view which believes in the ability of human science to master any and every problem, ordinarily chooses to ignore the capricious, unpredictable aspects
of the natural universe. In fact, such a world view is often so focussed on the 'immediate why' of the happening (e.g. earthquakes and other natural disasters) that it seldom concerns itself with the 'ultimate why' of such happenings.

Most cultures, however, teach those immersed in them to show much concern for the ultimate causes of things and no less concern for the details of how they come about. To these societies the universe seems to be a good bit less predictable and understandable. They cannot be content simply to describe why a person contracted a certain disease, they want to know 'how' it was that that person got ill and not another. And their concern leads them to regard the universe as basically capricious and unpredictable. In the case of such cultures, tragedy is taken to be done to the whim of displeasure of a personal spirit. New inventions such as airplanes, rockets etc., likewise may be understood to have come about due primarily to the whim of a supernatural being who chose to give to certain people the knowledge and skill to produce them. For they must assume, only God will give the people the ability to produce such wonders. The fact that the members of such cultures start with a different set of assumptions determines that they will arrive at conclusions different from others.
Another interesting story of world views could be taken from the different assumptions of the role or status of women in the society. There are cultures who are increasingly concerned that women have not been regarded as equal to men. They could define equality in terms of the right of a person to move freely both geographically and socially, to compete freely for employment or leaderships to speak out freely, to be free from tasks that we regard as drudgery. That is, they link equality with freedom, they judge that men have been allowed greater freedom than women, and they conclude, therefore, that the position of women is unequal to that of men, since it is not the same with respect to the possession of individual freedom.

On the other hand, there are other cultures who assume the most valuable thing a culture can give to its women is not freedom but 'security'. Whereas the cultures mentioned earlier might say that a woman is so valuable as an individual that she could be just as free as possible, the other cultures would reason that a woman is such a valuable member of the society that she should be made just as secure as possible. Stating from this latter assumption, these cultures frequently conclude that woman must be provided with secure marriage and home, and a relatively routine and restricted set of expected achievements in order that
she may in turn provide a maximum of security for the newest and most vulnerable members of the society, the children. In such societies equality between the sexes means the provisions of different things for men and women — security for women, freedom for men. There seems to be no feeling of compulsion on the part of these societies to give both men and women the same kind of thing, since they regard male and female roles as complementary that is non-overlapping. They, therefore, seek as much as possible to do away with all competition between the sexes. Furthermore, ideally the cultural assignment of greater freedom to men is to enable them to use that freedom to assure greater security for the women. Thus, in terms of their assumptions high security for women is just as valuable as greater freedom for men. Therefore, the status of men and women in such a society may be equal, though their roles are utterly different from the role that other societies may feel to be token equality. For equality to them can mean 'equal but thoroughly different' whereas for others it is coming more and more to mean 'sameness'.

II

For an insider of any given community, a world view is something which he received from the past and has to
be learned afresh by each generation. This could take place broadly by a process of absorption from social environment, particularly, in the family circle or a home. In many communities certain elements of the world view are communicated directly in rites of initiation and by any other forms of deliberate instruction. Most of the action in accordance with a given world view is generally at the subconscious level. This means that for an insider an accepted world view covers almost everything in his life. But sometimes when the unit is larger, a world view will include within itself a number of sub-world views within a wide variety and diversity is also possible. At times when the variations go beyond a certain limit, a counter world view will have come into being. This could also result in the existence of a new world view.

In the broadest sense, when an insider speaks of his world view it means simply the pattern in which he along with his fellow-community members do, think and feel about things together. If there is to be common life and corporate action, there must be agreement, spoken or unspoken, on a great many things. It is from this basic world view of the insider that flow standards of judgement or value, of what is good for him and his immediate perceptions of what is acceptable as in accordance with the general will of
the community. Also the standard of conduct concerning relation between individuals, between sexes and the generations, within the community and those outside the community.

An insider of any given culture understands — even if unconsciously — that his world view is closely bound-up with his language and is expressed in proverbs, myths, folk-tale, and various art forms which become part of the mental furniture of all the members of the community. It governs actions undertaken in the community — acts of worship or of general welfare, of laws and the administration of law, social activities such as dances and games, and smaller units of action such as clubs, societies, associations, for an immense variety of common purposes.

A need of a unified existence is always felt in any given community. And people find that participation and persistence in a world view is one of the factors which provides them (as insider of that particular world view) a sense of belonging. It gives them a sense of security, of identity, of dignity, of being part of a large whole and of sharing both in the life of the past generations and in the expectancy of the community for its own future.

For an insider of any culture, his world view is an integrated system of beliefs about God, reality or the
ultimate meaning; of value — about what is true, good, beautiful and normative; of custom — how to behave, relate to others, talk, play, dress, work, pray, trade; etc. and of institutions which express these beliefs — values and customs — e.g., government law courts, temples, churches, family, schools, hospitals, factories, shops, unions, clubs, etc. which bind him with the community together and give him a sense of identity, dignity, security and continuity.

Although an insider of any world view finds it difficult to accept change, yet his world view is never static. There is a continuous process of change. But this usually happens so gradually as to take place within the accepted norms, otherwise the world view of a culture is disrupted. Therefore, there is always a felt need for a persistence of a world view. There is always a fear of disruption and even of the system collapsing whenever a world view is being challenged. Any insider of any world view will not allow as far as possible any kind of disruption of a world view, because it means the disruption of his peace, and the interference of the well being of the community. And once the peace, the sense of security, of dignity and identity of the people is taken away, then everything is taken away. Thus, we see throughout the human history that a world view has served to bind the people of a community together, and
its importance has made the people to make a kind of persistence on maintaining a world view from one generation to the other.

Throughout the centuries man has witnessed the confrontations of different world views. It is very important to note that the role of the outsider of any particular world view is always very significant and crucial. A proper understanding of any world view demands so much of openness, patience and involvement of the outsider, where in most cases the unavailability of these qualities on the part of the outsider, makes him (an outsider) to come to all sorts of incorrect and blunderous conclusions.

But again there is another picture of the outsider's attitude towards a particular world view which has to be taken for discussion. It had happened in the history that whenever the power, the forces of the outsider is greater (greater in the sense of administrative or military power) there was always a tendency to ignore, look down on, underestimate and even to crush down the existing world view and to impose a new one.

It is a known fact in the history of this country, that the people who came to rule us were the bearers of good and bad qualities of their nations. They could not
strip themselves of the cultural characteristics and the world views of their countries and their people. With the absolutisation of western world view they could not see anything good in other world views, more especially in that of tribal culture. With their strong sense of superiority, we have seen that they had the tendency to believe that no other culture except that of their own was sensible. So in most of the confrontations without any proper understanding of the tribal world view, they had in one way or the other destroyed most of the important characteristics of the tribal world view.

For example, nature for them is for observation and experiment, but for a tribesman nature is where he could feel at home with, it is sacred for him. There are unlimited ways in which a tribesman could show his gratefulness to nature. There are ceremonies throughout the year in every season to mark his being involved in the processes of nature. These ceremonies may look barbarous to an outsider's, but for a tribesman it is done in the spirit of worship. As against the outsider world view of a specific place of worship, a tribesman is not restricted by it, his home, his paddy field, rivers and mountains are all places of worship for him because his world view considers them as equally sacred.
It is very important in any study of a world view to distinguish between the component entities of a world view and the purposes they serve. The component entities or forms of a world view are the observable parts of which it is made up. These are the customs arranged in patterns or the products of those customs. Many components of a world view are conceptualisations of material items as well as non-material items. Axes, hoes, houses, clothing, automobiles, animals, people etc. are concepts represented by material forms. The marriage customs, family structures, words, grammatical patterns, singing, dancing, sleeping, speaking etc. are concepts of non-material forms. Most anthropologists in the past were much concerned with the components of a world view they sought to observe and describe. They often went into greater detail in describing the items of a world view and the way these items were arranged than in dealing with any other part of a world view. Many such descriptions tended to dissect and classify kinship system, religious rituals, grammatical system, economic pattern and the like much as a medical student dissects a dead body. We learn much about the inventory of a culture from such descriptions but not much about its dynamics.

Each of the component entities of a world view is
used by the people of that given culture to serve particular purposes or functions. Some of these purposes or functions are general or universal, relating to basic human needs that every culture must meet. Others are more specifically related to individual, non-universal, and group concerns. At the general level it can be said that the purpose or function of marriage is to legitimize procreation but at a more specific level, marriage may function to enable young people to escape from their parents. Thus, the component entities or forms of a world view frequently served several purposes at once – some general, some specific.

The contributions that the component entities or forms of a world view make to the overall structuring of any given culture are their functions. As each form is used to play its part in relation to the other and it is always seen as serving its function. The participants in a culture may or may not be aware of the functions served by any given form of a world view, or they may be aware of certain functions and unaware of others. Some people may be aware of the fact that they eat to keep alive, but not that they eat also to reduce their fear of unknown situations.

We have just discussed the distinction between the component entities of a world view and the purposes they served. We have used the term 'forms' of a world view in
this context to refer to the component entities of a world view. Apart from the discussion on the relationship between the forms of a world view and the functions they play, it is also important for us to analyse the meanings and the usage of any given form of a world view.

One of the most important functions served by every form of a world view is to convey meaning to the participant of a community, and the meaning consists of the totality of subjective associations attached to the form of a world view. In many ways world view is communication, where each form of a world view is the bearer of impressions, values, attitudes and connotations from person to person and group to group. The meanings that these forms of a world view conjure up in the minds of those who employ them are a crucial aspect of the way these forms function in a society. The use that the participants in a culture make of their customs is also critically related to the meanings attached to these forms of a world view within the society. Indeed, what a given custom means is determinable only from an observation of its functions and uses within its specific cultural context. There are apparently no forms of world view that convey exactly the same meaning in any two different cultures.

In the same way as the forms of a world view may
serve several functions at once, so also they typically convey more than one meaning at the same time. Some of the meanings conveyed are at the conscious level for most participants, but many are below the threshold of consciousness for a majority of those who use these forms of a world view. Furthermore, many if not all of the forms of a world view will signify or mean at least some different things to different individuals and groups within the community.

A Wedding ceremony within a given culture may signify the legitimization of the right of the couple to live together and to produce and raise children together. There will however, be certain additional different meanings symbolized by that same ceremony in the minds of the couple, the parents of the bride, the parents of the groom, the guests etc. What for nearly everyone may symbolize total happiness may also symbolize apprehension to the couple, extra work and expense to the parents.

Closely interrelated to function and meaning is the matter of how a form of a world view is used. In other words, it is important for us to understand the distinction between world views' forms and their functions, meanings and uses. These considerations, more than others, make explicit the active part that human beings take in the operation of the culture. The forms of a world view are relatively
passive in and of themselves. How they function and what they mean are dependent upon the way active human agents employ them. Most of the ways in which the forms of a world view are used are routinized through the processes of culture. Thus, most of that world view is within a relatively fixed range of variation allowed by the tradition of their culture. Within this range there is room for individual and sub-group variations in most customs. It is possible, therefore, to speak of both culturally patterned usage and individual variation usage.