



METAPHORIC BEING



Muthal Naidoo

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Essays by Muthal Naidoo

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This book is dedicated to:

Mike Stainbank

The Lesch family: Bersan, Elmary Buis, Dieter and Mikhail

Francois and Debbie Smit

Lionel Berman and Tom Swart

Nomasonto Roslina Shongwe

Gowrie Naidoo

identity
 in ever changing modality
 floats like a ghost
 over the physical
 particle in wave
 indefinable

definition
 metaphor
 ballast for
 unbearable
 lightness of being

METAPHORIC BEING

Inspired by a reading of Milan Kundera's *Immortality*, this was meant to be an enquiry into "journalistic truth" as opposed to "novelistic truth". It grew instead into a consideration of the significance of the metaphor in our understanding of reality. This happened as a result of several coincidental occurrences: my discovery of Milan Kundera, followed by Vilayanur Ramachandran's Reith Lectures 2003, Steve Hagen's, *Buddhism Plain and Simple*, Michael White's *The Pope and the Heretic*, Simon Wiesenthal's *The Murderers among Us* and *Tutu as I know him* – an unplanned bibliography for this essay.

If you are trying to find a way to connect this random selection of readings, you are engaged in what Vilayanur Ramachandran calls, "cross-modal abstraction," the ability to abstract common elements from very unlike items. According to the Professor:

"cross-modal abstraction," evolved as a survival mechanism in prehistoric times and became an automatic function of the brain. Once human beings developed the ... ability to engage in cross-modal abstraction, that structure in turn became an exaptation for other types of abstraction that us humans excel in, be it metaphor or any other type of abstraction." (4th Lecture, Reith 2003, p. 5)

While Ramachandran, making correlations between neural and physical activity, searches for reality in brain functions, Buddhists see reality and Kundera seeks reality in the way we function in the world. Both Kundera and Ramachandran attribute changes in human perceptions of reality to revolutions that displaced human beings from the centre of the universe, disabused them of the notion of predestination, and questioned their understanding of being in the world.

In Kundera's words:

As God slowly departed from the seat whence he had directed the universe and its order of values, distinguished good from evil, and endowed each thing with meaning, Don Quixote set forth from his house into a world he could no

longer recognize. In the absence of the Supreme Judge, the world suddenly appeared in its fearsome ambiguity; the single divine Truth decomposed into myriad relative truths parcelled out by men. Thus was born the world of the Modern Era, and with it the novel, the image and model of that world. (The Art of the Novel, 6)

In Ramachandran's words:

The history of mankind in the last three hundred years has been punctuated by major upheavals in human thought that we call scientific revolutions – upheavals that have profoundly affected the way in which we view ourselves and our place in the cosmos. First there was the Copernican revolution – the notion that far from being the centre of the universe, our planet is a mere speck of dust revolving around the sun. Then there was the Darwinian revolution culminating in the view that we are not angels but merely hairless apes ... And third there was Freud's discovery of the "unconscious" – the idea that even though we claim to be in charge of our destinies, most of our behaviour is governed by a cauldron of motives which we are barely conscious of. Your conscious life, in short, is nothing but an elaborate post-hoc rationalisation of things you really do for other reasons. (Reith 2003, Lecture 1, 1)

For Buddhists it is the reverse:

Consciousness divides what is otherwise the direct experience of a seamless Whole into the world of multiplicity, the world of space and time. (Hagen, 140).

I interpret this to mean that for the Buddhist the relative emanates from human inability to comprehend the Absolute¹ ("a seamless Whole"). Religions see the Absolute (God) as the starting point out of which relativity emerges; for atheists there is no beginning or end and humans create absolutes to cope with relativity.

While Buddhists calmly make their way, like particles in waves, through life's diverse and continuous flow, regarding commitment to a particular point of view as denial of the comprehensiveness of the Absolute, the rest of humanity continues the struggle to stop the flow with fixed formulations of truth and identity.

In the search for meaning, coincidences, unexpected yet seemingly related happenings, tease us with glimpses of certainty. Coincidences call into play Ramachandran's cross-modal abstraction (metaphor) which allows us to derive coherence from disparate happenings. In creating metaphors, we give meaning-definition-consistency to existence. For Ramachandran, this is a means of survival; for Kundera, according to Jan Čulík, the metaphor turns reality into myth.

Kundera scrutinizes closely man's myth-making propensity. He finds that the basic vehicle of myth-making is the metaphor. Out of a large number of characteristics, pertaining to two facts or events, we arbitrarily choose one isolated feature which they both have in common, because this superficial similarity happens to please us (it emphasises an aspect that we momentarily, for no good reason, find important, to the exclusion of all other aspects, most of which we are often not aware of). (Čulík, A self-referential Paradox, 3)

In an infinite universe, our material existence is a metaphor for certainty and certainty is a myth.

"Imagology"

Once life was shown to be indeterminate and uncertain underneath its super-structure of myth, some languished in existential angst while others, seeing the gap left by the departure of the Divine, seized on the notion of uncertainty and turned it into metaphor for profit. These pragmatists, whom Kundera calls imagologues – image makers – demonstrate great expertise in milking our insecurities and have conquered the world with a new dogma:

"Imagology!" ...this word finally lets us put under one roof something that goes by so many names: advertising agencies; political campaign managers; designers who devise the shape of everything from cars to gym equipment; fashion stylists; barbers; show-business stars dictating the norms of physical beauty that all branches of imagology obey." (Immortality, 127)

¹ In this essay Absolute = Comprehensive truth, absolute = human reduction to a single truth

Impermanence and change, the business principles of imagologues, and metaphor their *modus operandi*, made concrete in updates and make-overs, restore weight to existence as they proliferate a material democracy.

The word change,... has been given a new meaning: it no longer means a new stage of coherent development (as it was understood by Vico, Hegel or Marx) but a shift from one side to another, from front to back, from the back to the left, from the left to the front (as understood by designers dreaming up the fashion for next season) ... Imagologues create systems of ideals and anti-ideals, systems of short duration which are quickly replaced by other systems but which influence our behaviour, our political opinions and aesthetic tastes, the colour of carpets and the selection of books ... (Immortality, 129 - 130)

Now we no longer fear change, we fear being out of fashion, out of step, not politically correct. Imagology, which has given us a way to cohere, to be in community with ever-changing, fashionable identities, is a new, more effective form of 'democracy'.

"Imagology has gained a historic victory over ideology. All ideologies have been defeated: in the end their dogmas were unmasked as illusions and people stopped taking them seriously. For example, communists used to believe that in the course of capitalist development the proletariat would gradually grow poorer, but when it finally became clear that all over Europe workers were driving to work in their own cars, they felt like shouting that reality was deceiving them. Reality was stronger than ideology. And it is in this sense that imagology surpassed it: imagology is stronger than reality..." (Immortality, 127-8)

While ideologists theorise, plan and create structure upon structure to implement democracy, imagologues with no bureaucratic controls to impede their progress, have, with the aid of the media, immersed us in a practical form of democracy that has spread throughout the world – a form of democracy that is 'kitsch':

The most pernicious metaphorical constructs of reality are those which consciously set out to exclude the negative aspects of life. Kundera calls these constructs 'kitsch.' (A self-referential Paradox, 3)

Imagologues have ensured the support of the people for kitsch democracy through their powerful means of consultation:

Public opinion polls are the critical instruments of imagology's power, because they enable imagology to live in absolute harmony with the people... Public opinion polls are a parliament in permanent session, whose function it is to create truth, the most democratic truth that has ever existed. Because it will never be at variance with the parliament of truth, the power of imagologues will always live in truth and although I know everything human is mortal, I cannot imagine anything that could break this power ... the findings of polls have become a kind of higher reality, or to put it differently: they have become the truth." (Immortality, 128-9)

In addition, having turned supply and demand into a metaphor for democracy, imagologues propagate it through the media.

"The imagologue is a person of conviction and principle: he demands of the journalist that his newspaper (or TV channel, radio station) reflect the imagological system of a given moment. And this is what imagologues check from time to time when they are trying to decide which newspaper to support." (Immortality, 127)

The globe has thus become the constituency of imagologues who are homogenising the planet while we, in our designer jeans, embrace this new form of totalitarianism, and simultaneously lament the loss of diversity and cultural uniqueness. Though imagologues, with their swiftly changing metaphors, demonstrate that there are no absolutes and existence in an infinite universe is transient, we cling to their metaphors as our reality because they are absolute in the moment. Thus they have become coping mechanisms for being-in-the-world.

Imagologues, working in the moment, have resolved the absolute/relative paradox by making change consistent. And the phrase "living in the moment" has become a mantra.

The Paradox

But imagology is really a form of escapism. It has allayed our fear of change but it cannot deal with its root cause – the insecurity of random existence. Religion has dealt with this insecurity by explaining that worldly existence is transient not random; it is a prelude to permanent existence in an afterlife. But constant strife based on religious differences serves only to confirm the relativity of truth and the randomness of existence.

Those who accept the randomness of being, see society and its institutions as a human reaction to arbitrary existence. Through our institutions, we have created 'absolutes', – the rules and regulations that have allowed us to build a secure existence. Society, a fortress against the relative, is the human creation of 'absolute' truth. In Hinduism this is maya, illusion, mistaking the relative for the absolute. But society, a metaphor in an ever expanding universe, is our reality on earth.

Kundera, however, is critical of our desire for absolutes.

Man desires a world where good and evil can be clearly distinguished, for he has an innate and irrepressible desire to judge before he understands. Religions and ideologies are founded on this desire. They can cope with the novel only by translating its language of relativity and ambiguity into their own apodictic [indisputably true] and dogmatic discourse. They require that someone be right: ... This "either-or" encapsulates an inability to tolerate the essential relativity of things human, an inability to look squarely at the absence of the Supreme Judge. (The Art of the Novel, 7)

But in daily interaction people are forced to translate the "language of relativity and ambiguity into their own apodictic and dogmatic discourse". Even Hamlet, who couldn't act because he didn't have conclusive proof, eventually accepted his suspicions as fact and acted on them. 'To be' means to live in the world, in a practical situation; if we do not act, we cannot be. And decisions and actions are based on a reduction of relative to a single truth. We must choose and can choose only one from the many options for action that relativity offers.

And that is the paradox of being. In order to be (act, create), we have to reduce the relative to the 'absolute'. That makes what we call 'absolute' a human construct; it arises from the human condition. And we are not unaware, though our awareness may be subliminal, that the choices we make are reductionist rather than Absolute. Why else are capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia, such dilemmas? Why else, even after a judge has made up his mind, are there appeal courts? Why else do we have contradictory views on how to treat AIDS? On stem cell research?

When we still believed in the dichotomy of good and evil, it was easier to make categorical judgments. But after Einstein, we could no longer be in denial. Perhaps, it was to overcome the horror of uncertainty, the 'unbearable lightness of being' that led to the mass psychosis that gave rise to the atrocities of the holocaust. Perhaps, by demonstrating that they had control over life and death, the Nazis sought to wipe out uncertainty, impose certainty on the world, make truth and knowledge absolute and remove ambiguity from our existence. Their actions fit into Anthony Giddens' definition of fundamentalism:

Fundamentalism is not about what people believe but, like tradition more generally, about why they believe it and how they justify it. Fundamentalism can develop on the soil of traditions of all sorts. It has no time for ambiguity, multiple interpretation or multiple identity – it is a refusal of dialogue in a world whose peace and continuity depend on it. (1999 Reith Lecture 5, p.6)

Fundamentalism has its roots in the reductionism to which we resort to lessen uncertainty and from which it gains its brute power.

But the complexity of existence cannot be willed away in this crude manner. In the practical world, where 'truth' is relative, it takes courage to face up to the fact that we do not have ultimate control over our actions; that we cannot foresee all the consequences; that the principles on which we base our lives are pragmatic not Absolute; that our decisions and actions gain validity from confirmation by others as we cannot know with certainty that they are right in themselves.

So we resort to majority decision-making and the opinion poll. But consensus only gives us the confidence to act; it cannot guarantee the rightness of our decisions.

Even the decisions of arbiters of truth in a Justice System are not guaranteed. When a crime is committed, opposing metaphors are put to the test at a trial. The defence puts one construction on the facts; the prosecution another and whichever has the most sway is declared the truth. In countries where trials include juries that represent public opinion, the construction accepted as truth carries the weight of the people. Even so, it is not final. In our country, which does not use the jury system, a judge weighs the evidence and makes a decision. But his decision is also not final.

Decisions of judges or juries are subject to appeal. Thus, despite our striving for the Absolute, we demonstrate through our judicial processes that we can only produce relative truth. It can change from High Court to Supreme Court and needs further consent to become 'the truth'.

In the end, what we accept as 'truth' depends on consensus: if a meaning carries the weight of numbers or power, it becomes 'the truth' – hence our dependence on public opinion polls.

Journalists

Reduction is most clearly manifest in the work of journalists and judges who in their search for truth, must reduce the relative to the categorical. This is a form of fundamentalism and it has given journalists tremendous power. According to Kundera,

The whole moral structure of our time rests on the Eleventh commandment [Tell the truth]; and the journalist came to realise that thanks to a mysterious provision of history (Woodward and Bernstein) he is to become its administrator. (Immortality, 123)

Journalists, as Woodward and Bernstein have shown, are defenders of democracy. They see it as their function to expose actions and procedures that threaten democratic rights and freedoms.

But democracy, which means individual rights and freedoms, translates into myriad truths – relativity. And the journalist's search for indisputable fact is his weapon against relativity. The journalist, therefore, functions in a paradox. The immediacy of reporting with its requirement of indisputable fact ties him to the moment, forces him into reductionism. In contrast, the novelist, with no compelling deadlines, searches at his own pace for truths that contextualize facts.

Journalists are thrown into further contradictions when they are unable to penetrate the labyrinths of bureaucracies. The lack of transparency throws them off course.

TRANSPARENCY: A very common term in political and journalistic discourse in Europe. It means: the exposure of individual lives to public view ... Axiom: the more opaque the affairs of State, the more transparent an individual's affairs must be; though it represents a public thing, bureaucracy is anonymous, secret, coded, inscrutable, whereas private man is obliged to reveal his health, his finances, his family situation, and if the mass media so decree, he will never again have a single moment of privacy either in love or in sickness or in death. The urge to violate another's privacy is an age-old form of aggressivity that in our day is institutionalized (bureaucracy with its documents, the press with its reporters), justified morally (the right to know having become first among the rights of man) (The Art of the Novel, 150)

As Kundera explains, journalists unable to probe the affairs of State, turn their focus on the personal lives of individuals who become scapegoats for governments, institutions and organizations. The following newspaper headlines about problems in the Health Department, demonstrate the point.

The Sunday Times, 12 Aug 2007:
MANTO'S HOSPITAL BOOZE BINGE

Pretoria News, 17 August 2007
MANTO GETS RECORDS BACK: Minister in urgent bid to gag Sunday Times after its claims of her 'boozing'

The Sunday Times: Aug 19, 2007
 MANTO: A DRUNK AND A THIEF

Sowetan: 21 August 2007
 'MBEKI ORDERED MANTO LIVER': DA wants public
 protector to probe claim that president used his power to get ailing
 minister rare life-saving organ.

The focus is on the personal rather than the public performance of the Minister. And the facts or fact? Abuse of alcohol. "Purely positivist factual truth" (*Immortality*, 124) is mundane, but the metaphors abstracted from such demonstrable facts move 'truth' from the absolute to a superstructure of relative truths that can topple politicians from positions of power.

Some put the facts together to form a picture that exposes dangerous incompetence and apathy; others find in them a conspiracy aimed at toppling the President. There is no way to establish the absolute truth or falsity of these metaphors, but the total effect is to discredit the integrity of the individual and throw doubt on her competence to hold office.

Journalistic vs. Novelistic Truth

When the focus of the journalist shifts to the personal, to the individual in her private capacity, he makes moral judgments about her. He places her actions against accepted norms and values to determine her character. And as he is restricted to being in the moment, he knows her only in a particular set of circumstances so what he presents is a one-dimensional portrait, a stereotype, a metaphor.

In contrast, a novelist presents a character in multiple situations. As Kundera explains, it is not about defining character traits.

To apprehend the self in my novels means to grasp the essence of its existential problem. To grasp its existential code ... (which) is not examined in abstracto; it reveals itself progressively in the action, in the situations. (The Art of the Novel, 29 - 30)

And the scientist asks,

What exactly do people mean when they speak of the self? Its defining characteristics are fourfold. First of all, continuity. You've a sense of time, a sense of past, a sense of future. There seems to be a thread running through your personality, through your mind. Second, closely related is the idea of unity or coherence of self. In spite of the diversity of sensory experiences, memories, beliefs and thoughts, you experience yourself as one person, as a unity. (Ramachandran, Lecture 5, p. 6)

Is this unity a metaphor, an abstraction, a reduction? Buddhists have no doubt:

We have seen that the abiding self or soul we commonly assume we are is an illusion, a figment of imagination. (Hagen, 134)

And Ramachandran agrees:

(In) the Hindu philosophical view there is no essential difference between self and others ... the self is an illusion," ... (Reith 2003, Lecture 5, p.7)

There seems to be consensus among those I have quoted that there is no categorical self. Though consensus does not mean Absolute truth, this view of the self accounts for the differences in modes of operation between journalists and novelists.

As journalists take conformity to social norms and fixity of identity for granted, they deplore inconsistency of behaviour. The novelist, however, sees each action of a character as an individual action, so consistency of behaviour is quite irrelevant. Each action exposes a different aspect of her nature. And as the novel pursues the "wisdom of uncertainty" (*The Art of the Novel*, p.7) she cannot be reduced to a metaphor, a standard identity.

If a novelist took events surrounding the Health Minister and placed them in a novel, he would not be concerned to verify or deny facts. He is interested in the human being and his concern is to examine her actions and the situations in which she is involved to discover her unique responses to them. The novelist searches for understanding from within, from subjective consciousness, the heart of relativity, and does not judge. To judge would be to impose his understanding of truth rather than discovering the truth of her being.

The journalist, however, searching for 'incontrovertible truth' is not looking at the human being; he is measuring her conformity to predetermined human norms and values. This is his bias and it is reductionist and prejudicial; it precludes a search for real understanding of her actions. In Kundera's novels, truth is not based on any form of predetermination and represents the search for comprehensive, all encompassing truth.

"The novel's spirit is the spirit of complexity. Every novel says to the reader: 'Things are not as simple as you think.' That is the novel's eternal truth." (The Art of the Novel, 30)

And in the end it comes back to constructs of the Absolute – Buddhism's "a seamless Whole," Hinduism's Oneness of Being – but not in a supernatural context of faith – in the human context of relativity – in our struggle to find unity in our diversity.

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KARMA – AMBIGUITY OF ACTION

When people say, 'It is my karma,' they are making a connection between actions, placing them in a sequence of cause and effect – action leading more to punishment than reward. But the word karma means act, action, performance so why the shift in emphasis to consequences?

I believe it emanates from our need to make connections, a survival strategy that Vilayanur Ramachandran calls "cross-modal abstraction"². We join actions together to create a context from which we derive meanings that promote an understanding that there is order in the universe; that our existence is not arbitrary. Happenings, therefore, are seen to be logical not coincidental and action or lack of action has consequences – the common understanding of karma.

When actions lead to consistent outcomes, we begin to build up a base of apparently infallible knowledge that evolves into 'absolute' truths. These 'absolute' truths form the foundations on which we have built microcosms in which existence is as clearly defined and as stable as we can make it – stability being as crucial to us as oxygen. So we regulate living in community with fixed conventions and fixed truths. Conformity to fixed conventions and truths forms the basis for trust and affinity between human beings. That may account for the distrust of people of different cultures – different belief systems.

Trust is an informal means of creating stability. Naming, classifying, categorising, institutionalising are formal means. They give the definition and order that make action possible. Definition has thus become our way of being in the world. It is our "absolute" truth, deified and enshrined in tradition. And in all our endeavours we strive for the ultimate absolute – perfection. In Hinduism, the pursuit of enlightenment is the pursuit of oneness of being, i.e. the fusion of relative truths into one is the achievement of perfection.

In repudiating relativity, we have defined human function as bringing order out of disorder. And in so doing, we have given shape to a world and a universe. Even though Copernicus ousted us from our position at its centre, we as creatures who make meaning, still rule the universe.

But our efforts to reduce the uncertainty of existence are undermined by the very nature of our humanness. We are ambiguous creatures; being body and mind, instinctive and rational, individual and social, we are capricious – the essence of relativity – continuously challenging fixed definition. And the pragmatic attempt to define us, capture us in one-dimensional identities is like putting salt on a bird's tail.

According to Milan Kundera, relativity (not consistency) is the tool for exploring the nature of an individual. Measuring consistency is really measuring conformity to external social requirements. It is not a way to discover the uniqueness of the individual.

No matter how doggedly we project 'absolute' truths into the realm of supernatural fixity, they remain human constructs that change with changing circumstances. Our 'absolute' truths, used to define and control the individual, constantly give way to the uncertainty that arises from human contradictions. The commandment, 'Thou shalt not kill,' for instance, stated as an absolute becomes relative in self-defence, in executions and in war.

Nevertheless we continue to believe in 'absolutes'; we cannot abandon them because we need the perception of stability that they provide in order to act. So our acceptance of relative truth as absolute is pragmatic. Hinduism calls this 'maya' (illusion). And therein lies karma - action based on relative truth, on uncertainty.

So all our acts are leaps of faith and we get things 'right' or 'wrong'; but even our assessment of the 'rightness' or 'wrongness' of our actions and judgments cannot be taken for granted. There are always unforeseen circumstances.

² See quote, p. 7

A NOTE ON HINDUISM

I was once asked to sign a petition against East Coast Radio which had featured a pastor who vilified the Hindu religion – probably on the usual grounds of polytheism and pagan rituals. (I hadn't heard the broadcast.) As I do not believe in reacting to criticism with protest action, I did not sign. I was certain that the pastor had spoken in ignorance and what he needed (and probably East Coast Radio too) was education.

If the pastor was of Indian descent, he probably felt ashamed, feared that he would be connected to polytheism and pagan rituals and needed to distance himself from them. His was an understanding based on his observation of the ritual practices of Hindus. As a child, I too had repudiated the religion on account of the rituals which did not make sense to me. As a middle-aged adult, I embarked on a private study of Hindu philosophy.

This is what I learned from my reading. Hinduism attributes creation to an abstract life-giving principle – energy. It does not posit an anthropomorphic conception of God. Nirguna Brahman is the name given to the energy from which worldly existence emanated. It is formless. (*Nir* - No, *Guna* - Form/attribute i.e. formless. *Brh* - root of Brahman means growth, expansion). For Hindus, Nirguna Brahman is the Absolute/Ultimate Reality and Hinduism represents a search for the Absolute – enlightenment.

Most human beings cannot relate to an abstraction; they have need of a God with whom they can identify and communicate, like a father or mother. So Nirguna Brahman, the abstract concept, is reformulated into Saguna Brahman (Sa – With, Guna – Form/attributes). Where Nirguna Brahman is Absolute Truth, Saguna Brahman is relative truth – the human construction of knowledge – which can only be pragmatic.

Saguna Brahman, being relative truth, takes on a variety of deified forms. Hence the countless “gods” whose many names reflect various human needs: Shakthi, for instance, represents strength and power; Shiva, with the third eye, represents

omniscience – the power of knowledge. Ganesha, the elephant-headed god represents fortitude – the power to remove obstacles.

As human needs are countless, they have led to countless anthropomorphic representations – the deities of the religion. These deities and the many sacrificial rituals performed in worship of them give rise to ideas of paganism and polytheism. As this is where the majority are located, this is what outsiders see and what they get is a reductionist view of the religion.

Deities and rituals represent only the most basic of several levels of understanding that cater for varying capacities to comprehend the meaning of existence. But all levels, from the most basic concrete level (rituals) to the highest abstract level (meditation), represent attempts to eliminate the ego and unite *atman* (individual energy) with Brahman (cosmic energy).

These are the levels that I have identified through my reading:

1. Sacrificial rituals and the worship of deities – the basic level expressed in concrete terms. At this level the breaking of the coconut, symbolizes the dissolution of the ego
2. Devotion to a personal deity – Shiva, Durga, Ganesha etc.
3. Bhakthi worship, devotion to Krishna
4. Study of religious texts: the Vedas, the Bhagavad Gita, the writings of Hindu philosophers
5. Guidance from a Guru
6. Study of the Upanishads (Vedanta)
7. Yoga and meditation – the highest level of understanding that dispenses with deities and sacrificial rituals.

Hinduism recognises that as we live in a karmic world, i.e. a world of relative truth, we do not have complete understanding of our circumstances. Consequently our actions are flawed and it becomes necessary to strive for enlightenment – absolute truth.

Yoga and Meditation (disciplining of mind and body) is the way to eliminate the duality of being, the ambiguity of karma, the relativity of truth, the uncertainty of existence. Yoga and Meditation seek to dissolve consciousness (ego) in the eternal unconscious (Sanatana Dharma) – to unite athman with Brahman in pursuit of oneness of being – Absolute truth.

And this is where science and religion diverge. While science is on an adventure exploring relativity, religion is attempting to eliminate it.

SEEING THE METAPHOR

For an atheist life in the universe is a complete mystery and existence is shrouded in uncertainty. She sees that we build religious, political and social structures to ground ourselves in certainty. These are metaphors for stability but as our knowledge is incomplete and constantly changing, all our actions only appear to be logical. What we do in the moment makes sense in the moment but we cannot know for certain that it is the right thing to do. Truth, therefore, is relative, not absolute and material society is a metaphor for 'absolute' truth.

Religions on the other hand, grounded in the dictates of a protective Higher Being, understand that life on earth is a temporary proving ground where people have to qualify for eternal existence either in heaven or hell. And human existence, emanating as it does from God and returning to God, is not arbitrary. Furthermore, 'absolute' rules, such as the Ten Commandments, give stability to existence on earth. Faith in God – Absolute Truth – allows human beings to set their feet firmly on the ground, act with confidence and establish stable societal and social structures that regulate living and secure existence.

However, when the structures that humans build become oppressive; when democracy mutates into corruption and exploitation, human beings become aware of the fragility of all they have created. They begin to see institutions and their functions as unreliable, and society, which they took to be a fortress of stability, as insecure and uncertain. Then they feel they have been abandoned by God.

When the integrity of societies is destroyed, even religions have to acknowledge the uncertainty of established truths. In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna makes clear to Arjuna, who is reluctant to make war against blood relatives, that he must break with tradition and fight his cousins because they are destructive and cruel. They must die. Even Bhishma, the soul of integrity, cannot be spared because he, following tradition, fights alongside his cruel, destructive kin. Krishna's argument, an argument for capital punishment, is pragmatic; it demonstrates the relativity of truth.

But we cannot contemplate uncertainty with calmness. Though religion retains its firm hold on 'absolute' truth, once our faith has been shaken, it cannot be restored in traditional ways. And our limited ventures into space have increased the fear that ours is an arbitrary existence. But space programs have led to a substantial development in Science Fiction which, paradoxically, is helping to restore our security.

Though space programs have not taken human beings beyond the moon, Science Fiction has already peopled the universe with a variety of humanoid characters similar to the way that religion has filled the heavens with spiritual beings. In thus extracting the universe from the unknown and uncertainty, Science Fiction, like religion, gives us a way to overcome our angst about uncertain existence. It has turned space into multiple, though fantastic, replications of planet earth, and space has become a familiar region, less overwhelming, less uncertain.

We call those who inhabit Science Fiction's universe aliens, but their weird shapes and forms are modelled on humans and animals. So we are able to relate to them. In addition, these strange-looking creatures from 'outer space', exhibit very human norms and values. They are good or evil and, like us, seek to assert power and control over others. Sci-Fi, in making the vast deeps of the universe familiar in this way, and in allowing us to experience space travel vicariously, has allayed anxieties about our ant-like existence.

And in projecting human norms and values, good and evil, into outer space, Science Fiction has made inherent in alien life the absolute-relative controversy. This is where Sci-Fi differs from religion.

As religion has excommunicated relative truth, there is no confusion in paradise; there are no conflicting views of who we are and how we function. Life in Heaven being perfect relieves its inhabitants of the obligation to find meaning in existence. In Heaven, there is perfect understanding and all are in total agreement about everything. It is Utopia where all live happily ever after.

Why then do we mourn when someone dies? Why do we not celebrate the entry of the departed soul into paradise?

Is it because of what we actually see: the corpse, the grave, the burial – the finality of Death? The empty corpse compels our attention and erases the notion of an afterlife. The death before us is real; we see it as an end. And to say someone has "passed on" has little meaning as we look upon the unequivocal absolute of a dead body. Death is our only experience of absolute truth. As we are embodiments of relative truth, this encounter with the absolute is shocking.

Our hovering between consistency and inconsistency is the sign of life. Living human beings, involved in contradictions, conflicts, making pragmatic choices, create the relativity of truth. Absolute Truth, which represents abstract perfection, has no living human content. So how can a Heaven of Absolute truth accommodate human life?

Hinduism makes quite clear that it does not. In the striving for oneness of being, the elimination of relativity and the elimination of the ego are one and the same thing. Cremation symbolises the end of relative existence as human life reverts to pure energy and is reunited with cosmic energy. There is nothing human in this union.

Religion depends on faith and lives in the metaphor without seeing it.

ALIENS OR ANGELS

A TV program, in the series *Issues of Faith*, has the intriguing title UFOs-ALIENS-RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS.

The program, it seemed to me as I watched it, was trying to find justification for religious phenomena in science fiction. It made sense: science fiction, which marries religious and scientific concepts, is closer to religion than science. Like religion, it shrouds some of its heroes, Neo in *The Matrix* for example, in an aura of mystery that is akin to the spiritual. In the sci-fi movie, *The One*, which explores the idea of the Multiverse (parallel universes), the protagonist, played by Jet Li, tries to reduce the multiplicity of existences to one, i.e. the reduction of relative to Absolute Truth – the martial arts, a way to God.

The *Issues of Faith* program, which set about interpreting religious texts in terms of science fiction, was trying to give material reality to angels and demons by interpreting them as aliens, and by turning miracles and transfigurations into UFOs and teleportation through space (beam me up Scotty).

The Hindu, African, Muslim, Christian, and Jewish religious authorities interviewed, were all willing to give credence to extraterritorial life by equating it with sightings of transcendental beings described in religious texts. For some, the existence of human life on earth was a gift of alien beings who built the pyramids and Mayan temples that early humans were apparently not capable of constructing. They endorsed the idea that early religious art forms were expressions of alien cultures. They even accepted the possibility of life on other planets and the notion of parallel universes. They were far removed from those who persecuted Galileo; they were bringing religion out of its conflict with science. In so doing, like imagologues, they were giving religion a make-over.

It was religion accommodating a sci-fi understanding of existence.

I recognise the value of religion in helping to regulate living and building the stability of community. But religion presents living in the world as a transient reality, a prelude to Absolute reality. Life on earth, therefore, is not valuable in itself and we are not independent beings. Our function on earth is to work for a passport to Heaven.

Science and technology, on the other hand, in examining the existential reality of life on planet Earth, reflect human confidence in our ability to interpret and determine our own destinies. For scientists the mystery of our origins and destination is a challenge, a problem to be solved; nothing is pre-ordained; we make meaning, we build, we create our reality.

And when I think of all that human ingenuity has devised to give us stability in uncertainty, I am filled with awe. Being able to see the metaphor, makes it possible to appreciate the wonders of human creativity and accept our responsibility to preserve human life and all that sustains it.

We are responsible for our existence. We cannot escape that responsibility – there is no supernatural escape into life after death.

RELIGION AND DEMOCRACY

Religion and Democracy present ideological and practical ways to define individuals and communities, give them stability and security and guide them towards an existence that is ethical, moral, and responsible. But their focuses are different; democracy operates in the imperfect world of everyday things while religion envisions a perfect world that can be attained after death if we follow divinely ordained fixed precepts. As democratic governance deals with the here and now, the striving for perfection is in the here and now and life becomes a manifold process towards perceivably obtainable goals.

In its adherence to centuries old doctrines, religion attempts to encapsulate the present in the past, while democracy, which is continually evolving, attempts to set the present in the future. As a result, religion and democracy treat the individual differently. In religion, which requires total submission to prescribed scriptures and practices, movement is introspective and controlled.

In a democratic society, which provides the structure that supports and encourages personal exploration, growth and independence, movement is towards the unknown in the vast universe in which we have our being. As a result, democratic values expressed through processes rather than formularies, change and expand to accommodate new understandings of individual rights and freedoms. Witness debates on The Civil Union Bill and same sex marriages. As emphasis in religion is on norms and values established in ancient texts, conformity is equated with faith. But in a liberal democracy, where the community is seen as the matrix that nurtures individual freedom and development, individuals are propelled into the creation of unique destinies.

In modern times, the migration of people across the globe, especially from East to West, has led to the formation of multi-cultural communities in strongholds of western democracy where the unfamiliar practices of migrants bring to the surface xenophobic impulses that enclose democracy within ethnocentric boundaries. In

such communities, government by-of-for the people, developed for a homogeneous culture, has to expand to include unfamiliar customs and beliefs. It is a difficult process as immigrant cultures may be equally uncomfortable with the liberal rights that obtain in the host community.

When immigrant cultures assert traditional beliefs that run contrary to taken-for-granted notions of freedom in their new societies, they paradoxically expose democratic notions of freedom as forms of coercion – the banning of the hijab in France, for instance. And liberal democrats, committed to the expansion of individual freedom, have to ask themselves whether democracy includes the right of the individual to impose restrictions on herself and accept what liberal democrats deem to be oppressive conditions? If democracy means freedom of choice, does that include the freedom to give up the freedom of choice? What is the purpose of this kind of conservative challenge – to undermine or to expand a liberal democratic understanding of freedom? As different value systems collide and clash, what is treasured in one culture may be irrelevant in another; what is regarded as harmless in one may be hugely offensive in another.

Danish cartoonists, who caricatured the Prophet Muhammad, took for granted their freedom of expression and gave little thought to the sensibilities of the Muslims living in their midst. According to Islamic beliefs, the act of depicting the Prophet Muhammad is, in and of itself, a desecration; the irreverence of the portrayals compounded the sacrilege. The outbursts that followed the publication of the cartoons were based on mismatched perceptions: religious versus democratic values.

As the arguments of the two sides were differently contextualised, there was no common ground for discussion. So there were people shouting, 'Abuse, Desecration, Racism,' on the one hand and, 'Down with censorship; viva freedom of speech' on the other. With each side clinging to its own understanding of the issue, there could be no meeting of the twain.

How do people standing on different platforms get together to reconcile their views? Who takes the initiative towards reconciliation?

The individual in the liberal democratic tradition, constantly challenging restrictions and striving for independence, is fulfilling her destiny. Should she adopt the same mode of operation when she encounters values and norms that run counter to her own in another culture? If she does, she runs the risk of being perceived as intolerant and abusive. She, however, is simply acting in accordance with values inculcated in her society.

Must the freedom that she derives from her culture, a freedom that guides her thinking and actions, that makes her who she is, must her taken-for-granted freedom be abandoned when she encounters taken-for-granted traditions of another culture?

Should she abandon the freedom that defines who she is? If she cannot be her authentic self when she encounters difference, who should she be – hypocrite-patron-missionary or iconoclast? There is no equality in the assumption of such roles and in order to afford people of different cultures respect and friendship, one has to meet them on equal terms. Is that possible? We have worked out superficial protocols for interaction between peoples of various cultures because our meetings have been at borders and after formalities we have gone our separate ways.

Now we live as neighbours and the accepted protocols, previously predicated on passing acquaintance, are woefully inadequate. Living with people who don't think or behave as we do, we have to develop new ways to relate and while we struggle to establish new modes of interaction, we are forced to encounter our own ethnocentricity and a form of xenophobia that we had no idea inhabited our beings.

But negative feelings provide opportunities for growth as they force us to search for ways across cultural divides. The process is fraught with difficulty. How do people who embrace change interact with those who do not? Do we have the right to impose values on others because we believe ours to be more humane? Should freedom of expression that is a tenet of our socialization, fire off missiles at the adherence to a different set of values? Is that humane? But if one adopts a hands-off policy, how

far should such tolerance go? To acceptance of authoritarian attitudes, gender bias, slavery, abuse, genocide? Do we live together but separately? Resurrect apartheid?

At present, we are witnessing cultures in collision through happenings such as the Danish cartoons, a Pope's reaction, terrorism and George Bush's desire to democratize the Middle East. And we ask, is it right to interfere in another culture; make it conform to our norms and values? Is a return to religious orthodoxy the panacea for all the world's ills? Is democracy? Will Bush's attempts to foist democracy on Iraq end the conflict in a country where Shia and Sunni have not, for over a thousand years, resolved their religious differences; where religion, perceived as a way of life prescribed by Holy Scriptures, does not allow for the constant pushing back of the boundaries of individual rights that is characteristic of Western democracy? Since there seems to be no fit between Bush's requirements and Iraqi aspirations, is he not embarked on ideological colonisation of a diverse group of people who have been fighting colonialism in one form or another ever since the British created a land called Iraq?

In South Africa, we live in a multi-cultural society. In 1994, we came out of our group areas and had to find ways to interact. Having emerged from apartheid, we had the incentive of not wanting to appear racist and, for the most part, committed ourselves to the effort. In our Truth and Reconciliation processes, which continue informally in our daily interactions, we are learning to forgive, forget and move on.

But the past is easily dealt with compared to the present. In our new constitution we have wholeheartedly embraced the ideals of democracy but implementation becomes more challenging everyday. Respect for the individual, regardless of race, colour and creed, still remains a conscious effort; and race-consciousness is very evident in party politics. And prejudice, our *raison d'être* before 1994, is channelled in new ways – against foreigners and gays – and maintained against women, the disabled and the poor.

Though we have and are making tremendous strides in overcoming our apartheid social conditioning and though we began with a truly liberal new constitution that sought to empower the individual, we then agreed to proportional representation, which cut the voter off from the representative and made the representative accountable to the party not the people. Thus began the process of political disempowerment of the individual that was completed with the adoption of floor crossing legislation that left the voter not knowing what party she was voting for and from whom she could demand accountability. Now we have government of the people, by the party, for the party. It is a form of democracy but not the democracy for which I voted in 1994.

But who can say that it is wrong when those, bound by tradition, not able to move forward into democracy, wish to bring back the death penalty, denounce homosexuality and the right to abortion and find obnoxious the idea of a woman as president of the country. Since the laws abolishing capital punishment, endorsing gay rights and gender equality were promulgated by a ruling party voted in by people who repudiate these measures, I have to ask myself again, what actually does democracy mean? Have our leaders endorsed a democratic philosophy far in advance of the people they lead? Are they imposing democratic ideals in the same way that Bush seeks to impose them in the Middle East?

It is easy to define democracy in the abstract, hard to identify it in its implementation because its workings depend on human integrity, in particular the integrity of leaders. As that cannot be guaranteed because power corrupts, corruption, which rides roughshod over individual rights, becomes the vehicle that dispenses small benefits to the governed.

We got rid of apartheid but we kept the corruption and poverty. So what does democracy mean? Does it simply mean having the vote?

But with the maladjustment between liberal democratic values and traditional norms that arises from race consciousness, we cannot depend on the vote to ensure the accountability of politicians.

The ease with which democracy can be sabotaged makes it necessary to have arbiters who stand outside party politics. In Archbishop Desmond Tutu, we have a leader who has found a way to combine religious and democratic values. He is grounded in Ubuntu but he has no political power.

UBUNTU

Ubuntu: *I am because we are and because we are, you are.* In other words a human being is simultaneously an individual and a social being. 'I am' and 'you are' refer to the individual and 'we are' refers to community. The individual grows out of community. Is the individual more important than the community or vice versa? Or are they interdependent and therefore in balance?

Balance would mean that the individual understands that she derives her identity from being in community. The group provides the security and sustenance that allow her to develop beyond simple survival needs. Her unique contributions in turn lead to the growth and development of the group: the greater her individual freedom, the greater the progress of the community. The shared experiences of the individuals in the group form the basis of the group's culture. So culture is dynamic. The creativity of all its individuals keeps it evolving into more and more complex forms.

The family, the basic social unit, prepares the individual for life in the community. Parents give children the genes that make them the individuals that they are. Each child inherits a unique set of genes that makes her different from her siblings and allows her to develop her own personality even as she is being socialized to live in a group.

As the individual conforms to family requirements, she begins to develop into a social being. As each child's genetic uniqueness determines how she responds to the socialization process, her attitudes and responses will be different from the way in which her brothers and sisters respond.

So siblings are all different. Even though they live together and are brought up in the same environment, they develop distinct identities. In an extended family, which includes grand-parents, uncles, aunts, cousins, etc., the individual comes into contact with a wider culture and has the opportunity to develop a more complex identity and a greater sense of responsibility.

The socialization process opens up channels of communication between individuals, and contributes as much to the development of individual character as her genetic make-up. So the individual is not simply a recipient of the socialization process; she is also a contributor to it. Each individual plays a role in developing the social unit that is the family. Every action of the individual, whether parent or child, adds to the building of its culture and helps to determine its direction. With mutual respect, it functions for the benefit of all.

As the family is the basic building block of society, a healthy society depends on the healthy functioning of the family. In a perfect democracy, society is the extension of the family; it provides a nurturing environment that allows the individual to grow and develop. It takes care of her material needs in providing services such as water, electricity, goods for all her needs, security, health care, education, etc. That gives her the freedom for creative self-expression and personal development which in turn is the way that she, as an individual, makes her contribution to the society in which she lives.

Understanding individual-group interdependence leads to an understanding of the individual's responsibility to herself and to her society. As society nurtures the individual, it is to her advantage to contribute positively to it. In doing her best to build a compassionate society, she is doing the best for herself.

SOUTH AFRICA'S CHANGING CULTURE

Belief systems grow out of our interactions with one another and with the environment in which we live. Culture is the expression of a belief system formalised in the conventions we create for communal living i.e. our modes of work, trade, knowledge, science, technology, transport, language, arts, morals, laws and relationships.

Conventions are customary behaviours, regular routines into which we channel our actions – ritual conduct that creates a sense of stability and security; that gives “concreteness” to existence. In Milan Kundera’s terms cultural conventions are metaphors (in Hinduism, maya – illusion) that mask the uncertainty of existence. As each group’s culture grows out of a different environment, each one is unique. Cultures, however, arise out of common human needs so there are basic similarities between them.

Traditional belief systems and conventions demonstrate an intimate dependency on nature. Nature’s vicissitudes gave rise to beliefs in benign spirits (rain gods etc.) that helped people prosper; and malevolent spirits (demons, witches, etc.) that thwarted their development. All aspects of the environment were endowed with spirits – the land that sustained them, animals, birds, insects, trees, plants and sky. Traditional arts: poetry, music, dancing, singing, drawing, painting, pottery, sculpture etc. expressed and reinforced beliefs about relationships to nature, to one another and to spirits. They were important aspects of the socialization process.

We tend to think of traditional conventions as our culture; but they are not. Our beliefs and behaviours change with changing environments so our culture is our present way of life. Traditions represent a past way of life. But we cling to them because they have been handed down as authentic, have become fixed practices and their fixity gives us a sense of security.

Traditions are static; culture is not – it is constantly evolving. It changes with the development of technology and the dictates of power. As technology helps to control the environment, it changes our relationships with nature, with one another, and provides new ways of doing things.

When Shaka introduced new technology in the assegai, a short, stabbing spear, it changed the traditional practice of warfare and gave him power to amalgamate neighbouring tribes and control their ways of life. In the nineteenth century, machine technology gave rise to free enterprise and capitalism and changed the way in which people worked and lived. It also made possible the colonization of Africa and changed the cultures of the colonized.

In 1652, when the Dutch East India Company, set up a refuelling station at the Cape, there were small separate African kingdoms, states and villages all over the country with cultures closely derived from nature. The Khoi-Khoi were the first people with whom the Dutch came into contact. The Dutch, with a culture in which advanced technology had given them greater control of nature and ways of living that were more institutionalized, regarded the Khoi-Khoi as primitive and therefore exploitable. As the Company was mainly involved in barter, it probably did not have a profound effect on the Khoi-Khoi way of life.

When some of the Dutch became settlers and took up farming, they came to regard South Africa as their home and adapted their traditions to their new country. They adopted the designation “Afrikaner” and saw themselves as a local people with a right to the land. French Huguenots and Germans, who came to settle among them, were integrated into their community. All these European settlers brought new ways of living to the country. They set up farming estates and employed slaves to work on their farms. These slaves from the East Indies added to the diversity of the culture developing at the Cape. But the culture of the settlers was dominant; their farming, trading methods and technology were changing the environment and giving them power over all. Slaves and indigenous people adapted to Dutch requirements and learned to speak Dutch.

Language, like technology, is a powerful transmitter of culture. The norms and values of the society in which it originates, are embedded in its vocabulary. The adoption of a language, therefore, indicates the adoption of the culture from which it arises and to which it has given form. So learning a new language leads to changes in traditional beliefs. Think of how attitudes to lobola, the African dowry system, are changing. In the old tradition it was a way of ensuring harmony between families, then in a capitalist society it became a commercial matter and the value of a bride was assessed according to educational qualifications, and now, in a culture of human rights, people question whether lobola reduces a woman to a commodity.

In the late eighteenth century, when the British took control of the Cape to secure their trade route to the East, they clashed with the Dutch over slavery. Wilberforce was a powerful voice in England advocating abolition. The Dutch resented the intrusion of the British into a way of life in what had become their homeland. When the British abolished slavery at the Cape, it was the last straw for many. To escape British control, they trekked into the interior to build new lives. Their experiences of hardship on the trek – hardships that they overcame in their determination to survive and flourish – led to a new culture of adventure, courage, fortitude, dour independence and insularity.

When the British took control of the country, indigenous cultures were incorporated into a new way of life. Christian missionaries came to convert African people; schools were opened and education inducted them into British ways. Settlements of English people in the Eastern Cape and in Natal helped to spread British norms and values.

When diamonds and gold were discovered, South Africa was thrust into the machine age and a culture of free enterprise. That meant development as well as exploitation of natural resources and indigenous people. Cecil Rhodes, who became a mining magnate, and a Minister in the Cape Parliament, wrote:

I contend that we are the finest race in the world and that the more of the world we inhabit the better it is for the human race. Just fancy those parts that are at present inhabited by the most despicable specimens of human

beings what an alteration there would be if they were brought under Anglo-Saxon influence, look again at the extra employment a new country added to our dominions gives. (Confessions of Faith, www.milestonedocuments.com/)

This assumption of white superiority became the dominant culture of South Africa. White superiority, which derived from domination, exploitation and materialism, became a taken for granted notion. Its concomitant, black inferiority, derived from political and economic disempowerment, was also taken for granted. We lived in a culture of varying perceptions of racial superiority and inferiority. To assert their human dignity, black people began to adopt aspects of the dominant culture.

People like Rhodes, Barney Barnato and others, had the technology, finances and know-how to exploit the resources of the country. And under the British, South Africa acquired the institutional structures and infrastructures of industrial capitalism and urbanization. African people, having lost their land, were drawn to the cities to find work. Many became mine-workers, living in mining compounds, away from their homes, families and traditional ways of life. Others found work in the urban areas. When they abandoned their rural families and established new ones in urban informal settlements, they cut themselves off from traditional roots and the social responsibilities inherent in traditional belief systems. Their traditional cultures became sub-cultures.

The new economy had changed their way of life dramatically. They no longer had land and independence. In their relationships with their employers, they developed attitudes of submission, resentment and anger at the same time as they learned to speak English and/or Afrikaans and adapt to European ways. They gave vent to their resentment in their townships, and township culture became a precarious mixture of escapism and violence. Loss of the traditional conventions that had sustained them, had hurled them into the debilitating consciousness of the uncertainty of existence.

Indians adapted their traditions to their new environments; they also learned to speak English and/or Afrikaans and began to adopt European ways. Being segregated into little shanty towns helped them to retain their traditional languages, their religious

books and objects, their dress and food. Living as aliens, separate and different, never regarded as integral to the society, they developed a culture of insularity – protection against an uncertain existence.

Coloured people, living in their townships, created a way of life based primarily on European traditions, and struggled with questions of identity and human dignity in their quest for metaphors that would ground them in certainty.

In 1910, the country became a national state ruled by an Afrikaner government under British jurisdiction. Black cultural groups were now brought under a centralized administration that would determine where and how they lived. They were subjected to British imperialism as well as a growing Afrikaner nationalism which was building a democracy for white people.

Contradictory beliefs of Afrikaners and British with regard to Black people weakened them against growing Black resistance to oppression.

The majority of African men had been turned into a poorly paid labour force. African women had to find the means to help support their families. Some became domestic workers in white homes; others began informal businesses as hawkers and vendors. Some worked in factories. These were coping mechanisms under which there was deep-seated resentment that exploded from time to time in defiance and protest.

The provision of education, based on the British model, assisted in the acculturation of all people living in South Africa. Primary and secondary education was free but not compulsory for Blacks; so there were few schools. Indians and Africans built additional schools that were subsidized by the government. Those who could, attended school, some went on to universities and entered professions. Through their studies, they were exposed to Western philosophy and revolutionary ideologies, such as Marxism; the writings of African scholars in the Negritude Movement; and to African-American scholars, such as W.E.B du Bois.

These ideologies and independence movements inspired them, helped them to structure their discontent and led to the development of a revolutionary cadre.

For African people it was the lack of opportunity that led to dissatisfaction with their circumstances; for Coloureds and Indians it was the restriction of opportunity that frustrated them. Such differences in treatment kept Black people divided.

Indian culture was a culture of resistance from the onset. The independent merchant class that followed the indentured labourers into South Africa and set up businesses, did not hesitate to take legal action against local governments that tried to restrict their enterprises. These merchants brought Mahatma Gandhi to South Africa to fight their legal battles. Gandhi had studied law in London, and in South Africa was introduced to the writings of Leo Tolstoy by Herman Kallenbach. He developed a philosophy that reflected a fusion of Indian and European thought. In creating political organisations [the Natal Indian Congress, the Transvaal British Indian Association, etc], and establishing the newspaper, *Indian Opinion*, Gandhi gave form to the merchants' resistance.

In 1906, he devised the strategy of mass nonviolent resistance (Satyagraha), which combined Tolstoy's humanism with Hindu humanism. Satyagraha was his legacy to South Africa and after he returned to India, Congress leaders continued the fight against laws curtailing Indian expansion and development. Their struggle led eventually to the Passive Resistance Campaign of 1946 -7.

The campaign did not achieve its objectives but it led to an awareness that brought the separate resistance movements of Africans, Coloureds and Indians together in a pact against segregation and authoritarian rule. The need for unity eventually generated the term "Black" that included African, Coloured and Indian. The repudiation of race as a basis for discrimination led to the formation of a united political movement that included liberal whites. This unity, posing as it did, the greatest threat to white domination, led to the rigid structuring of segregation under apartheid.

Apartheid Culture

World War II weakened British influence in South Africa and Afrikaner Nationalism came into its own. An apartheid government was set up in 1948 that gave statutory legitimacy to segregation: the Group Areas Act, Bantu Education Act, Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, etc. that validated the culture of racial contempt, suspicion, distrust, fear, derogatory stereotyping and discrimination. Even those who resisted it were forced to operate within it.

Apartheid was focussed on the development of white people – Afrikaners in particular. An affirmative action program for Afrikaners was put in place, and Blacks had to put up with the arrogance and often incompetence of Afrikaner civil servants.

Under apartheid, South Africa continued to adapt to the industrial-capitalist culture that was sweeping the world. The establishment of the institutions and infrastructure of industrial-capitalist democracy, begun under colonialism, continued under apartheid. And South Africa became part of the modern capitalist world. Race and class were conflated to reflect the hierarchical social structuring of capitalism that divides people into rich and poor.

Between 1948 and 1960, Black resistance remained within the culture of passive resistance, which is based on a belief in the humanity of the oppressor. In 1960, the Pan African Congress, under the leadership of Robert Sobukwe, organised demonstrations against the pass laws. At the Sharpeville demonstration, police opened fire on protestors and many people were killed.

After the Sharpeville massacre, Nelson Mandela rejected passive resistance and Umkonto we Sizwe, the armed wing of the ANC, was established. Sharpeville had given rise to a new revolutionary determination to overthrow apartheid by violent means if necessary. In response, the government became even more despotic; it hunted down revolutionary leaders and imprisoned them.

Activists lived under surveillance, threats of banning, house arrest and imminent imprisonment; they were being tortured and murdered in prison, assassinated at their

homes and in out of the way places. Those not already imprisoned were leaving the country to join training camps to continue resistance from neighbouring countries and abroad.

Without leaders at home, resistance appeared to have been stamped out and black people lived in a culture of fear, suspicion, submission, collusion and violence.

Then came Steve Biko. Inspired by African-American activism, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, etc., Biko established the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa. The BCM rekindled the revolutionary spirit of the masses that led to the Soweto Uprising of 1976, which in turn led to increased state repression as well as resolute revolutionary resistance. An underground movement developed and Umkonto we Sizwe and other militia groups became an invisible presence within the country. Ordinary people living in an atmosphere of fear and intimidation escaped into traditional cultural practices to evade the stress and horrific reality of their circumstances.

South African society was divided into two major camps: people planning revolution and the overthrow of apartheid on the one hand; on the other, the Nationalist Government, intent on creating an exclusively white South Africa with its policy of separate development.

Between these camps, a subculture of collusion had developed amongst Blacks to cope with the austerity of a subjugated existence. It gave rise to a class of collaborators willing to cooperate with government. The Nationalist Government saw in them the means to further its plans for separate development. Collaborators could be used to give legitimacy to government policy: first, the Homelands System to segregate African people –the major task – and later, the Tri-cameral Parliament to segregate the minority groups of Coloureds and Indians.

Under the Homelands System, Africans were denied South African citizenship. Every African was classified according to her ethnicity and became an alien in the country. She had no rights in South Africa because she had been declared a citizen of a Self-governing State or a Homeland.

This citizenship was based solely on ethnicity. For example, someone of Venda origin, born and brought up in Pretoria where she had lived all her life, was arbitrarily declared a citizen of the Self-governing State of Venda. She was no longer a citizen of South Africa even though she had never lived in the Self-Governing State of Venda and had never even visited it. It made no difference where she lived; she had no rights except in Venda.

So it was for all African people; they had citizenship only in Homelands and Self-governing States; outside of Homelands and Self-Governing States, they were aliens and had to carry passports. Only white people had citizenship in the country they called the Republic of South Africa. With Homelands and Self-governing States, the Government claimed to be reviving and supporting ethnic self-government and traditions. It was proud of its separate development strategy.

Once the government had dealt with the African people, it turned its attention to the two small minorities, Coloureds and Indians. Earlier governments had tried to repatriate Indians and had failed. And Coloureds were indigenous to the country. The Government was stuck with these groups. So it introduced the Tri-Cameral System of government. Tri-Cameral – three separate houses of parliament: one real, the House of Assembly – the White parliament, and two facades, the House of Delegates for Indians and the House of Representatives for Coloureds. African people were not part of the Tri-cameral Parliament. From the Government point of view they were not citizens of South Africa; furthermore they had already been “adequately” provided for in their own homelands with their own governments.

Collaborators, recognized by the government as leaders of the Coloured and Indian communities, were “democratically” [without majority consent of their communities] elected to these new separate parliaments. These new MPs controlled only minor matters pertaining to their own separate communities. In the minds of the Nationalists, who were fully aware of the facades that they were creating, the Tri-Cameral Parliament would demonstrate to the world that all Blacks now had independence and the right to rule themselves. But all the so-called leaders in the Tri-cameral

System and in the Homelands and Self-governing States were under the control of the apartheid government and they administered the laws of apartheid.

And we all lived together in a patently make-believe culture of happy separate development. In reality our culture, was a culture of repression, hypocrisy, moral instability, subversion and above all violence. We became conditioned to all forms of violence.

The Tri-cameral System was the last straw for activists who regarded it as a declaration of war. And from the early 1980s, we were in a do-or-die culture of extreme violence. It was a time of defiance, protest marches, bombings, detentions, bannings, house arrests, roadblocks, searches, torture, murder, states of emergency, panic and fear. It was a time of marauding police terror and brutality that brought “hippos” (police assault vehicles) and tear gas to the many activist funerals in the African townships; funerals were the only rallying points left to keep the spirit of resistance high. The funeral became the symbol of resistance.

It was also a time of “necklacing” – brutal executions of “impimpis” (those suspected of collaborating with the police and government). The reign of terror was interrupted briefly by the release of Nelson Mandela from prison in 1990; then continued during negotiations between the ANC and the Nationalist Government at CODESA³. The period of transition to democracy was a period of incoherent violence, especially in the Homelands. The AWB (Afrikaner Resistance Movement), the militia group of Afrikaners on the far right, came to the fore, police terror peaked and there were mass detentions. Youth in the Homelands went wild, marching and destroying, demanding their rights and persecuting women accused of being witches. The negotiations at CODESA were jeopardized by the Afrikaner far right’s assassination of Chris Hani. The murder would have plunged the country into civil war but Nelson Mandela’s statesmanship, vision, strength and uncompromising demand for equity, kept the process on track and a new state based on democratic principles was created.

³ Convention for a Democratic South Africa

In 1994, South Africa held non-racial elections and the rights of all people were recognised. Our way of life changed again. We were all citizens of the country and that meant another major cultural shift – into a new psychological environment. All people of all colours became one nation living under the same laws and regulations. We were all equal before the law.

New lifestyles have been developing since then. At the same time, old cultural traditions, suppressed under colonialism and apartheid, are being revived.

The reach for the traditional is a reach for human dignity. But traditional practices reflect the cultures of past environments, not present day realities. So they are not part of the mainstream and do not impact in a significant way on our public lives. They have become forms of entertainment that add colour and variety to public gatherings. At political events they are expressions of ethnic group solidarity. Their essential meanings are relegated to the private sphere.

The culture that we formally adopted in 1994 was that of liberal democracy – a culture beyond our experience. So we still live double lives; in the public domain we profess liberal democratic values; in private many are ruled by the norms and values of their traditions – the comforting fixed practices of authoritarianism. In public, communication is in English or Afrikaans, the official languages of colonialism and apartheid that remain as lingua franca. In our homes we speak a variety of African, European and Indian languages. But the general adoption of English as the language of communication weakens the hold of traditional languages and cultural traditions.

Through the adoption of a universal language and western technology, we have joined in the global endorsement of democratic norms and values. But our socialization into apartheid still bedevils us. We still perceive and are still perceived in terms of stereotypes. To overcome the stigmas of the past, we are impelled to assert our dignity as human beings; we do so through the pursuit of power, materialism, wealth and violence.

We have thus fallen into a culture of corruption, which is as much a form of violence as apartheid was. So our conditioning in violence continues. And rape – in all its

manifestations from the physical to all forms of exploitation and fraud – has become the essence of our new culture. Institutions of society, in which we formerly invested trust, are now in the business of defrauding us; our banks, for instance, and our government institutions. Perhaps they have never been trustworthy, but with computer technology, the power to defraud has become so much easier, can be accomplished invisibly and on a large scale.

The vote and elections do not guarantee democracy. Neither does a constitution. In South Africa, they are smoke screens behind which we hide a reversion to exploitation. Under apartheid, we lost respect for the rule of law, the lynchpin of democracy. Corruption in the new dispensation makes it impossible to restore that respect. Without respect for the rule of law we have only a facade of democracy and our constitution is simply an empty metaphor.

Corruption, racism and violence continue to determine the way we live. They form the basis of our present-day culture – a reality which we cover up by paying lip service to Ubuntu and hiding behind Nelson Mandela. During the time of the struggle, we believed in democracy as something real. But after 1994, it became clear that democracy is a set of ideals – to which we can only aspire without making it our reality. Even around the world we find only approximations, relative understandings of democracy – not the perfection embodied in constitutions.

That is because governance requires pragmatism; and we give our trust to governors in the hope that in their decision-making they have some commitment to the ideals of democracy; that they will be benevolent dictators. In countries where political parties have to compete for power, there is a better chance that politicians will be benevolent dictators. Where political parties are elected on racial/emotional/ sectarian grounds politicians become predators.

THE RULE OF LAW

The growth and development of the individual is made possible by the security of living in community – a person is a person through other people – ubuntu. The aim of democracy is to provide the security that allows for maximum individual freedom.

Democracy from demos (people, awethu) and kratos (power, amandla) – amandla awethu – government of the people, by the people, for the people is based on the ideals of liberty, fraternity and equality. Fraternity and equality translate into responsibility and respect for others.

But human beings are self-serving creatures; we often forget fraternity and equality in pursuit of liberty. Without them, freedom remains ambiguous, both positive and negative. Positive freedom leads to beneficial creativity and development; negative freedom leads to exploitation, manipulation, fraud and destruction. In order to provide the security that leads to positive individual freedom, a democratic government, through the rule of law, enforces conformity to fraternity and equality to ensure liberty.

Freedom in democracy means responsible freedom: we cannot simply do as we please; we have to take into consideration how our actions may affect others. And respect for the rights of others translates into respect for the rule of law.

The rule of law, which a Government enforces through its police force and the justice system, is there to foster a culture of accountability. The rule of law makes a government an institution of control – even democratically elected governments. Governance, therefore, is on a continuum of control. The difference between authoritarian and democratic government is simply the difference in degree of control. And the degree of control determines the degree of individual freedom.

Individual freedom is probably the most significant ingredient in the progress and development of a society. If we look at societies where there is great progress, we see high degrees of individual freedom. The progress that results from such individual creativity and innovation, reaches across borders, bestowing benefits globally.

Where the rule of law does not operate, as in situations of high crime, individual freedom is diminished. Crime is usually associated with poverty; poor people are desperate people with little individual freedom – the resort to crime is an expression of freedom. But poverty itself is a crime; it reveals a society's repudiation of fraternity and equality. It is an indictment of governments and societies that are called democratic. Poverty exists where those who are not poor, pursue individual freedom at the expense of those who live in dehumanising conditions. That makes us all criminals whether we are directly engaged in criminal activities or not.

Though we all recognize that poverty leads to crime, we don't acknowledge that poverty is an indication of the failure of democracy. And the situation is exacerbated when the people, mandated to protect democracy, are also involved in crime. Crime at higher levels of society, by people in positions of power and trust – governmental as well as non-governmental – is far more devastating than the most barbarous crimes committed by the criminals among the poor. Poor people commit crimes against individuals; powerful people commit crimes against society that lead to large scale ruin and destruction.

And when leaders violate the rule of law they give rise to a general culture of lawlessness. When we read daily of bribery and corruption committed by those in power – from the highest levels of government to the street level of the police force, we feel free either to repudiate the rule of law or to take the law into our hands. So now in South Africa, we have the world's highest incidence of rape – that includes the rape and murder of children and babies. These crimes, as horrendous as they are, do not compare with the fraud committed at high levels that takes the food from the mouths of millions. With the general suspension of the rule of law in a country, we cannot trust the police; we cannot trust politicians; we cannot trust banks; we cannot trust industrialists and businessmen; we cannot trust one another.

Exploitative uses of power replace the rule of law. A government that is entrenched, i.e. that knows that it can stay in power for the foreseeable future, will be a government in which the rule of law becomes a plaything to be manipulated. To keep a government somewhat honest, i.e., concerned about the welfare of citizens, is to

keep it off-balance. Once a government becomes entrenched, it has no need to be democratic; there is no challenge to its power – it has the votes of the majority; there is no need to deliver them from poverty.

The only way to keep a government off-balance is to keep it uncertain of its ability to maintain power. If it really needs our votes, it will make more of an effort to improve conditions of living, especially for poor people. But voting, where race and ethnicity still rule the day, sets the same people in power over and over.

At this moment (October 2013), there is an interesting development in the US. The Congress has shut down government on the grounds that it cannot endorse President Obama's healthcare legislation. The Congress, presumably consisting of wealthy people, professes that government cannot afford to take care of its poor citizens. In other words, it cannot carry out its mandate of ensuring fraternity and equality – the prerequisites for individual freedom. It is a clear demonstration of democracy's Achilles' heel – its reliance on trust.

The words "liberty", "equality", "fraternity" roll easily off the tongue; but they are not guaranteed under "democracy". Most societies with elected governments have to be content with liberty, equality and fraternity as regulated under the law (when there is the rule of law); but when it comes to economic and social liberty-equality-fraternity -- the necessary complement to individual freedom – the individual is on her own in all societies.

TECHNOLOGY, CHANGE, INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM

In the beginning, people lived in small, rural communities on land that provided them with the basic necessities for survival. They revered the land that sustained them, and developed beliefs based on the blessings and misfortunes that nature provided. Life was lived on an intimate scale and travel was limited.

The invention of the wheel changed that; it gave rise to all kinds of new technologies and forms of transport. Travel increased. People encountered other peoples and other ways of living and that led to a broadening of their perspectives. In addition, as they developed more sophisticated tools, they began to gain control of the natural environment and that altered their relationship to nature. Though they still venerated nature, they began to exploit its resources.

The invention of machines and electricity made possible greater exploitation of natural resources and led to a radical alteration of the way of life; people were moved out of subsistence economies into free enterprise that led to capitalism, nationalism and bureaucratic governance. Governments and corporations took over the land and the means of production. They set up labour intensive industries and enterprises – factories, agricultural estates, etc – that standardised and mass produced goods.

That in turn led to the development of mass transport systems – greater freedom of movement of goods and people over the earth's surface.

The Industrial Revolution that made possible the abolition of slavery, created a new, more liberal form of dependency in its stead. People who had been small independent farmers, craftsmen and tradesmen, became workers and civil servants dependent on government and industry. Governmental institutions took over services such as education, health care etc. and Industrialists provided employment. The Worker, symbol of the Industrial Age, was a dependent servant of power with the right to vote. And dependency determined how he would cast his vote.

Workers and civil servants adapted their dress, food, homes, worship and arts to their new work environments. Their way of life was characterized by the factory principles of standardization, centralization and concentration. And they sent their children to schools where they were inducted into the same principles.

Today with the development of computer technology which has greatly increased individual freedom, we are again undergoing new and radical changes. As computer technology is evolving at ever increasing rates, we have come to accept change in our lives as normal and the notion of standardization that characterized the machine age is breaking down. Now we embrace diversity – niche markets – and are moving out of confining nationalisms into the vast array of Globalism, and a desire for more localized governance is developing.

At the same time, however, we are hampered by the culture of dependency into which we were socialized in the Industrial Age. With the new technology and its gift of greater freedom from drudgery, work has become less labour intensive. Workers all over the world are being retrenched. Our education system, which has been providing education for employment, is now providing education for unemployment. Under better healthcare systems populations are increasing, while jobs are decreasing. The private sector and civil service can no longer absorb all high school and university graduates.

We are beginning to see that our education is no longer relevant in a changing socio-economic environment. Individuals are now being required to take full responsibility for their economic survival. Education, therefore, has to become education for self-development. The focus has to change from standardized education to individual education and empowerment for economic independence.

Our schools, however, are still providing standardized education that divorces theory from practice so learners can be instructed in the mass not as individuals. Schools must become places where the individual learner is given the opportunity to discover her interests, talents and aptitudes. She must have the opportunity to develop real skills, both practical and theoretical, and gain the expertise that will lead to self-

employment. She must be allowed to devise a personal curriculum and be offered training by specialists who offer theory in practice.

That means education should be freed from a school campus. The computer has lifted education from the confines of classrooms, schools, towns and countries. It allows for individualized learning, greater specialization and world wide communication with others in the same fields.

Education, therefore, need not be limited to time and place, and should encourage interaction between people of all ages. This is happening informally and marks the beginning of the revolution that is needed.

Meanwhile much informal education is taking place through technology. Like language, technology is a transmitter of culture; we may not realize it but the norms and values of a country are embedded in its technology. Technology produced in the United States arises out of the democratic belief in individual freedom; items from household appliances to computer technology empower individuals. They facilitate work and communication and enhance feelings of independence and competence. When we import U.S. technology, we import those values as well and we too derive feelings of independence and competence from them.

The same can be said of structures like supermarkets and shopping malls. When we enter a supermarket, it does not occur to us that we are exercising democratic rights – freedom of movement and freedom of choice. As we move through these structures, we are being subtly socialized into these norms and values.

If we look at the Arab Uprisings that began in 2011, we see people who were and are demanding democracy. Since they were/are living under authoritarian rule, where did they get their understanding of democracy? Cell phones, I-pads, camera phones and computers enabled them to communicate widely, organise and expose the oppression under which they live/d and even enabled them to topple dictators. They *experienced* individual freedom in using new technology and were empowered to move beyond confining cultures.

With I-phones, smart-phones, I-pads etc. anyone can be a reporter and journalism is changing. It now accommodates information and opinions from people on the street. The camera phones that individuals carry are becoming the means of gathering news from inside events.

Normally journalists are outside events and rush to scenes when they hear of extraordinary occurrences. But today people inside events, normally just victims, now armed with various forms of camera phones, are transmitting on the spot pictures and information to which the traditional journalist has no access. The term “citizen journalism” acknowledges this new development.

In the U.S where individual freedom is highly prized and education less standardized, journalists are building UAVs – Unmanned Aerial Vehicles or drones, which can fly over newsworthy occurrences and record happenings below.

From the invention of the wheel to the computer, technology has liberated us from a xenophobic, parochial existence and given us the freedom to roam the universe. And we owe our increasing individual freedom, not to governments, but to inspired inventive individuals.

Inventors, being individuals, understand individual needs. They are inspired to create when they see ways to make life easier. Their inventions remove drudgery from work, facilitate and speed up activities and make possible the impossible. Washing machines, motor cars, flying machines, ATMs, computers, social media, UAVs etc, all extend individual freedom.

And individual freedom is one half of what democracy is about; the other half of course is the responsibility to ensure individual freedom for all human beings. That’s where government comes in with all its controls to ensure the rule of law.

Most of us are not aware that we adopt democratic norms and values through the technologies that we use. We believe, perhaps, that democratic norms and values are spread through revolutionary uprisings such as the revolutionary movement that

took place in South Africa. True, revolutions do espouse democratic values, but only in theory not in practice. There is little freedom in a revolutionary movement. Revolutions are forms of war and require co-ordinated activity – that means no deviation from ideology and strategy – it means acceptance of authoritarian control.

We also call elected governments democratic. But governments are seats of administration where regulations, rules and laws that curtail freedom are formulated. All kinds of controls are set up through bureaucracies to keep the individual in check: finger-printing, ID documents, licences, etc. – top-down administration, authoritarian in practice.

Furthermore, a government enforces its laws through the police and army, which are its frontline. When we see protesters marching in the street and police beating and tear-gassing them, we are watching the government in action – we are witnessing the authoritarian control that is necessary to ensure the responsible behaviour that promotes individual freedom. Our existences are paradoxical – in order to experience freedom we have to be restrained.

As Alvin Toffler puts it, “in the paradoxical sense the veiled threat of violence makes daily life non-violent.”⁴ The veiled threat of violence in law enforcement prompts us to behave in responsible ways. The threat of traffic fines, for example, helps to regulate traffic and allows us to travel fairly safely on our roads.

It is a government’s function to ensure that these controls are in place. Individual freedom in a democracy, therefore, is controlled freedom, responsible freedom. When revolutionaries shout the word “freedom”, they are calling for freedom from excessive restraint – not for the absence of restraint. Those in protest marches who damage property and loot do not understand this; their behaviour is unrestrained – anarchic, anti-democratic.

The aim of democratic government is to *protect* individual freedom; but the actual *experience* of individual freedom, comes mainly from our use of technology. The

⁴ Alvin Toffler, 1990, *Power Shift*, New York: Bantam Books, p.15

more advanced the technology the greater the sense of individual freedom. But, in the human condition, there are always those who repudiate responsible freedom, i.e. respect for the right of others to individual freedom. They turn the blessings of technology into curses.

SCHOOL

Despite the fact that education is failing everywhere, we still call for schools and more schools. School is still thought of as the means to employment even though unemployment is rife throughout the world; thousands are losing their jobs and marching in protest.

It's no use blaming governments for growing unemployment. Politicians are simply administrators, not innovators. If we are to 'blame' anyone, it would have to be the scientist or technologist. Scientists and Technologists are the innovators and their discoveries lead to major and continuous change in society; their inventions radically transform the way we live, think and interact. They, for instance, created the conditions for transformation from subsistence to capitalist production. They made possible our evolution from simple communities into ever increasingly complex societies.

Now we are being carried out of industrialism into the electronic-nuclear age. We are in the midst of another social revolution. Only the wisest can see its ramifications; the rest of us remain within the old paradigm, clinging to the institutions of industrialization. School is one such institution. It still operates on the principle of standardization, like a factory, churning out mass produced education that sends students into the world to seek work and serve with machine-like precision.

Before industrialization, the home was not simply a place of nurture, comfort and relaxation; the home was an economic unit in which a family operated a trade or small business and children born into the family were in apprenticeship from childhood. Even today, parents who share their occupational interests with their children provide them with a vital stimulus. The likelihood of their children becoming independent is greater because they are learning from live models and gaining real, practical experience.

Industrialization took away the economic independence of ordinary people and broke the routine of children following in the family tradition. Education was taken over

by a centralized government and schools were established to prepare children for employment. The purpose of the Industrial Age School was to produce compliant workers for factory-type institutions and the teacher's role was to inculcate:

- (1) Competence in the 3Rs: workers had to be able to read to follow instructions;
- (2) Punctuality: factory work is synchronised through division of labour; each worker has to be in place on time in the assembly line;
- (3) Obedience: mechanised work needs absolute conformity to the process.

And school became an institution in which the learner is processed in a production line, in a cloistered environment because its operation is more important than the learner.

Children in school are regimented and ruled by the clock. They attend between specified hours, are divided into class groups of the same age, and are fed the same diet of abstract information. They move through school from grade to grade on an assembly line picking up more and more abstract information as they go. This kind of socialization may have been sufficient as long as labour intensive 'factory' type institutions needed workers with only basic skills.

Those times have changed; factory-type assembly lines are becoming mechanised and we no longer need masses of semi-skilled workers. New technologies are replacing the worker, not only in factories, but in all institutions and bureaucracies. The worker is becoming redundant. School, therefore, can no longer guarantee employment.

In the 1970s, when Ivan Illich spoke of deschooling society, I believe he meant getting rid of the institution and turning the whole of society into a place of education – as it had been before industrialization. Before the establishment of the 'factory' school, skills and training were acquired through apprenticeship. We seem to be moving in that direction with the establishment of learnerships, apprenticeships and institutions of technology but learning is still happening in factory-like conditions.

Our schools are still providing standardised education which divorces theory from practice so that learners can be instructed in the mass not as individuals. Education has to change its focus from the group to the individual. We need a new education system that encourages the development of individual interests and talents in real work environments, not in programs that simulate reality. That means opening up schools, not separating them like prisons, but integrating them into the community.

Furthermore, the confined populations of schools are sitting ducks for the disaffected who cannot fit into school or society – as various shooting incidents have shown. And herding children into schools turns schools themselves into breeding grounds for violence – witness the increase in bullying and hazing, even incidents of rape and murder.

Education should be offered in the way goods are offered in shopping malls, and made as easily accessible to all. The individual learner should have the opportunity to choose what, when, where and how she wishes to learn. She must be allowed the freedom of choice to create her own individual curriculum rather than being forced into the formulas that others think are best. To gain the knowledge, both theoretical and practical in her chosen fields, she should be able to move easily between places of learning that specialize in the areas of her interest. She should no longer be confined to one school building in one place and time. And she should not be restricted to a class group of the same age. If she is given the freedom to join interest groups, she will be with learners of all ages.

Education has to become the means for self-discovery and that should be the basis for the acquisition of knowledge. A learner's education must enable her to discover her talents, aptitudes and interests and develop expertise, both practical and theoretical in her chosen fields. That means specialist rather than generalist teachers – specialists who offer theory in practice.

Strangely enough, something like this is happening in a prison, Boksburg Prison, as was shown in a program in the TV series *Leihlo la Sechaba*. Having received hands-on training with the proper equipment in the proper environment created on

the prison premises, prisoners have set up a bakery business and are supplying other prisons with bread. They speak of opening their own businesses when they are released. They are being empowered.

To try to develop work skills in the abstract environment of the traditional school is to continue providing the world with disempowered semi-skilled workers who go out to look for jobs instead of creating employment for themselves.

Learners need to be prepared for economic independence, not in abstract school situations but in real work environments. Their learning should not be for marks but for actual practical application. Mistakes will then become part of the learning process and not be treated as a failure of intelligence. In that way, we will rid the learner of the fear of failure and stop the labelling of people as intelligent or stupid in terms of the marks that they get.

In the 1980's Alvin Toffler advised us to become 'prosumers' – to reclaim our functions as producers as well as consumers. As consumers we depend on governments for services and on corporations for jobs – they are the producers and we, the consumers.

And society is divided between producers and consumers, employers and workers, the powerful and the disempowered – the perpetuation of inequality that often compromises the right of equality before the law. Dependency is evident in all forms of protest: students who cannot gain entry into higher education, workers who rise up against poor pay and citizens who march against poor service delivery. The universal cry of protest, "We DEMAND", is a declaration of dependency, of disempowerment. It is the declaration of the dependent consumer.

We need education that empowers by nurturing creativity and leads to the economic independence of the individual. Education is a process of self-discovery; why postpone it to after we leave school?

RHYTHM AND COMPATIBILITY

I went to work with some people one day – we were there to stuff envelopes – and discovered myself to be a disruptive influence. I was impatient and couldn't understand why I had to wait around when I could see what had to be done and wanted to get on with it. I actually became rude and forced my co-workers into a routine that was not their usual way of working.

From the looks and actions of others around me, I realised that I was being uncivilized. I apologized to the person in charge but I worried about my behaviour for the rest of the day. Eventually, I realised what was wrong. My work rhythm had not been compatible with the rhythm of those around me.

I had discovered this mismatch of rhythms as a source of incompatibility many years before but had not given it serious consideration. After my retirement and as a loner, I work at home without having to match my rhythm to anyone else's so I had forgotten about it but the incident that day woke me once more to a consideration of the mismatch of rhythms as a source of incompatibility.

Rhythm is either fast- or slow-paced. In music you have slow and fast movements that complement one another. Some music remains basically slow and others fast. Hip-hop and rap is fast paced and frenetic and its appeal is mainly to the young and energetic.

In music, fast and slow movements complement one another. But workers in an assembly line work at the same pace – and I had been out of step on that day when I went to stuff envelopes.

People like me, work with great intensity gathering speed as we go. Others are more relaxed and take their time. Fast workers get down to work right away, hardly stopping until they have finished. Relaxed workers take their time, split their attention between the task, other tasks and social activities. Fast workers are probably prone to hypertension. I think that because I am hypertensive.

When I look back over my life, I see that I got on best with those whose work rhythms matched mine. My helper (domestic worker) and I get on fabulously because our work rhythms match. She gets on with the job and doesn't stop until she has finished. I leave the house to her; she knows what she is doing and does not need me in the way.

There are two men who occasionally do odd jobs for me. The first is like me: he knows what he has to do and gets on with it. He doesn't even stop to eat. The only interruptions he experiences are when I offer him a drink or a bite which he usually postpones. The other man, who is just as competent, works in a relaxed way. He stretches a job out over days and takes frequent breaks to visit with other people. You have guessed it; I give preference to the first man.

But there are great disadvantages to being a fast worker. The most important is that a fast worker does not give others time to take in what is going on. I worked at the till as a volunteer in a charity shop where we sold goods at very low prices so we added up the cost of items manually. I would add up quickly in my head and that sometimes led to problems. People would question the accuracy of my totals and I would have to total up again with the customer.

I was at a college of education before I retired. There I worked with people with different rhythms. I worked best with people who moved fast; they were the people with whom I became good friends. But I got on most people's nerves because I acted immediately on suggestions. I didn't realize at the time that I was taking seriously what may simply have been people letting off steam.

People who work well together share the same rhythms of performance. Differences in rhythm are not generally recognised but these differences lead to all kinds of prejudicial perceptions. I am beginning to think that rhythmic difference may be the root cause of incompatibility in relationships and rhythmic similarity may be the most important element in stable ones. At this ripe old age, I realize that my rhythm makes me impatient and intolerant and I should be sensible about the way I work with people.

OUTSIDER

I was born and brought up in colonial-apartheid South Africa, in a society balkanised into separate racial ghettos. For black people, that meant living double lives. Work and employment brought us into contact with the dominant group – into relationships that were official and formal, filled with patronage, posturing, pretence, and hostility. After work, we went home to our ghettos to relax, be with family and friends and live fairly free from restraints.

Freedom, closeted in segregated areas, took on separate cultural trappings. In the mainstream, we were acculturated into Western ways, but in the ghettos, we lived very different lives based on ethnic traditions. Thus we developed a divided consciousness and became critical of traditional norms and values that were not acceptable in the mainstream.

My childhood was spent in an Indian ghetto, the Asiatic Bazaar in Marabastad in Pretoria. Because we spoke English at home (not Tamil or Afrikaans), the children in our family were not really socialised into the practices of the Tamil community in which we lived. Our family had come from Durban and we were, to a large extent, outsiders in the location. My involvement in the customs and rituals in which I participated was perfunctory. My awareness during prayers and rituals was always that of an observer not a participant. And it amazed me to see others lose themselves completely in them. I couldn't do that. I couldn't close my eyes; I was incapable of religious faith.

When I was about twelve, we moved back to Durban. Being a stranger in the city, I continued to be an observer. My new teacher, a devout Catholic convert, exposed us, the pupils in her class, to Catholic rituals. When I found myself counting Hail Marys on a rosary and marching in a Marian parade, I couldn't understand what I, an outsider, was doing inside. Faith, the ability to simply accept and believe, still baffled me completely. I think I joined that parade to find faith. But I didn't. I still couldn't lose myself in ritual the way others did.

Soon afterwards, I rejected religion altogether. My uncle MD was an atheist, and though I repudiated his explanation of evolution (I couldn't understand why there were still apes and monkeys when they could have become human), he made me aware that others lived without religious faith. I realize now that I had, instinctively, uncomprehendingly, been aware of being in the metaphor.

As an adult without a scientific background, I have for years been trying to understand what scientists and physicists tell us about the Universe. From what I have read, I have learned that life (animal and plant) is a rare, exceptional occurrence, a miracle that seems to have come about purely by accident. Some 3.5 to 4 billion years ago, conditions were right for the creation of life on earth and as far as scientists are aware, there has been no replication elsewhere in the universe.

As curious, creative, creatures with the capacity to explore the universe, humans are faced with the paradox of existence. We are finite beings in an infinite and expanding universe. We have built up knowledge to try to understand the workings of the universe but we can never know it all and what we think we know is subject to change and cannot be asserted with absolute certainty.

Because we live in a state of uncertainty, we have created coping mechanisms to give stability and meaning to our lives – coping mechanisms such as social structures for communal living: religion, customs, traditions and institutions. These are “concrete” systems that ward off the fear of the vast unknown. But they are fences we put up against uncertainty, what Kundera refers to as metaphors, to make bearable “the unbearable lightness of being”. And, paradoxically, we search endlessly to define infinity, to give it the beginning-middle-end that defines us – birth, existence, death.

When I began to explore Hinduism, the religion into which I was born and about which I knew nothing, (and now know a little), I discovered karma and learned again about the paradox of existence: our finiteness in an infinite universe; our inability to foresee all the consequences of our actions and make absolute judgments; that material

existence is maya, illusion, the absolute on a foundation of relativity. It had surprised me to find in Hinduism the kind of understanding that I was discovering in the realm of science.

When I became aware of the African concept of ubuntu, it summed up for me the meaning of human existence. Ubuntu: *I am because we are or a person is a person through other people.*

In other words, we become human individuals through our interactions with one another. Without interaction we are nothing, we do not exist.

From my reading, it seems that this is what scientific wave-particle experiments have led to – the understanding that existence is apparent only in interaction – Ubuntu.

