

**Lecture delivered by Shri Habib Tanvir  
on the occasion of  
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**Cultural Persuasions of Politics and their Implications**

I feel greatly honoured to have come to this session to speak during this P.C. Joshi's lecture series. I have great respect for P.C. Joshi. I have had personal contact with Late P.C. Joshi and at that time when I was in the IPTA, P.C. Joshi was above all actually in one sense the founder of IPTA. It was he who brought Uday Shankar and all the others collected together and made this a Central squad and then function in Almorah, P.C. Joshi's very native place.

Now when we were close to P.C. Joshi, his stature could not be gauged. It was like that. We could not really realise how great the man was. What a visionary he was. You have heard copious works on Prof. P.C. Joshi to corrugate out the essential features of P.C. Joshi's personality and his vision. But people like myself, who were extremely young at that time, I joined the IPTA in 1945 and in coming close to P.C. Joshi meeting us simply like an ordinary man with great warmth and an affection encouraging young boys and girls to mix together, express themselves in terms of art and all. One did not realise what he is talking about. When I came to Delhi in 1964 and later on again met P.C. Joshi, he said, "you have written Agra Bazar." It is fine. Now you must write on Kabir and if you cannot write because of your journalistic activities and other things, I will lock you up in my house, give you food and everything - sit down and take Rajendra Prasad Dwivedi, read him, take Sardar <sup>Tafri's</sup>~~Geoffrey's~~ book of Kabir and write because Kabir was equally radical. It is like August on your cultural history. Like Nadeem was too; he had and all comprehending view.

I do not think I will be mistaken if I said that P.C. Joshi believed that people's culture was of the politics, worth pursuing. I do not think he made any difference between politics and culture. He thought culture of paramount importance in directing political policies and of course much later we realised that he was not wrong. He was perhaps, totally right. Much later we realised that there was no men who really understood it, who envisioned it, who could sort of really filled it. Any political line that excluded the culture of the people must of necessity be anti-people. There is just no doubt about it. The

cultural persuasions of the politics of today are such that we demarcated, we compartmentalised culture. We separate it as anything, a non-quantity which can be measured, whose volume and density can be tested and it can be put in a box. Unlike P.C. Joshi who thought that culture was all pervasive. It was in all walks of life; it was our way of living; it was our identity. That is what P.C. Joshi felt strongly and made us all feel later. It was through experience out sheer because of my extra background and a sprinkling of the folk artists that were there in the entire Bombay in those days. According to them I went back to the villages, I had learnt a lot of songs through them, used to sing them and when I looked at these folk arts, I learnt with new eyes. After my return from Europe, I got them over here to participate. Even that did not give me a proper vision. It took me years and years for us using them only a performing arts in going to the villages, to have workshops and mingling with them, realising at long last that there is a lot to take from them, not only to give them which is the usual attitude of the elite middle class road workers in Rahatkari or in other rural amelioration projects, which is quite surprising because there is in fact more to take than to give.

There is a different set of sophistication amongst the people of the villages compared to the urban sophistication. It is not true that there is, on the one hand, sophisticated society and on the other hand a rural society, which is totally unsophisticated. It is just two different sets of sophistications. Then I realise that their rights, their rituals, their harvests, their interests, their needs, their deprivations, all those are connected with their cultural expression through the workshops and developed an integral view of the performing arts, which is, I dare say, not commonly advanced. Only performing arts are considered higher returns to be pursued by themselves and an end by themselves, and it is not true. In our case particularly, it is not true. Our art and culture in the classical sense, they had another buff in continuity, but for the people who have a continuity. There was a constant growth. It is not static; it is a growing culture and it exists. Since it exists, they we must do anything worthwhile in the field of performing arts, then we must go back to the folk roots, of the folk traditions in theatre and when I did that, I realised that imitation will not do. It went up to pick up things from the people and practice them. It will be just as bad, as aping the West, as imitating anything. If the urbans were to imitate the villagers, it will be disastrous, just as much, as it has been disaster in aping the West and still are aping the West.

It appears to me that the people themselves came and participated so that they have in their blood and bones that kind of culture. Then there will be nothing further to do with him; it will be expressing itself of its own accord, which is what happened. But not without catalysism because catalysism is what brings about a natural change for the better in the folk art. Catalysism, which critically intervene in the static quality of culture and allows it to grow. It is like stagnant water. When it is allowed to flow by making little outlets, it becomes crystal clear later on, because many of the traditions, it happened to get stagnant, saturated, crystallised and become almost unchangeable, the rules become hard and fast. So it keeps changing in categories, the folk becomes classical, like Manipuri dance which towards the beginning of the 20th century had to be classified as classical. Prehlad Natak of Orissa, which is considered folk today, I will not be surprised if in another fifty years or less, would sort of see that it qualifies as a classical because it has got all the rural, all the regime in which it works is classical.

That is another story when we return to the little and the great tradition - how they are inter-connected in view.

P.C. Joshi was the first man who for one thing, I think, must have enlisted the entire lot of artists in India, the cream of Indian art and performing arts and music, dance and drama were picked by P.C. Joshi and harnessed in services of IPTA, which was part of the national movement of this country.

Likewise, I think the Communist Party at that time when he was the Secretary, benefited the most because people thronged to him because of his vibrant, very attractive magnetic personality. At that time he met Gandhi and he talked about why was he all the time talking about cultural theatre, the need for it, so that it grows and amateur theatres are all right, they should go on functioning, but there was need for a professional theatre. Mr. Dange saw the point and he said why should not there be a trade union theatre. I said, why not and I came to Delhi in 1954, talked to Shri Sippi Sahib and Prem Sagar Gupta and others of the Communist Party and said, if we just ask them to give Re.1/- from their monthly wages towards theatre, we will have a vibrant professional theatre of the working class. It was welcome; like many other ideas which appeared good, were welcomed. It was hardly our fault if they were not.

There is another man who was quite a visionary before P.C. Joshi and that was Gandhi. Gandhi had such a clear picture of the relationship of politics, culture and the economic life of the country, as nobody else. He gave a succinct metaphor; he put it like

this; "I want my heart to have its foundation deep in my own soil, but along the veins of that heart to be thrown open to the bucketings of the veins of the world". I do not think any other metaphor could describe the situation better. He was almost saying that don't allow the blizzards of culture to throw you off balance. Let your feet be planted firmly in your soil, but receive whatever the influence you want which can be utilised to the purpose of your own indigenous cultural growth. That is what he was trying to say very beautifully and through experience I realised that that is exactly what it ought to be. Culture must be allowed to flourish in this fashion without losing its roots, its balance, its reiterations, but grow.

Then of course, Gandhi was totally forgotten. So was P.C. Joshi as far as his vision of culture was concerned and came others, lip service to Gandhi and nothing happened. To this day Gandhi is being paid lip service in his name many things may not take place, but not any solid work based on the philosophy or the understanding of Gandhi. He is made to appear a Saint, a philosopher of antiquity, very fair and worth respecting, reverential norms.

It is inconvenient to follow Gandhi the way he wanted us. No cottage industries will go by default, no basic education because the system must produce standard regimented patterns, which is what happened later. , not utilitarian functional education which is good for the people of the soil to let them be where they are and be more useful participants in society, but the other type of education which makes them leave their village, go and fill the plants or become peons and get alienated from their own language and their own culture. That type of education substituted his concept of education of economically or politically. Our big Five Year Plans were good. There was a necessity for those things. Borrowings were important. We had no infrastructure. It became important that we have those Five Year Plans to get capital industries come up and allow the country to grow, but later on the balance was lost. Nehru had a certain concern both for the culture of the country and for the industrialisation. He had a certain feeling for the tribals. He got Rev. Elwin to advise in that respect. He himself had no policy towards tribals, but there certainly was a more genuine feeling towards the tribal and that they had worth emulating something, something worthwhile, which can be given back to them because he goes on dancing that they have a culture of their own and I am not sure if it is not better. The man could say that had some time somewhat sense that they had their long administrative systems, their own jurisprudence, their own way of life and there own way of holding

communities together in a harmonious whole and progress. The big technology essential at that time power bearings by indigenous technology to harness all the purpose of our rural conditions, which was not. It was big, all round big dams, big industries in the heart of tribal lands because our minerals, iron ore, coal, bauxite and dolomite, all these happen to be in the jungles or in the mountains where the tribal live. So that is whether it is Rajasthan or Orissa, Bihar or Chhatisgarh or Bengal, the Adivasis in the very heart of the country where the Adivasis live are the big plants. The result is that in the Bhilai Steel Plant, in the Beladilla plant of iron ore, etc., you find unskilled labour, some Chhatisgari also, outsiders, but that is all, otherwise, some other parts of the world coming with justification, according to them. No justification from my view because there is no need; if you want indigenous growth of culture, you must allow more people to participate on the same land, so that they can look after the culture.

The result was that the tribal community began to break up into wage earners and prostitutes. There is no exaggeration at all, drunkards, prostitutes and wage earners. Tribals becoming individuals scattered with no community sense, this is what happened to a community which had looked after itself beautifully in the past. So with that result begins the question that big technology is all right, big dams are all right, but the people have their own relic, their culture should not go by default. Their way of living should not be drowned into the big dams because even sort of allowing them other places is to destroy their culture because culture is not something which grows and after all, let us have a look at what is culture. Is it a file to be kept in the safe custody of the Government of India and then all responsibility of looking after culture is over? Can it be confined in a Department, call it the Department of Culture, where some contribution is made towards a few performing art groups and even though graft a culture? Is culture not your health system, your fertiliser system, of all your "Jadi-Bhooti", which are needed for use in health, your cycles of crops - if all that is culture, then how can one file or one Department look after that. Why should I be at loggerheads with the Department of Culture, or for that matter Commerce of Finance or even External Affairs Ministry or any Ministry for that matter? Why should it also not be responsible for looking after the culture of the people. I mean how come you allow satellite televisions to come into this country, multi-nationals to enter into this country in the name of globalisation and free market reigning alien values, allowing your children to get totally alienated from your traditions and then have the trend

to look after your culture. Think for making some contribution through your performing arts, having some kind of "Apna Utsav" as a spectacle, as something to be seen by curious middle-class urban onlookers while managing their lunch and barking on when they are tired. Why should it be confined to Festivals of India, sent all over the world in the name of purchasing weapons and then culminating in Pokharan and Atom Bombs. What is this facade, why do you say that you are looking after culture, when you are not. P.N. Foster (?) in one of his books "People who live in Flats, My dear, have no ancestors". We are fast losing our ancestors. Our children who grew on the old tales of old Grannies, grandmothers and nursery rhymes are now being nourished by Western pop music and pop dances and imitating 'Shaktiman', which is an imitation of something else. Our consumerism has produced " कौन बनेगा करोड़पति " and people are thronging to become Krolepati. Now if this is not bulldozing culture, a roller coaster, going forcibly, annihilating all the cultural sources, our culture which was changing gradually and so we never said it, influencing one another from Rajasthan-Gujarat, Gujarat-Madhya Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh-Bihar, Bihar-Bangla Desh, these influences have gently been continued, but suddenly comes the on-rush, comes a big force, a flush of vulgar culture, vulgar and alien through commercialisation, through advertisement, through electronic media, through the print media, sensationalism, giving rise to crime, giving rise to unemployment in all the classes including the educated, allowing for terrorism, making trans-border conflicts, sharper and more difficult to handle, making issues, subjugating languages. If so called sub-standard languages, whether in Kashmir, wherever the languages then throttle all the people by and large.

The same thing happened in Pakistan in the name of Urdu, Punjabi and Sindhi and Pushto gone by default, by and large. In our case like the Brahmnic order of ancient times in which there should not have been a single syllable of Sanskrit to fall upon the impious ears of the Shudra - that was a time. The times have not changed. You have produced the Sarkari Hindi; you have produced certain norms, publications to be absorbed into Akashwani and Doordarshan. Then you horrify to speak your own mother-tongue properly. When I say properly, very, very improperly because you are getting removed, having lost touch with the peoples' language, their dialects, so called, where you have lost touch with the language, with the vocabulary, contributed by Tulsi Das, Kabir Das, Meerabai, Vidya Pati and other so many people. And if they are 'Mahan', if they are great poets, who have given you 'Shabdaavli' which is inimitable and expanding. So have folk

lores given a lot, except it is trying to take vision of life except terminology would describe the latest developments in science. This is the only place where you need new words, but the people are capable of creating new words for their need. They had in the agrarian economy a rich vocabulary for love for nature, for everything else that they needed, which they had handled. Now, if they were to be harnessed, taken into confidence to participate in decision making quite simply, they would give you words. For Air-Conditioned Compartment, the Bombay coolie a long time ago used to say - ठंडी गाड़ी में चलेंगे साहब, ठंडी गाड़ी - very simple and in our view it worked. Likewise prosecutor, defendant, Hindi, Ilaakai language is 'झगड़ू' - Defendant is 'पलटू' very significant words. But we have seized to go to the people to pick up Indian words which they had already created. They have already accepted words like road, "जगदलपुर से चली गाड़ी होले-होले" । There may be different road, सड़क गरदा pedigree, in Chhatisgarh is पगडंडी गरदा is jecpable road. सड़क is road, which is not pucca and सड़क रोड इज नगर वाली रोड, tarred, pucca. So they could make the distinction when they took up these areas and still they use those words. For station, they use 'Thesan' in Chhatisgarhi. The difficulty of pronouncing station is lost, it becomes 'Thesan', Post Office, Telephone, Iran says telephone to bring it into the order of Irani communication in the Persian language, telephone and life was so nearer. But we have become so self-conscious that we were so removed, our sober language became sort of different from the written language. And the written language becomes then the spoken language. This is the greater disaster that has happened so that you learn the language through the written language and that is not the spoken language. It is already far removed and a language becomes a spoken language altogether.

Now the spoken language has never stayed in one place. But not quite so forcibly and so aggressively as now. In other language areas, Spanish, French, German, I do not see these feelings, such a big difference between spoken and the written word as in the case of India. But it is not just a question of India. The standard marking, it is standard Bengali, it is standard Knnada, standard Tamil, it is standard Telugu, have all got those sub-standard Marathi and Kannada, Telugu, etc. and those sub-standard languages are dialects which belong to the people. The people on modern life, their languages are on modern life and they are considered in study and when they are educated, they look down upon their own Sanskars on their own right to literature and upon the communities and parents itself and

become a foreigner to their community. They are assimilated, they become like us, they dress up like this each like us, behave like us and perpetuate the same system of exploitation on their own people.

This is what we are trying to do. A process of assimilation like the pro-constrictors, assimilation in which everything is convenient, everything is homogenised, sterilised, regimented and that is convenient to rule, it is convenient for 'Satta' and therefore, it must be rejected. We in the name of cultural autonomy want new set cultural autonomy is the one thing which is going to do by default altogether, is my hunch. I hope not, I have to look after the culture of the country, but then it looks like because if it is to happen, the linguistic division of the country at the time when Vallabhbhai Patel was doing it, under the Nehru regime, well why it could not be implemented then, why did we have so much ruptured at that time in Bombay between Gujaratis and Marathis. It is not good to say final division, linguistic division either it won't be a fair division now because culture progresses, languages changes every 10-15 miles. And it just goes on like that. And it is convenient to look after that kind of culture because that is you must take into your fold in decision making the people themselves.

De-centralisation in the name of Panchayati Raj is on paper and it is pretty good. But what was seen when I go in the Panchayats, which are functioning now, it is the same administrative system, same corruption, same rules and norms which they had learnt from above, same process. They cannot devise ways, they cannot change the people's ways of governance.