

Freedom of Expression

There have been attacks on the media and on media personnel right through the year. A previous issue of *Pravada* has documented these attacks.

Several newspapers and editors have been charged with attempting to bring the government into disrepute for publishing the affidavits purporting to be from former Deputy Inspector of Police Udugampola and detailing alleged death squad activities. In one of these cases, the Colombo High Court held that the press was "free to publish news and opinion that may be distasteful to the government"; the Attorney-General has now appealed against this decision.

Attempts have also been made to forcibly prevent the distribution of papers. The weekly tabloid, *Yukthiya*, has, for example, filed a fundamental rights case alleging

forcible seizure and destruction of the paper in Nuwara Eliya by the mayor.

These attacks have brought many journalists and other media personnel to form the **Free Media Movement** in an effort to beat back attempts to muzzle the media.

Conclusion

It is difficult, in the light of what has been said above, to see any signs of improvement in the human rights picture in 1992. The legal regimes and other structures that permit and encourage violations are still in place. The government's commitment to respect human rights and to punish violators is dubious. The ideology of human rights is subject to constant attack. While the magnitude of violations of some rights has decreased, other rights appear in greater danger than ever before. All in all, it is still a situation where human rights are being violated with impunity.

Conclusion of the T.B. Davie Academic Freedom lecture, 1991, delivered by Edward Said, the first part of the text of which appeared in the previous issue of Pravada.

IDENTITY, AUTHORITY, AND FREEDOM: THE POTENTATE AND THE TRAVELLER

Edward Said

What kind of authority, what sort of human norms, what kind of identity do we then allow to lead us, to guide our study, to dictate our educational processes? Do we say: now that we have won, that we have achieved equality and independence, let us elevate ourselves, our history, our cultural or ethnic identity above that of others, uncritically giving this identity of ours centrality and coercive dominance? Do we substitute for a Eurocentric norm an Afrocentric or Islamo- or Arabocentric one? Or, as happened so many times in the post-colonial world, do we get our independence and then return to models for education derived lazily, adopted imitatively and uncritically, from elsewhere? In short, do we use the freedom we have fought for merely to replicate the mind-forged manacles that once enslaved us, and having put them on do we proceed to apply them to others less fortunate than ourselves?

Raising these questions means that the university - more generally speaking the academy, but especially, I think, the university - has a privileged role to play in dealing with these matters. Universities exist in the world,

although each university, as I have suggested, exists in its own particular world, with a history and social circumstances all of its own. I cannot bring myself to believe that, even though it cannot be an immediately political arena, the university is free of the encumbrances, the problems, the social dynamics of its surrounding environment. How much better to take note of these realities than blithely to talk about academic freedom in an airy and insouciant way, as if real freedom happens, and having once happened goes on happening undeterred and unconcerned. When I first began teaching about thirty years ago, an older colleague took me aside and informed me that the academic life was odd indeed; it was sometimes deathly boring, it was generally polite and in its own way quite impotently genteel, but whatever the case, he added, it was certainly better than working! None of us can deny the sense of privilege carried inside the academic sanctum, as it were, the real sense that as most people go to their jobs and suffer their daily anxiety, we read books and talk and write of great ideas, experiences, epochs. In my opinion, there is no higher privilege.



But in actuality no university or school can really be a shelter from the difficulties of human life and more specifically from the political intercourse of a given society and culture.

This is by no means to deny that, as Newman said so beautifully and so memorably:

The university has this object and this mission; it contemplates neither moral impression nor mechanical production; it professes to educate the mind neither in art nor in duty; its function is intellectual culture; here it may leave its scholars, and it has done its work when it has done as much as this. It educates the intellect to reason well in all matters, to reach out towards truth, and to grasp it.

Note the care with which Newman, perhaps with Swift, the greatest of English prose stylists, selects his words for what actions take place in the pursuit of knowledge: words like *exercise*, *educates*, *reach out*, and *grasp*. In none of these words is there anything to suggest coercion, or direct utility, or immediate advantage or dominance. Newman says in another place:

Knowledge is something intellectual, something which grasps what it perceives through the sense; something which takes a view of things; which sees more than the sense convey; which reasons upon what it sees, and while it sees; which invests it with an idea.

Then he adds:

Not to know the relative disposition of things is the state of slaves or children; to have mapped out the universe is the boast, or at least the ambition, of philosophy.

Newman defines philosophy as the highest state of knowledge.

These are incomparably eloquent statements, and they can only be a little deflated when we remind ourselves that Newman was speaking to and about English men, not women, and then also about the education of young Catholics. Nonetheless the profound truth in what Newman says is, I believe, designed to undercut any partial or somehow narrow view of education whose aim might seem only to re-affirm one particularly attractive and dominant identity, that which is the resident power of authority of the moment. Perhaps like many of his Victorian contemporaries—Ruskin comes quickly to mind—Newman was arguing earnestly for a type of education that placed the highest premium on English, European, or Christian values in knowledge. But sometimes, even though we may mean to say something, another thought

at odds with what we say insinuates itself into our rhetoric and in effect criticizes it, delivers a different and less assertive idea than on the surface we might have intended. This happens when we read Newman. Suddenly we realize that although he is obviously extolling what is an overridingly Western conception of the world, with little allowance made for what was African or Latin American or Indian, his words let slip the notion that even an English or Western identity wasn't enough, wasn't at bottom or at best what education and freedom were all about.

Certainly it is difficult to find in Newman anything like a license either for blinkered specialization or for gentlemanly aestheticism. What he expects of the academy is, he says:

The power of viewing many things at once as one whole, of referring them severally to their true place in the universal system, of understanding their respective values, and determining their mutual dependence.

This synthetic wholeness has a special relevance to the fraught political situations of conflict, the unresolved tension, and the social as well as moral disparities that are constitutive to the world of today's academy. He proposes a large and generous view of human diversity. To link the practice of education - and by extension, of freedom - in the academy directly to the settling of political scores, or to an equally unmodulated reflection of real national conflict is neither to pursue knowledge nor in the end to educate ourselves and our students, which is an everlasting effort as understanding. But what happens when we take Newman's prescriptions about viewing many things as one whole or, referring them severally to their true place in the universal system, we transpose these notions to today's world of embattled national identities, cultural conflicts, and power relations? Is there any possibility for bridging the gap between the ivory tower of contemplative rationality ostensibly advocated by Newman and our own urgent need for self-realization and self-assertion with its background in a history of repression and denial?

I think there is. I will go further and say that it is precisely the role of the contemporary academy to bridge this gap; since society itself is too directly inflected by politics to serve so general and so finally intellectual and moral a role. We must first, I think, accept that nationalism resurgent, or even nationalism militant, whether it is the nationalism of the victim or of the victor, has its limits. Nationalism is the philosophy of identity made into a collectively organized passion. For those of us just emerging from marginality and persecution, nationalism is a necessary thing: a long-deferred and-denied identity



needs to come out into the open and take its place among other human identities. But that is only the first step. To make all or even most of education subservient to this goal is to limit human horizons without either intellectual or, I would argue, political warrant. To assume that the ends of education are best advanced by focusing principally on *our own* separateness, our own ethnic identity, culture, and traditions ironically places us where as subaltern, inferior, or lesser races we had been placed by nineteenth century racial theory, unable to share in the general riches of human culture. To say that women should read mainly women's literature, that blacks should study and perfect only black techniques of understanding and interpretation, that Arabs and Muslims should return to the Holy Book for all knowledge and wisdom is the inverse of saying along with Carlyle and Gobineau that all the lesser races must retain their inferior status in the world. There is room for all at the rendezvous of victory, said Aime Cesaire; no race has a monopoly on beauty or intelligence.

A single overmastering identity at the core of the academic enterprise, whether that identity be Western, African, or Asian, is a confinement, a deprivation. The world we live in is made up of numerous identities interacting, sometimes harmoniously, sometimes anti-thetically. Not to deal with that whole - which is in fact a contemporary version of the whole referred to by Newman as a true enlargement of mind - is not to have academic freedom. We cannot make our claim as seekers after justice that we advocate knowledge only of an about ourselves. Our model for academic freedom should therefore be the migrant or traveler: for if, in the real world outside the academy, we must needs be ourselves and only ourselves, inside the academy we should be able to discover and travel among other selves, other identities, other varieties of the human adventure. But, most essentially, in this joint discovery of self and Other, it is the role of the academy to transform what might be conflict, or contest, or assertion into reconciliation, mutuality, recognition, and creative interaction. So much of the knowledge produced by Europe about Africa, or about India and the Middle East, originally derived from the need for imperial control; indeed, as a recent study of

Rodney Murchison by Robert Stafford convincingly shows, even geology and biology were implicated, along with geography and ethnography, in the imperial scramble for Africa. But rather than viewing the search for knowledge in the academy as the search for coercion and control over others, we should regard knowledge as something for which to risk identity, and we should think of academic freedom as an invitation to give up on identity in the hope of understanding and perhaps even assuming more than one. We must always view the academy as a place to voyage in, owning none of it but at home everywhere in it.

It comes, finally, to two images for inhabiting the academic and cultural space provided by school and university. On the one hand, we can be there in order to reign and hold sway. Here, in such a conception of academic space, the academic professional is king and potentate. In that form you sit surveying all before you with detachment and mastery. Your legitimacy is that this is your domain, which you can describe with *authority* as principally Western or African, or Islamic, or American, or on and on. The other model is considerably more mobile, more playful, although no less serious. The image of traveler depends not on power, but on motion, on a willingness to go into different worlds, use different idioms, and understand a variety of disguises, masks, and rhetoric. Travelers must suspend the claim of customary routine in order to live in new rhythms and rituals. Most of all, and most unlike the potentate who must guard only one place and defend its frontiers, the traveler *crosses over*, traverses territory, and abandons fixed positions, all the time. To do this with dedication and love as well as a realistic sense of the terrain is, I believe, a kind of academic freedom at its highest, since one of its main features is that you can leave authority and dogma to the potentate. You will have other things to think about and enjoy than merely yourself and your domain, and those other things are far more impressive, far more worthy of study and respect than self-adulation and uncritical self-appreciation. To join the academic world is therefore to enter a ceaseless quest for knowledge and freedom.