

**MAN
IN TECHNOLOGICAL SOCIETY**

M. N. Roy Memorial Lecture

by

Sachchidananda Vatsyayan

Indian Renaissance Institute

Indian Radical Humanist Association

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at the

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FOREWORD

The birthday of the late M. N. Roy, which falls on March 21, is celebrated each year by the Indian Renaissance Institute and the Indian Radical Humanist Association by arranging a lecture of an eminent authority on a topic of public importance. In celebration of the 96th birth anniversary this year, the Roy Memorial Address was delivered in New Delhi on 22nd March 1983 by the celebrated poet and writer Shri Sachchidananda Vatsyayan. The full text of the address is published in this pamphlet.

The object of this lecture series is not to give a resume of the ideas of M. N. Roy, but to present new thinking on a critical topic. This, I believe, is an appropriate mode of perpetuating the memory of a revolutionary philosopher who was always opposed to ideological orthodoxy, who became alienated from communism because of its spirit of blind conformism, and who would have liked his own ideas to be critically appreciated but never sanctified.

I am extremely grateful to Sachchidananda Vatsyayan for his highly interesting address. He spoke on a topic of vital importance and I am sure the reader will find his address as stimulating as was found by the audience which heard it.

V. M. Tarkunde

I am deeply sensible of the honour which the Indian Renaissance Institute has done me, by inviting me to deliver the M. N. Roy Memorial Lecture this year. In expressing my gratitude for the honour I should also record my appreciation of this opportunity to pay public tribute to a great intellectual, whom I admired for the last twenty years or so of his life during which I knew him, and whom I have continued to admire through the three decades or so since his death.

But I must also confess that I regard myself as singularly unfit for the honour. Though I have always felt deeply committed to humanity, and though as a writer I have striven to contribute to the renaissance of India to the best of my ability, it is precisely as a creative writer that I feel most conscious of my limitations; a creative writer cannot be a true rationalist and could hardly be expected even to be rational at all times. Indeed, we only have to look round us at the created world to realise that even the Lord Creator Himself has not been a consistent rationalist and has had his moments of aberration. To the artist, perhaps, the world is a more lovable place for that reason; but obviously that too is a response which can hardly be defended on rationalist grounds.

In this context I may be forgiven for recalling frequent arguments with M. N. Roy and with Ellen Roy regarding the inadequacy of reason as ultimate arbiter in matters of aesthetics, or the desirability of redefining reason in non-rationalist terms to encompass and comprehend unreason and irrational response also. In his last years, his stance had somewhat mellowed and could allow room for, amongst other things, his own deep love for and understanding of the arts, especially music. It was in these years that I was able to achieve a warm personal friendship with him, a friendship I recall with pride as well as gratification because Roy, during years of rigorous training as a revolutionary activist, had acquired that perfect habit of an effortless impersonality in relationships which many have found so hard to sustain. It is indeed the warmer and more generous feelings of those last years that have often suffused my mind and helped me to preserve the admiration in which I hold

M. N. Roy as one of the all-too-few great Indian intellectuals of our century, men who have followed the imperious and sometimes harsh commands of the intellect with absolute dedication, courage and integrity.

I have already confessed to the limitations inherent in my position as a writer. I am not a scientist or a sociologist, not a scholar nor an expert in any subject; nor can I claim any experience of or acquaintance with technology, except of the sort and at the level which forms a necessary part of present-day civilized living. It is only my commitment to Man which gives me whatever title I may claim to speak on the subject I have chosen for my address. But I can console myself with the reflection that that is perhaps just as well; perhaps I can present to specialists and experts, scientists and sociologists, bureaucrats and technocrats, some aspects of the human predicament which generally suffer by default but which, I am convinced, are of profound significance for the future of man; not only for his future happiness but perhaps also for his very identity. I speak not with great knowledge but with deep seriousness, not with wisdom but with concern.

MAN IN TECHNOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Both as a common man and as a writer, I am concerned with what I might call an anthropocentric world. This concern may not seem remote from that of the sociologist or the anthropologist. But there is an essential difference which I may venture to formulate—not, naturally, in the scientists' but in the writer's terms. When a writer considers a man-centred world, he finds that the circle forthwith begins to lose shape: whether it is periphery that gets warped and twisted or the centre that shifts from and loses its position. Could it be said that anthropology concerns itself with the distorted circle of anthropocentric world, whereas sociology is the study of the displaced centre of the anthropocentric world? These formulations are not intended to be definitions and I am aware that they are disputable. My purpose is not a precise delineation of the difference between the scientists' approach and the writer's, but rather to record the fact of its existence.

OF LONELINESS AND BELONGING

I have considered it advisable to choose three themes for discussion under the general title of my lecture; the first of these I shall call 'OF LONELINESS AND BELONGING'. And considering the intensely subjective nature of these states of being, I hope I may be forgiven for introducing them with some anecdotes.

Some years ago, in the United States, I visited a retired professor in his one-room apartment in an upper storey in a multi-storeyed building. In the course of conversation with him I learned that he had not moved out of that room at all for four years: he had everything there that he did or might need—TV, radio, telephone, 'fridge', and there was a kitchenette where he could warm the prepared food on which he subsisted. He offered me a soup and proudly claimed that it could be called 'seventeen-year old soup': for about that many years it had been his practice to use the left-overs of one serving as the stock for next one—all he needed to do was to add a bit each of the ingredients and a little water, and to heat up the mixture. The seventeen-year term need not be taken too literally, but other friends who had sometimes visited him there knew that the soup was one of the threads of continuity in the old professor's life.

A second anecdote, which was narrated to me by a friend working in an international office in Geneva. One of these international organisations had just built a new group of apartment houses for its staff: four or five blocks in a row, six or seven storeys each, and a number of apartments in each storey. The entrance to each block was at a subterranean level, for residents drove up to their parking areas in the basement and took the elevator—even to the ground floor. In the anecdote as related to me, one of the resident officers returned from the office one day only slightly more preoccupied than on other days, parked his car, picked up his briefcase and newspaper, reading it cursorily on his way to the elevator—all perfectly normal. He did not need to look up from the paper as he pressed the elevator button: he knew exactly how many paces the door would be from his car and how high the elevator

button was. He entered the lift; the door closed and the lift rose and stopped, the door opening again perfectly smoothly; he got out and turned to one side as he always did, went the required number of steps without needing to count; pressed another button and in response to a buzz pushed it open to enter. He put his hat and briefcase in place and went and sat down, newspaper still in hand. A woman, presumably his wife, walked up and placed a cup of tea before him. The tea had a slightly unfamiliar taste: was it just indifferently made, or had the wife decided to try a new brand? He waited a moment for the familiar question: "How was the day at the office?" The question came, sure enough, but it was the voice which startled him: it was not his wife's.

You have, of course, guessed the rest of the story: all that had happened was that there had been a slight error in pressing the elevator button—he had landed one floor above—or it might have been below. Everything else was identical, including the conversational ploys. If the woman had not spoken—but you can embellish the story in your own way: the point I think has been made.

A third anecdote—an incident from my experience. While teaching in the United States, I was invited to address a school about a hundred kilometres out in the country: I was told that it was a school for Dropouts. It was indeed a special kind of school for a special kind of drop-outs, not just kids who happened to have discontinued their studies for one reason or another but young malcontents who rejected not only school but also their families and their society—they were dropping out of everything. Of course, they still needed to eat and to clothe themselves, even if the styles they adopted were meant to underscore their rejection of society—and they needed to do something, for which they had to have some knowledge, some skill..... So this very special school had been set up by their very rich parents in several hundred acres of forest land: here they could stay dropped-out in comfort and freedom. There were teachers, but they were merely made available; there were no hours of teaching or study, no curriculum, no class-rooms or rather there were rooms but no classes, and there was an auditorium which was used like a sort of

community centre where the 'students' sometimes sprawled and played music from tapes and smoked marijuana. A student could summon a teacher to provide specific instruction on something the student wanted to know: he was not obliged to pay attention beyond the duration of his interest or fancy. But let me not go on with the description; let me also spare you details of my lecture experience. I had been asked to talk to them about India because some of them were planning to visit there, and it was hoped that what I told them might rouse their interest in some further knowledge. I do not know if it did; but they were sufficiently interested for me to be able to ask some uncomfortable questions. Who was paying to provide them the luxury of dropping out of society and into their wonderful sylvan surroundings? Were they aware that they were spending *daily* the equivalent of the average Indian's earning in two years? That what I was referring to was the statistical average, which meant that many Indians earned less in two years than these drop-outs spent in a day?

Many of you will recall that Boris Pasternak, awarded the Nobel Prize, first accepted it and was then obliged to refuse it. In his letter of refusal he said something to the effect that "the society to which I belong does not approve" of my accepting it. Those may not be the exact words, but the phrase "the society to which I belong" were certainly there. In the light of my anecdotes, I would like you to focus your attention on this idea of 'the society to which one belongs'. What exactly is meant by belonging to a society? Did the retired professor, or the international bureaucrat, *belong* to society? The school kids were self-declared drop-outs, but what about these very eminent and respectable citizens?

I think that this is a crucial question which confronts us when we contemplate man in a technological society. And the answer is becoming less and less definite, more and more fuzzy and blurred at the edges, as technology advances. But as we search, we become aware of several undeclared results of technological advance, both in the realm of fact and of concept.

The idea of belonging, in a technologically advanced society, *produces uniformity*. It makes for social efficiency if

all persons are alike in all respects ; technology can then provide for them everything that it decides they need or should need—or *will get*.

Technology *produces anonymity*. Becoming alike, men find it more and more difficult to know who they are.

Technology also *produces an extreme loss of privacy*, which is perhaps more lethal than uniformity or anonymity. But perhaps I need to explain : I can do no better than recall another experience.

I was in Japan, watching a TV news coverage of a mine disaster. The spoken part was in Japanese, but the visual documentation was through to the point of ruthlessness. I saw that, as the bodies of those killed were brought up the shaft one by one, there was an anxious scramble of wives and families to identify the body. The unfortunate ones clung to the bodies and many broke down : the camera recorded and moved on to the next body, the next widow... Presently one young woman first reached out to look and then quickly turned away, not wishing her grief to be seen ; tottered a few steps up a slope and fell to the ground, sobbing out her husband's name. The camera shifted to the man with the mike : he had fallen to the ground too, and was slowly crawling towards her, pushing the mike closer and closer without her noticing, so that he could record her anguish in the raw for the millions of viewers tuned on the programme. He was discreet and unobtrusive after a fashion—but I was revolted by this intrusion of privacy : I am a writer and I have been a newsman too, but I consider this unethical and violatory in the extreme. And yet this is the norm in today's media journalism : there is no privacy of joy or sorrow or even conjugal intimacy, no private moment at all.

FROM 'THE HUMAN BETWEEN' TO 'THE OTHER'S OTHER'

As a consequence of this threefold erosion of personality in a technological society, man finds it increasingly difficult to regard himself as 'I'. Orwell coined the very apt word 'unperson' but for a more limited phenomenon : in techno-

logical society man is not the unperson but *the other person's other person*. He is 'the other's other' rather than himself. We all recall Sartre's famous phrase, "Hell is other people"; in a technological society all men are other people. Everyone, as the other's other, is in a hell of his own.

The question will, therefore, bear repeating: what do we mean when we talk of 'belonging to society'? A sense of belonging necessarily involves an awareness of relationship; between those who are merely 'the others' others' there can be no such awareness. Perhaps this is the reason for an interrogative phrase we hear so often in the west today: "How do you relate?" The question is considered complete in itself, and so it is; the question is not about *relating to* this or that but about the absolute possibility of relating at all.

In technologically less advanced society relationship begins from infancy. There is the relationship of *security* of which the mother be regarded as a symbol; the relationship of *authority* represented by the father; then the relationship of equality and brotherhood, of *belonging*—of society, of which the family is the first symbol or unit. With technological advance the third element of belonging, the family, gradually ceases to exist; the first two—the sense of security and the sense of authority—are also threatened and gradually eroded, for mother and father are also as inexorably unpersoned as the less specifically differentiated individual. And yet the technological society we are turning into is an advanced society not only in material terms: it is also intellectually very advanced. As a consequence, with the disappearance of the real bases for belonging, of security and of authority, we have found alternatives based on pure abstraction: we have a *conceptual* relationship with Mankind which provides a *conceptual* source of security and authority, a *conceptual* sense of belonging to society. These concepts are not rooted in our experience: indeed our experience is entirely negative to them. Experience and emotional life are then sought to be replaced by a sort of intellectual living, not to say a conceptual existence. Man is a standardized nonentity among other nonentities; he is confronted by a faceless Machine, efficient, alone, un-belonging, coldly hostile, inherently violent.

There is a Japanese word for 'man' which means 'human between'. It is a highly suggestive term, a statement not only of the Japanese but the human predicament. Man is completely relativized, with no ground of his own: he is just a relationship—the human between. What happens when there is no relationship left? With the between-ness gone, can the humanness survive? It is thus that a technological society is intrinsically a violent society: the ever-present threat to identity results in a permanent state of fear and provides a breeding ground for more violence.

We have not yet attained the status of a technological society: we are headed in that direction. If the picture I have invoked is a frightening one, it is natural to ask: can we change our course—or even turn back? I do not know the answer. It does seem to me that choices were made a few decades ago which committed us irredeemably to our road. Withdrawal would afford us only the luxury of becoming 'drop-outs'—a luxury for which someone else would have to pay the price.

It is also natural to ask: if the Machine is in fact so hostile and founded on violence, why does this hostility not show? Or, conversely, how is it expressed? Why is there no evidence of resistance? Of course, there is plentiful evidence of both: if it is scattered and without clear direction, the reason is again in the technological orientation of society itself. Because there is not a clear and strong sense of identity, there is a lack of understanding of purpose in opposition. Resistance lacks focus. Secondly, even the modes of dissent are standardized. The organised pressure of media results in channelisation of dissent: non-conformity can only express itself in recognised ways. There are patterns—indeed conventions of non-conformity, norms to be observed and approximated to, images to be lived up to. One must conform to certain patterns of non-conformity, assent to certain modes to expressing dissent. And the media will readily make themselves available for such expression, provide publicity, even a certain kind and degree of sympathy—but only for such expression. There is thus no brotherhood of dissent, only certain conformities of dissent—an arrangement which provides

a safety-valve for the more efficient working of a technological society.

One should add that *such dissent is also conceptual*: it is based on abstractions and not on experiential values. There is a normative force at work, not a body of experiential values but a set of abstract concepts suited also to technological organisation. With the impoverished personalities which such organisation permits us, being governed by abstractions, sustained by the power of the media, can be dangerous to us, making us vulnerable to immediate and total emotional control, suspicious of our own real emotions, experiences and aspirations for the sole reason that they are real and our own, not flowing from the abstract stereotype developed for us by society.

It is this living in the abstract, ruled by abstractions unrelated to experience, that is at the root of fear which in turn is the root of violence. Alienated, un-belonging man can only live in abstractions as *the Others' Other*; if "Hell is other people", it only means that the normative function has been relegated to Hell. It is Hell which decides what we shall do or even desire to do. "*They won't like it.*" Who is this 'they'? We cannot name him or describe him, for he has no face or form; he is the invisible structure through which technological society wields its power and exercises control.

AN 'EFFICIENT' SOCIETY

This is not a happy picture of man in a technological society. Human society in the technologically advanced countries is not a happy society. It is an efficient society. Happiness is not technically determinable; efficiency is. Some efficient societies have called themselves 'free', others have called themselves 'equal'; in one, as in the other, man continues to be the alien, the un-person, a desiccated, unbelonging yet conforming orphan, living an efficient but meaningless life; increasing efficiency, inflating his ego and stunting his consciousness. The logic of efficiency is the ground of all technological advance, the foundation of technological society.

But an examination of this social efficiency can be revealing. Efficiency is the advantage of *output* over *input* : as the output for a given input increases the efficiency rating goes up. Translating this into social terms, technology persuades us that as its efficiency increases, society also improves. But apart from the consideration that where society is concerned there are many intangibles involved which cannot be mechanically measured, is not even the output—input ratio presented before us disingenuous in the extreme ? For it should be obvious that where social change is concerned there are vast concealed inputs which technology is not interested in accounting for. It is only through the concealment of these extremely valuable inputs that technological societies are able to sustain the argument of efficiency. The cost in terms of the human personality is not reckoned at all. The man-hours put in are accounted for, but not the fact that *the more precious input is man himself, man in the raw*, and that on this input there is no return at all. I recall a story I read some years ago : the narrator is a cement factory worker's widow, whose husband has fallen into the rock-grinding machine and been crushed together with the stone that he was pouring in for grinding. The widow, in fact, is not the narrator ; the story takes the form of a letter she addresses to her dead husband. She tells how she imagines that he has become a part of the strength of the cement with which the giant city is being built ; how she sees him holding together those vast edifices, *into the material for which he has been ground to dust, to nothing...* *This is the concealed input in a technological society together.*

I have said already that we have not yet reached the last step of the ladder, but that we seem to have chosen the climb. Must we all, everyone the Others' Other, wait for the Devil's assessment of our story in Shakespeare's words : "A tale told by an idiot, signifying nothing" ?

II. MAN THE DEVOURER

The second theme I should like to dwell upon in treating of man in technological society may conveniently be titled 'MAN THE DEVOURER'. The image is not new ; nor I am

going to present any new facts or figures. The novelty, if any, is in certain juxtapositions. Even these are somewhat random. It is not only *not* my intention to marshal facts and figures like a statistician, I should also like to take full advantage of the writer's prerogative to use the imagination literally *to create images*. Some of the random figures I quote may be inaccurate, being based on magazine surveys; but I think you will agree that that does not vitiate my main argument.

POLLUTION

Delhi's thermal power stations throw up anything from two to twelve tons of ash into the air every day. We are told that the major part of the ash settles in four to seven days, but only the major part, and during this period a fresh outpour of ash continues. We are all familiar with the consequences so far as the atmosphere of Delhi is concerned. But not all of us may connect this with the fact that dust storms are now a frequent occurrence even in the interior of the Himalayas where they were unknown a few decades ago; the 'dust' contains a high percentage of ash and considerable quantities of chemicals.

One of the chemical ingredients of ash is sulphurdioxide --I need not list all the others. Scientists estimate that the sulphur-dioxide in the atmosphere may take upto fifteen years to be absorbed through processes of natural decay. During every day of those fifteen years, of course, fresh sulphur-dioxide and other pollutants will continue to be thrown into the air ceaselessly. And Delhi's thermal power stations comprise only one contributing unit: there are thousands more functioning throughout the world.

And this is the only one kind of pollution. There are many others. There is the ever-growing plastic industry. Plastic waste is practically indestructible. It can be discarded and dumped anywhere; it is not destroyed or reabsorbed through any natural process—unless, of course, under that head we can include natural catastrophe, powerful enough to destroy not only man but all life upon earth. There are more immediately dangerous chemical wastes, almost as indestructible and capable of producing terrible deforming disease. These are

being poured into rivers and streams, channelled into waste lands or buried deep under the surface of the earth. The process continues with the waste from the most dangerous source of all, the newly developing radio-active industries. For the time being the waste is being stored in containers buried underground : there is also talk of digging a hole deep into the ocean bed and pumping the waste down into it. But how long can this process of sweeping uncomfortable material under the carpet continue, while technological man is, with ceaseless industry, inexorably burying himself under the debris produced by his industrial advance ? To put it in terse, if strong, language, man is burying himself under his own shit.

DENUDATION

We could shift focus, and consider another set of juxtapositions. One Oak tree—*Banj* in the language of Western Himalaya, stores two tons of moisture. This means that with every oak tree cut down, the forest earth is deprived of two tons of retainable moisture. Of course, you can sell the oak timber and show an economic profit from your square of forest. But with the Himalayan forests seen as a whole the consequences of the heartless denudation of vast mountain sides can be easily understood. Scientists have estimated that at the present rate of deforestation the entire Himalayas—'abode of eternal snow' would become an arid desert in 30-40 years. Thus, man's industry in burying himself under his own shit is being matched by his diligence in making vast areas uninhabitable.

From figures quoted three or four years ago, it seems that one famous American newspaper's daily newsprint consumption is equivalent to the wood pulp of 600 acres of forest. The wood used for pulping is inferior wood ; even so, trees for this take anything from four to fifteen years to be fit for felling. 600 acres of forest *per day* for one newspaper—which will take four to fifteen years to grow : it does not need complicated mathematics to work out the period of destruction of our entire forest wealth. And one could add the consequences of the use of pesticides and defoliants for the supposed control of insects as also for purposes of war. Scientists have made us

aware already of the growing resistance of pests to pesticides ; we will need more and more chemicals to produce the same results. In other words, we are obliged to accelerate the rate of destruction of our resources in the struggle for survival. Science fantasists have envisaged a world consisting of cockroaches as the sole living survivors. You may not like cockroaches ; in that case you could indulge your preference for mosquitoes. But that *man* cannot survive in the scenario as it is developing at present seems clear enough.

We could consider also the rate at which we are consuming all existing and foreseeable sources of energy—all except the sun itself. But so far as can be seen at present, solar energy cannot totally replace other energy sources and much of the technology required for utilisation of solar energy itself uses metals and minerals already rare. A state of complete entropy may be a very remote prospect yet, but it is through technological man's industry itself that the world may grind to a standstill long before nature herself reaches that state of total equilibrium and non-flow.

HIGH ENERGY SYSTEMS

A technological society is a high energy system. The higher the technology, the higher the rate of flow of energy. With this goes another inevitable relationship : the higher the rate of flow, the greater the pressure of uniformity, of standardization. And this is true not only in the physical-chemical field but also in the biological field. A high energy system is inimical to variety, including variety of botanical and zoological species. In the biological, as in the mechanical field, high technology must reduce the variety of species. Even in the socio-economic and *even in the political realm, higher organisation must result in limiting the number of viable systems.* In some fields we can already see this happening ; in others, we may not see as clearly, but it is happening to man and his organisations. This is why I said earlier that technological society is and must be a society based on violence. *Technological man must devour all other varieties of man.* We know that in certain lower species—spiders, scorpions, crabs—the

young offspring immediately turns and feeds upon the body of the mother. Technological man seems inevitably to be moving in the same direction—his evolution notwithstanding. The mother, in his case, is the Mother Earth whom he proceeds to devour. In the case of the lower species, the young offspring consumes the mother's body and, nourished, goes into the world: it has a world to go into. But after man has devoured his mother, where will *he* go?

I have said already that I am only making certain juxtapositions from known facts. Biologists and sociologists throughout the world are aware of what is happening and of future consequences. Some have made earnest attempts to draw the attention of the world and to call a halt to this race towards self-destruction. There is the Rome Report, there are conservationist movements all over the world, there are the Green Parties, there is the Whole Earth movement. There are those who support organic agriculture. In India, there are a few dedicated individuals like Sundarlal Bahuguna, whom the bureaucracy is still trying to dismiss as an idealist. It is in such efforts that one can see some hope for man and for whatever human evolution has achieved so far. But in the main the official mind still thinks in terms of organisation for profit and organisation with increasing efficiency. One is, therefore, justified in saying that all socio-political organisations are still functioning only as power systems and must, therefore, depend on violence. Man must, therefore, still be viewed as the devourer. There can be no consolation in the fact that ultimately he can only become the self-devourer.

III. MAN THE MEASURE

My third theme may suitably be titled "MAN THE MEASURE". It is a reminiscent phrase and I might as well have said "Man as the measure of all things". Man as the Measure is the Renaissance Man—before the Renaissance we were not accustomed to think in terms of man as the measure. That statement, again, is true in that form only in a western context; for about the same time in other parts of the world, and notably in India, Man as a value was being emphasised.

The saints and the devotional poets asserted with great vehemence and conviction that Man is the highest value ; than Man there is nothing higher. Of course, 'Man as the measure of all things' was not the 'Man than whom there was nothing higher'. The difference between the two visions of Man is vital and must be clearly understood. In one, the emphasis or the centre of interest has shifted from a transcendental to a human world. Man as the measure or centre is in some sense displacing or dispossessing God. In the other view, there was no sense of separation from God : Man was a diminutive, micro-embodiment of God and it was in this sense that he was the highest attainable value. This difference in the approach to transcendence is important, though for my present purpose I do not need to press it further. In both cases there was a new emphasis on man as the creator of value. Man as the articulate, symbol-making, conceptualising, value-creating animal was no longer an animal ; as a creator of value he could even posit a value higher than life. One model of such a man was the man who sought knowledge—*Knowledge as Power*—the Faustian paradigm ; another model was the man who sought self-knowledge—*knowledge that obviated the pursuit of power*. In either, man was RESPONSIBLE : he exercised choice and was answerable for the consequences of his action.

In a technological society, *is man truly responsible* ? Is he really free to exercise choice, to act ? We have seen how man's area of choice is whittled away, how he is becoming depersonalised, dehumanised, how he loses his individuality, his identity, his privacy. If he is not free to choose, how can he be responsible ? In technologically advanced society, confronted by an amoral machine whose operation he cannot influence or affect, he realises that the extent to which he can himself become amoral is the measure of his success or even his chances of survival in such a society. Day by day the machine grows bigger and man less significant in comparison. But the pace of modern technology is faster than that of man's amoralisation : the consequences are there for anyone to see.

EXTENSION & ATROPHY

But man's predicament has to be seen in another setting

also. All technical progress is an extension of man's power. The automobile and the aeroplane are extensions of man's legs. The telephone and the loud-speaker are extensions of his voice. The telescope is an extension of his vision. Other devices provide simultaneous extension of several limbs or faculties. But every extension of a limb brings its concomitant atrophy of that limb. Less obviously, but not less truly, the mechanical extension of a faculty brings about an atrophy of that faculty. One can make a general proposition that all these technological extensions of faculties are leading to the decay or atrophy of the organism as a whole. Stated in more subjective terms as of greater significance to man, the direction of technological advance our society has accepted—or should I say resigned itself to?—results in a continuous extension of the ego and an atrophy of sympathy or compassion—perhaps I could even say consciousness. *Technological man is a man of unbounded ego but an atrophied soul.*

It is, of course, possible flatly to contradict me and refer to the vast meliorative possibilities opened up by modern technology and by the scientific advance that has developed that technology. But there would be no real contradiction, for we would again be weighing concrete benefits against concealed inputs. I could give many examples from my own experience of the kind of atrophy I am referring to, but I hope it is not necessary; one might more profitably refer to the contradictions inherent in technological progress itself. I will content myself with one example. Man has made vast advances in medicine and there is now also what may be referred to as the technology of medicine; we are justly proud of our achievements and the relief of human suffering that has resulted from them. But already medical scientists are concerned at the disappearance of 'the human touch' from medicine. With the advanced surgery available today, and the replaceability of limbs and organs, man becomes more and more an assemblage rather than an organism. There have been those who saw themselves as the 'engineers of the soul', though they were busy engineering the soul out of the medicine; there is a vastly more numerous community of those who regard themselves as technologists of human society.

and managers of power, able effectively to handle assembly lines, to change or replace worn or defective parts quickly, smoothly, for the individual is but a cog or an expendable energy source... And it is not only that every part is replaceable: biophysicists can already visualise technology which will make man totally replaceable. Cloning has been done with lower species: it is psychological fear rather than moral horror that still withholds consent from extending the experiment to man. Some biologists have recoiled on moral grounds, certainly, but not the technologists.

LOSS OF TOUCH

Let me, before I come to the concluding part of my address, make an imaginative use of a scientific argument. I don't mean to go into science fiction or science fantasy, but merely to present a reality more vividly through an extension of scientific fact. Biologically, touch is the oldest sense: all the other senses are extensions of, or evolved from, the sense of touch—sight, smell, hearing, taste. One could even say that time—biological time as distinct from astral time—begins with touch. In the sort of alienation from the body itself which I have been talking about, there is a loss of touch, a loss of contact with human society, even a loss of awareness of loss. And since time began with touch, the decay of touch is the death of time. Nietzsche had talked of the death of God: Huxley, one of the most perceptive authors of our age, was certain that 'Time Must Have A Stop', but we are on the threshold of the death of touch which is the death of time.

CONCLUSION

It is a gloomy picture that I have painted before you; but if it is at all exaggerated, the exaggerations are not to falsify but rather to emphasise: such emphasis is the more necessary in India today if only because it is not the current fashion here. And we know that the current fashion here is usually the very recently-outmoded in the West. Let me also say that everything I have suggested or argued has been amply documented in literature throughout the world, including our

own, especially in poetry. And this is the case not only in the advanced countries where the picture has already become true; the documentation can also be found where such things have only begun to happen or seem likely to happen. It is this imaginative insight of man into his own future that provides one reason for hope. There is, of course, science fiction and science fantasy, but this is a kind of literature which only projects into the future the realities of today: the sort of "total concern" for man which throbs in great literature is something different. In another category are people like Schumacher, arguing for technologies of scale that could still re-establish man as the measure.

There can, of course, be no absolute argument against technology. Even a crow uses technology when it drops pebbles into a pitcher to raise the level of water. The stone-axe is technology, the sling is technology, the bamboo thatch, the mud brick, the ox-cart, the spinning wheel, the water mill are all technology. There is no denying that it has brought the possibility of a life of dignity for many who would otherwise be without hope. But the objective should be clear: a human society using technology, not a technological society using, consuming and ultimately destroying man. It is the capacity to create value, to establish relationship, to reject dehumanisation, to give voice to "total concern", that is important.

The imaginative artist, the creative writer, cannot himself stop the headlong drive towards a technological society, but he can make man aware of his capacity to do so if he chooses, and to show him that it is still possible to choose. And the choice is between Power and Harmony, between man seeking mastery and thus becoming mastered by the machine of his making, and man accepting that responsibility for harmony which makes him the guiding spirit of all growth to come. The choice is our own.

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