

Autonomy

Girish Sahasrabudhe (28 Feb 2020)

Autonomy is the chief distinctive characteristic of all life, rather like a part of it. It enriches life. Like environment, it is not 'man-makeable'. Quite the contrary. it flourishes precisely when man lives life as it actually is.

If at all man's position in all life is unique it can be so only because man's autonomy expresses itself primarily as creation and imagination, the one 'physical' and the other 'mental', going hand-in-hand. The two are joined together in that both refer to something new, something which did not exist at the earlier moment. And, also, in that they relate directly to each other as inseparable aspects of the same autonomous act. From this point of view there is, for an individual who acted, neither "creative imagination", nor "imaginative creation". Or, they are the same. For, neither the imagination, nor the creation lend themselves to abstraction as such, at least as abstraction is understood in modern science. On the other hand, they are both concrete in the truest sense of the term. They refer to appearance on the scene of a new element of reality, an element in which they are merged. In no sense is this new element alienable from the individual who first brought it into existence. However, it is shareable – others may partake of it. It can trigger new imagination and new creation, by other individuals too. And then, not define them, but at most inspire them.

Every autonomous act of an individual is enacted in a society – it is "social" in the widest sense of the term. It is so both in its imaginative, as well as its creative aspects. Both are guided by the social life of the individual, which is what human life is in the final analysis. In this context it would be an error to think of this guidance as either a 'determination' of, or even as a 'limitation' on either of the aspects of the act. For such an imputation presupposes a kind of abstraction not admitted by the possibility of autonomous action. An imagination, which admits such an abstraction is an anathema to autonomous

social action of an individual. This, if for no other reason than that it inevitably separates the imaginative and creative aspects of autonomous action. Moreover, such abstraction has no necessary relation to the act judged to be 'determined', or 'limited'. (Clearly, this is not to say that it can have no relation whatever with the act. Just that the relation it has is not necessary. Also, that this abstraction must then in some sense be 'external' to the guiding social paradigm of the act to start with.) How can it? For it cannot accompany the act, but only follow it. But what may be considered to legitimately follow the act is only reflection charged with new imagination and creation. Such reflection will quite often heed, as a matter of routine choice, an abstraction critical of the act – inevitably subtracting from it any pretensions to universality it might have.

Autonomous social action is the primary mode of creation of knowledge with the individual, as well as of its continuous renewal and deepening. In the same measure this autonomous action itself also partakes of that knowledge. Knowledge is thus a 'higher' form of autonomous creation. Not in the sense of being 'precise', or 'universal', or even 'free', but in the sense of being eminently shareable, and thus becoming part of the repertoire guiding autonomous action of other individuals. It is lokavidya. This shareability has the specific character of being valuable to autonomous social action. It is tested at each stage, not proven forever. It is not based on any abstract universal categories of thought, or even of judgement. It may even be that the only true abstraction inherent to the shareable knowledge in society of autonomous individuals appears as value. Therefore, quite unlike scientific knowledge, the abstraction in it is not a tool of action but a guide for choice of tools of action.

All this, if it is more, or less correct in its basic contention, means that autonomous social action is such only when it admits possibility of similar autonomous action by others. Societies, which, in a manner of speaking, more, or less recognize this as they regulate themselves would be more, or less autonomous. Swaraj may be thought of as just such self-regulation. Also, then, autonomous societies are societies of autonomous individuals. A free society of

free individuals, experience shows, appears more and more like the state. Clearly, one may imagine an autonomous society of autonomous individuals to appear more like the environment.