

## **Human Rights and Asian Values**

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In 1776, just when the Declaration of Independence was being adopted in this country, Thomas Paine complained, in *Common Sense*, that Asia had "long expelled" freedom. In this lament, Paine saw Asia in company with much of the rest of the world (America, he hoped, would be different): "Freedom hath been hunted round the globe. Asia and Africa have long expelled her. Europe regards her as a stranger and England hath given her warning to depart." For Paine, political freedom and democracy were valuable anywhere, though they were being violated nearly everywhere.

The violation of freedom and democracy in different parts of the world continues today, if not as comprehensively as in Paine's time. There is a difference, though. A new class of arguments have emerged that deny the universal importance of these freedoms. The most prominent of these contentions is the claim that Asian values do not regard freedom to be important in the way that it is regarded in the West. Given this difference in value systems-the argument runs Asia must be faithful to its own system of philosophical and political priorities.

Cultural differences and value differences between Asia and the West were stressed by several official delegations at the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993. The foreign minister of Singapore warned that "universal recognition of the ideal of human rights can be harmful if universalism is used to deny or mask the reality of diversity." The Chinese delegation played a leading role in emphasizing the regional differences, and in making sure that the prescriptive framework adopted in the declarations made room for regional diversity. The Chinese foreign minister even put on record the proposition, apparently applicable in China and elsewhere, that "Individuals must put the states' rights before their own."

I want to examine the thesis that Asian values are less supportive of freedom and more concerned with order and discipline, and that the claims of human rights in the areas of political and civil liberties, therefore, are less relevant and less appropriate in Asia than in the West. The defense of authoritarianism in Asia on the grounds of the special nature of Asian values calls for historical scrutiny, to which I shall presently turn. But there is also a different justification of authoritarian governance in Asia that has received attention recently. It argues for authoritarian governance in the interest of economic development. Lee Kuan Yew, the former prime minister of Singapore and a great champion of the idea of "Asian values," has defended authoritarian arrangements on the ground of their alleged effectiveness in promoting economic success.

Does authoritarianism really work so well? It is certainly true that some relatively authoritarian states (such as South Korea, Lee's Singapore, and post-reform China) have had faster rates of economic growth than many less authoritarian ones (such as India, Costa Rica or Jamaica). But the "Lee hypothesis" is based on very selective and limited information, rather than on any general statistical testing over the wide-ranging data that are available. We cannot really take the high economic growth of China or South Korea in Asia as "proof positive" that authoritarianism does better in promoting economic growth-any more than we can draw the opposite conclusion on the basis of the fact that Botswana, the fastest-growing African country (and one of the fastest growing countries in the world), has been a oasis of democracy in that unhappy continent. Much depends on the precise circumstances.

There is little general evidence, in fact, that authoritarian governance and the suppression of political and civil rights are really beneficial in encouraging economic development. The statistical picture is much more complicated. Systematic empirical studies give no real support to the claim that there is a general conflict between political rights and economic performances. The directional linkage seems to depend on many other circumstances, and while some statistical investigations note a weakly negative

relation, others find a strongly positive one. On balance, the hypothesis that there is no relation between freedom and prosperity in either direction is hard to reject. Since political liberty has a significance of its own, the case for it remains untarnished.

There is also a more basic issue of research methodology. We must not only look at statistical connections, we must examine also the causal processes that are involved in economic growth and development. The economic policies and circumstances that led to the success of east Asian economies are by now reasonably well understood. While different empirical studies have varied in emphasis, there is by now a fairly agreed-upon list of "helpful policies," and they include openness to competition, the use of international markets, a high level of literacy and education, successful land reforms, and public provision of incentives for investment, exporting, and industrialization. There is nothing whatsoever to indicate that any of these policies is inconsistent with greater democracy, that any one of them had to be sustained by the elements of authoritarianism that happened to be present in South Korea or Singapore or China. The recent Indian experience also shows that what is needed for generating faster economic growth is a friendlier economic climate rather than a harsher political system.

It is also important, in this context, to look at the connection between political and civil rights, on the one hand, and the prevention of major disasters, on the other. Political and civil rights give people the opportunity to draw attention forcefully to general needs and to demand appropriate public action. The governmental response to acute suffering often depends on the pressure that is put on it, and this is where the exercise of political rights (voting, criticizing, protesting, and so on) can make a real difference. I have discussed (in these pages and in my book *Resources, Values, and Development*) the remarkable fact that, in the terrible history of famines in the world, no substantial famine has ever occurred in any independent and democratic country with a relatively free press. Whether we look at famines in Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, or other dictatorial regimes, or in the Soviet Union in the 1930s, or in China from 1958 to 1961 (at the failure of the Great Leap Forward, when between 23 and 30 million people died), or currently in North Korea, we do not find exceptions to this rule. (It is true that Ireland was part of democratic Britain during its famine of the 1840s, but the extent of London's political dominance over the Irish was so strong-and the social distance so great and so old, as illustrated by Spenser's severely unfriendly description of the Irish in the sixteenth century-that the English rule over Ireland was, for all practical purposes, a colonial rule.)

While this connection is clearest in the case of famine prevention, the positive role of political and civil rights applies to the prevention of economic and social disasters generally. When things go fine and everything is routinely good, this consequence of democracy may not be sorely missed. But it comes into its own when things get fouled up, for one reason or another. Then the political incentives provided by democratic governance acquire great practical value. To concentrate only on economic incentives (which the market system provides) while ignoring political incentives (which democratic systems provide) is to opt for a deeply unbalanced set of ground rules.

## II.

turn now to the nature and the relevance of Asian values. This is not an easy exercise, for various reasons. The size of Asia is itself a problem. Asia is where about 60 percent of the world's population lives. What can we take to be the values of so vast a region, with so much diversity? It is important to state at the outset that there are no quintessential values that separate the Asians as a group from people in the rest of the world and which fit all parts of this immensely large and heterogeneous population. The temptation to see Asia as a single unit reveals a distinctly Eurocentric perspective. Indeed, the term "the Orient," which was widely used for a long time to mean essentially what Asia means today, referred to the positional vision of Europe, as it contemplated the direction of the rising sun.

In practice, the advocates of "Asian values" have tended to look primarily at east Asia as the region of their particular applicability. The generalization about the contrast between the West and Asia often

concentrates on the land to the east of Thailand, though there is an even more ambitious claim that the rest of Asia is rather "similar." Lee Kuan Yew outlines "the fundamental difference between Western concepts of society and government and East Asian concepts" by explaining that "when I say East Asians, I mean Korea, Japan, China, Vietnam, as distinct from Southeast Asia, which is a mix between the Sinic and the Indian, though Indian culture itself emphasizes similar values."

In fact, even east Asia itself has much diversity, and there are many variations to be found between Japan and China and Korea and other parts of east Asia. Various cultural influences from inside and outside this region have affected human lives over the history of this large territory. These influences still survive in a variety of ways. Thus, my copy of Houghton Mifflin's Almanac describes the religion of the 124 million Japanese in the following way: 112 million Shintoist, 93 million Buddhist. Cultures and traditions overlap in regions such as east Asia and even within countries such as Japan or China or Korea, and attempts at generalization about "Asian values" (with forceful and often brutal implications for masses of people in this region with diverse faiths, convictions, and commitments) cannot but be extremely crude. Even the 2.8 million people of Singapore have vast variations of cultural and historical traditions, despite the fact that the conformism that characterizes its political leadership and the official interpretation of Asian values is very powerful at this time.

Still, the recognition of heterogeneity in the traditions of Asia does not settle the issue of the presence or the absence of a commitment to individual freedom and political liberty in Asian culture. The traditions extant in Asia differ among themselves, but they may share some common characteristics. It has been asserted, for example, that the treatment of elderly members of the family (say, aged parents) is more supportive in Asian countries than in the West. It is possible to argue about this claim, but there would be nothing very peculiar if some similarities of this kind or other kinds were to obtain across the diverse cultures of Asia. Diversities need not apply to every field. The question that has to be asked, rather, is whether Asian countries share the common feature of being skeptical of freedom and liberty, while emphasizing order and discipline. The advocates of Asian particularism allow internal heterogeneity within Asia, but in the context of a shared mistrust of the claims of political liberalism.

Authoritarian lines of reasoning often receive indirect backing from certain strains of thought in the West itself. There is clearly a tendency in America and Europe to assume, if only implicitly, the primacy of political freedom and democracy as a fundamental and ancient feature of Western culture one not to be easily found in Asia. There is a contrast, it is alleged, between the authoritarianism implicit in, say, Confucianism and the respect for liberty and autonomy allegedly deeply rooted in Western liberal culture. Western promoters of personal and political freedom in the non-Western world often see such an analysis as a necessary preliminary to bringing Western values to Asia and Africa.

In all this, there is a substantial tendency to extrapolate backwards from the present. Values that the European enlightenment and other relatively recent developments have made widespread cannot really be seen as part of the Western heritage as it was experienced over millennia. In answer to the question, "at what date, in what circumstances, the notion of individual liberty ... first became explicit in the West," Isaiah Berlin has noted: "I have found no convincing evidence of any clear formulation of it in the ancient world." This view has been disputed by Orlando Patterson, among others. He points to particular features in Western culture, particularly in Greece and Rome, and in the tradition of Christianity, which indicate the presence of selective championing of individual liberty.

The question that does not get adequately answered it is scarcely even asked is whether similar elements are absent in other cultures. Berlin's thesis concerns the notion of individual freedom as we now understand it, and the absence of "any clear formulation" of this can certainly co-exist with the advocacy of selected components of the comprehensive notion that makes up the contemporary idea of individual liberty. Such components are found in the Greco-Roman world and in the world of Jewish and Christian thought. But such an acknowledgment has to be followed up by examining whether these components

are absent elsewhere—that is, in non-Western cultures. We have to search for the parts rather than the whole, in the West and in Asia and elsewhere.

To illustrate this point, consider the idea that personal freedom for all is important for a good society. This claim can be seen as being composed of two distinct elements: (1) the value of personal freedom: that personal freedom is important and should be guaranteed for those who "matter" in a good society; and (2) the equality of freedom: that everyone matters, and personal freedom should be guaranteed, on a shared basis, for all. Aristotle wrote much in support of the former proposition, but in his exclusion of women and slaves he did little to defend the latter. Indeed, the championing of equality in this form is of quite recent origin. Even in a society stratified according to class and caste, freedom could be valued for the privileged—such as the Mandarins and the Brahmins—in much the same way that freedom was valued for non-slave men in corresponding Greek conceptions of a good society.

Or consider another useful distinction, between (1) the value of toleration: that there must be toleration of diverse beliefs, commitments and actions of different people; and (2) the equality of tolerance: that the toleration that is offered to some must be reasonably offered to all (except when tolerance of some will lead to intolerance for others). Again, arguments for some tolerance can be seen plentifully in earlier Western writings, without being supplemented by arguments for universal tolerance. The roots of modern democratic and liberal ideas can be sought in terms of constitutive elements, rather than as a whole.

In the terms of such an analysis, the question has to be asked whether these constitutive components can be found in Asian writings in the way they can be found in Western thought. The presence of these components must not be confused with the absence of the opposite, that is, with the presence of ideas and doctrines that clearly do not emphasize freedom and tolerance. The championing of order and discipline can be found in Western classics as well. Indeed, it is by no means clear to me that Confucius is more authoritarian than, say, Plato or Augustine. The real issue is not whether these non-freedom perspectives are present in Asian traditions, but whether the freedom-oriented perspectives are absent from them.

This is where the diversity of Asian value systems becomes quite central. An obvious example is the role of Buddhism as a form of thought. In Buddhist tradition, great importance is attached to freedom, and the traditions of earlier Indian thinking to which Buddhist thoughts relate allow much room for volition and free choice. Nobility of conduct has to be achieved in freedom, and even the ideas of liberation (such as moksha) include this feature. The presence of these elements in Buddhist thought does not obliterate the importance of the discipline emphasized by Confucianism, but it would be a mistake to take Confucianism to be the only tradition in Asia—or in China. Since so much of the contemporary authoritarian interpretation of Asian values concentrates on Confucianism, this diversity is particularly worth emphasizing.

Indeed, the reading of Confucianism that is now standard among authoritarian champions of Asian values does less than justice to Confucius's own teachings, to which Simon Leys has recently drawn attention. Confucius did not recommend blind allegiance to the state. When Zilu asks him "how to serve a prince," Confucius replies: "Tell him the truth even if it offends him." The censors in Singapore or Beijing would take a very different view. Confucius is not averse to practical caution and tact, but he does not forgo the recommendation to oppose a bad government. "When the [good] way prevails in the state, speak boldly and act boldly. When the state has lost the way, act boldly and speak softly."

Indeed, Confucius clearly points to the fact that the two pillars of the imagined edifice of Asian values, loyalty to family and obedience to the state, can be severely in conflict with each other. The Governor of She told Confucius, "Among my people, there is a man of unbending integrity: when his father stole a sheep, he denounced him." To this, Confucius replied: "Among my people, men of integrity do things

differently: a father covers up for his son, a son covers up for his father-and there is integrity in what they do."

Elias Canetti observed that, in understanding the teachings of Confucius, we have to examine not only what he says, but what he does not say. The subtlety involved in what is often called "the silence of Confucius" seems to have escaped his austere modern interpreters, who tend to assume that what is not explicitly supported must be implicitly forbidden. It is not my contention that Confucius was a democrat, or a great champion of freedom and dissent. Yet there is certainly good reason to question the monolithic image of an authoritarian Confucius that is championed by the contemporary advocates of Asian values.

### III.

If we turn our attention from China to the Indian subcontinent, we are in no danger of running into a hard-to-interpret silence. It is difficult to out-do the Indian traditions in arguing endlessly and elaborately. India not only has the largest religious literature in the world, it also has the largest volume of atheistic and materialistic writings among the ancient civilizations. The Indian epic Mahabharata, which is often compared to the Iliad or the Odyssey, is in fact seven times as long as the Iliad and the Odyssey put together. In a well-known Bengali poem written in the nineteenth century by the religious and social leader Ram Mohan Ray, the horror of death is described thus: "Just imagine how terrible it will be on the day you die, / Others will go on speaking, but you will not be able to respond."

This fondness for disputation, for discussing things at leisure and at length, is itself somewhat in tension with the order and discipline championed in allegedly Asian values. But the content of what has been written also displays a variety of views on freedom, tolerance, and equality. In many ways, the most interesting articulation of the need for tolerance on an egalitarian basis can be found in the writings of the emperor Ashoka in the third century B.C. Ashoka commanded a larger Indian empire than any other Indian king (including the Moghuls, and even the Raj, if we omit the native states that the British let be). He turned his attention to public ethics and enlightened politics after being horrified by the carnage that he witnessed in his own victorious battle against the king of Kalinga, in what is now Orissa.

The emperor converted to Buddhism. He helped to make it a world religion by sending emissaries abroad with the Buddhist message to East and West, and he covered the country with stone inscriptions describing forms of good life and the nature of good government. The inscriptions give a special importance to tolerance of diversity. The edict (now numbered XII) at Erragudi, for example, puts the issue thus: ... a man must not do reverence to his own sect or disparage that of another man without reason. Depreciation should be for specific reason only, because the sects of other people all deserve reverence for one reason or another.

By thus acting, a man exalts his own sect, and at the same time does service to the sects of other people. By acting contrariwise, a man hurts his own sect, and does disservice to the sects of other people. For he who does reverence to his own sect while disparaging the sects of others wholly from attachment to his own, with intent to enhance the splendour of his own sect, in reality by such conduct inflicts the severest injury on his own sect.

The importance of tolerance is emphasized in these edicts from the third century B.C.-their importance as public policy by the government and as advice for the behavior of citizens toward each other.

About the domain and the jurisdiction of tolerance, Ashoka was a universalist. He demanded this for all, including those whom he described as "forest people," the tribal population living in pre-agricultural economic formations. Condemning his own conduct before his conversion, Ashoka notes that in the war in Kalinga "men and animals numbering one hundred and fifty thousands were carried away [captive]

from that [defeated] kingdom." He goes on to state that the slaughter or the taking of prisoners "of even a hundredth or thousandth part of all those people who were slain or died or were carried away [captive] at that time in Kalinga is now considered very deplorable" by him. Indeed, he proceeds to assert that now he believes that "even if [a person] should wrong him, that [offense] would be forgiven if it is possible to forgive it." The object of his government is described as "non-injury, restraint, impartiality, and mild behavior" applied "to all creatures."

Ashoka's championing of egalitarianism and universal tolerance may appear un-Asian to some commentators, but his views are firmly rooted in lines of analysis already in vogue in intellectual Buddhist circles in India in the preceding centuries. In this context, however, it is interesting to look at another author whose treatise on governance and political economy was also profoundly influential. I refer to Kautilya, the author of Arthashastra, which can be translated as "economic science," though it is at least as much concerned with practical politics as with economics. Kautilya was a contemporary of Aristotle. He lived in the fourth century B.C., and worked as a senior minister of emperor Chandragupta Maurya, Ashoka's grandfather, who had established the large Maurya empire across the subcontinent.

Kautilya's writings are often cited as proof that freedom and tolerance were not valued in the Indian classical tradition. There are two aspects of the impressively detailed account of economics and politics to be found in Arthashastra that tend to suggest the view that there is no support here for a liberal democracy. First, Kautilya is a consequentialist of quite a narrow kind. While the objectives of promoting the happiness of the subjects and the order in the kingdom are strongly backed up by detailed policy advice, the king is seen as a benevolent autocrat, whose power, albeit to do good, is to be maximized through proper organization. Thus, Arthashastra presents ideas and suggestions on such practical subjects as famine prevention and administrative effectiveness that remain relevant even today—more than 2,000 years later—and at the same time it advises the king about how to get his way, if necessary through the violation of the freedom of his adversaries.

Second, Kautilya seems to attach little importance to political or economic equality, and his vision of the good society is strongly stratified according to lines of class and caste. Even though his objective of promoting happiness applies to all, his other objectives clearly have an inegalitarian form and content. There is an obligation to provide the less fortunate members of the society the support that they need for escaping misery and enjoying life—Kautilya specifically identifies as the duty of the king to "provide the orphans, the aged, the infirm, the afflicted, and the helpless with maintenance," along with providing "subsistence to helpless women when they are carrying and also to the [newborn] children they give birth to"; but this obligation is very far from valuing the freedom of these people to decide how they wish to live. The tolerance of heterodoxy is not to be found here. Indeed, there is very little tolerance in Kautilya, except tolerance for the upper sections of the community.

What, then, do we conclude from this? Certainly Kautilya is no democrat, no egalitarian, no general promoter of everyone's freedom. And yet, when it comes to the characterization of what the most favored people—the upper classes—should get, freedom figures quite prominently. The denial of personal liberty of the upper classes (the so-called "Arya") is seen as unacceptable. Indeed, regular penalties, some of them heavy, are specified for the taking of such adults or children in indenture even though the slavery of the existing slaves is seen as perfectly acceptable. To be sure, we do not find in Kautilya anything like Aristotle's clear articulation of the importance of free exercise of capability. But the focus on freedom is clear enough in Kautilya as far as the upper classes are concerned. It contrasts with the governmental duties to the lower orders, which take the paternalistic form of state assistance for the avoidance of acute deprivation and misery. Still, insofar as a view of the good life emerges in all this, it is an ideal that is entirely consistent with a freedom-valuing ethical system. Its domain is limited, to be sure; but this is not wildly different from the Greek concern with free men as opposed to slaves or women.

I have been discussing in some detail the political ideas and practical reason presented by two forceful, but very different, expositions in India respectively in the fourth and third centuries B.C., because their ideas have influenced later Indian writings. I do not want to give the impression that all Indian political commentators took lines of approach similar to Ashoka's or Kautilya's. Quite the contrary. There are many positions, before and after Kautilya and Ashoka, that contradict their respective claims, just as there are others that are more in line with Ashoka or Kautilya.

The importance of tolerance, even the need for its universality, is eloquently expressed in different media: in Shudraka's drama, in Akbar's political pronouncements, and in Kabir's poetry, to name just a few examples. The presence of these contributions does not entail the absence of opposite arguments and recommendations. The point, rather, is that the heterogeneity of Indian traditions contains a variety of views and reasonings, and they include, in different ways, arguments in favor of tolerance, of freedom, and even (in the case of Ashoka) of equality at a very basic level.

Among the powerful expositors and practitioners of tolerance of diversity in India, of course, we must count the great Moghul emperor Akbar, who reigned between 1556 and 1605. Again, we are not dealing here with a democrat. He was, instead, a powerful king who emphasized the acceptability of diverse forms of social and religious behavior, and who accepted human rights of various kinds, including freedom of worship and religious practice, that would not have been so easily tolerated in parts of Europe in Akbar's time.

Consider an example. As the year 1000 in the Muslim Hijra calendar was reached in 1591-92, there was excitement about it in Delhi and Agra (not unlike what is happening now, as the Christian year 2000 approaches). Akbar issued various enactments at this juncture of history, and these focused inter alia on religious tolerance, including the following:

No man should be interfered with on account of religion, and anyone [is] to be allowed to go over to a religion he pleased. If a Hindu, when a child or otherwise, had been made a Muslim against his will, he is to be allowed, if he pleased, to go back to the religion of his fathers.

Again, the domain of tolerance, while neutral with respect to religion, was not universal in other respects—with respect to gender equality, or to equality between younger and older people. Akbar's enactment went on to argue for the forcible repatriation of a young Hindu woman to her father's family if she had abandoned it in pursuit of a Muslim lover. In the choice between supporting the young lovers and the young woman's Hindu father, old Akbar's sympathies are entirely with the father. Tolerance and equality at one level are combined with intolerance and inequality at another level. And yet the extent of general tolerance on matters of belief and practice is quite remarkable. It may not be irrelevant to note, especially in the light of the hard sell of "Western liberalism," that while Akbar was making these pronouncements on religious tolerance, the Inquisition was in full throttle in Europe.

#### IV.

It is important to recognize that many of these historical leaders in Asia not only emphasized the importance of freedom and tolerance, they also had clear theories as to why this is the appropriate thing to do. This would apply very strongly to Ashoka and Akbar. Since the Islamic tradition is sometimes seen as being monolithic, this is particularly important to emphasize in the case of Akbar. Akbar was a Muslim emperor who was deeply interested in Hindu philosophy and culture, and he also took much interest in the beliefs and practices of other religions, including Christianity, Jainism and the Parsee faith. In fact, he also attempted to establish something of a synthetic religion for India, the Din Ilahi, drawing on the different faiths in the country.

There is an interesting contrast here between Ashoka's and Akbar's forms of religious tolerance. Both stood for religious tolerance by the state, and both argued for tolerance as a virtue to be practiced by all. But Ashoka combined this with his own Buddhist pursuits (and tried to spread its "enlightenment" at home and abroad), while Akbar tried to "combine" the distinct religions of India, incorporating the "good points" of different religions. Akbar's court was filled with Hindu as well as Muslim intellectuals, artists, and musicians, and he tried in every way to be nonsectarian and fair in the treatment of his subjects.

It is also important to note that Akbar was not unique among the Moghul emperors in being tolerant. In many ways, the later Moghul emperor, the very intolerant Aurangzeb, who violated many of what we would now call the human rights of Hindus, was something of an exception to the Moghul rule. The exponents of Hindu politics in contemporary India often try to deny the tolerant nature of much of Moghul rule, but this tolerance was handsomely acknowledged by Hindu leaders of an earlier vintage. Sri Aurobindo, for example, who established the famous ashram in Pondicherry, specifically identified this aspect of the Moghul rule: "[T]he Mussulman domination ceased very rapidly to be a foreign rule.... The Moghul empire was a great and magnificent construction and an immense amount of political genius and talent was employed in its creation and maintenance. It was splendid, powerful and beneficent and, it may be added, in spite of Aurangzeb's fanatical zeal, infinitely more liberal and tolerant in religion than any medieval or contemporary European kingdom or empire."

And, even in the case of Aurangzeb, it is useful to consider him not in isolation, but in his familial setting. For none of his immediate family seemed to have shared Aurangzeb's intolerance. Dara Shikoh, his elder brother, was much involved with Hindu philosophy and, with the help of some scholars, he prepared a Persian translation of some of the Upanishads, the ancient texts dating from about the eighth century B.C. In fact, Dara had much stronger claims to the Moghul throne than Aurangzeb, since he was the eldest and the favorite son of his father, the emperor Shah Jahan. Aurangzeb fought and killed his brother Dara, and imprisoned his father, Shah Jahan, for the rest of his life (leaving him, the builder of the Taj Mahal, to gaze at his creation in captivity).

Aurangzeb's son, also called Akbar, rebelled against his father in 1681 and joined hands in this enterprise with the Hindu kingdoms in Rajasthan and later the Marathas. (Akbar's rebellion was ultimately crushed by Aurangzeb.) While fighting from Rajasthan, Akbar wrote to his father, protesting his intolerance and his vilification of his Hindu friends. Indeed, the issue of the tolerance of differences was a subject of considerable discussion among the feuding parties. The father of the Maratha king, Raja Sambhaji, whom the young Akbar had joined, was none other than Shivaji, whom the present-day Hindu political activists treat as a super-hero, and after whom the intolerant Hindu party Shiv Sena is named.

Shivaji took quite a tolerant view of religious differences. As the Moghul historian Khafi Khan, no admirer of Shivaji in other respects, reports: "[Shivaji] made it a rule that wherever his followers were plundering, they should do no harm to the mosques, the book of God, or the women of anyone. Whenever a copy of the sacred Quran came into his hands, he treated it with respect, and gave it to some of his Mussulman followers." A very interesting letter to Aurangzeb on the subject of tolerance is attributed to Shivaji by some historians (such as Sir Jadunath Sarkar, the author of the classic *Shivaji and His Times*, published in 1919), though there are some doubts about this attribution. No matter who among Aurangzeb's Hindu contemporaries wrote this letter, the ideas in it are interesting. The text contrasts Aurangzeb's intolerance with the liberal policies of earlier Moghuls (Akbar, Jahangir, Shah Jahan), and then says: "If Your Majesty places any faith in those books by distinction called divine, you will there be instructed that God is the God of all mankind, not the God of Muslims alone. The Pagan and the Muslim are equally in His presence.... In fine, the tribute you demand from the Hindus is repugnant to justice."

The subject of tolerance was much discussed by many writers during this period of confrontation between

the religious traditions and their associated politics. One of the earliest writers on this subject was the eleventh century Iranian writer Alberuni, who came to India with the invading army of Mahmood of Ghazni and recorded his revulsion at the atrocities committed by the invaders. He proceeded to study Indian society, culture, religion, and ideas (his translations of Indian mathematical and astronomical treatises were quite influential in the Arab world, which in turn was deeply influential on Western mathematics), and he also wrote on the subject of the intolerance of the unfamiliar.

... in all manners and usages, [the Hindus] differ from us to such a degree as to frighten their children with us, with our dress, and our ways and customs, and as to declare us to be devil's breed, and our doings as the very opposite of all that is good and proper. By the bye, we must confess, in order to be just, that a similar depreciation of foreigners not only prevails among us and the Hindus, but is common to all nations towards each other.

The point of discussing all this now is to demonstrate the presence of conscious theorizing about tolerance and freedom in substantial and important parts of the Asian traditions. We could consider many more illustrations of this phenomenon from writings in early Arabic, Chinese, Indian and other cultures. Again, the championing of democracy and political freedom in the modern sense cannot be found in the pre-enlightenment tradition in any part of the world, West or East. What we have to investigate, instead, are the constituents, the components, of this compound idea. It is the powerful presence of some of these elements-in non-Western as well as Western societies-that I have been emphasizing. It is hard to make sense of the view that the basic ideas underlying freedom and rights in a tolerant society are "Western" notions, and somehow alien to Asia, though that view has been championed by Asian authoritarians and Western chauvinists.

V.

I would like to conclude with a rather different issue, which is sometimes linked to the debate about the nature and the reach of Asian values. The championing of Asian values is often associated with the need to resist Western hegemony. The linkage of the two issues, which has increasingly occurred in recent years, uses the political force of anticolonialism to buttress the assault on civil and political rights in post-colonial Asia.

This linkage, though quite artificial, can be rhetorically quite effective. Thus Lee Kuan Yew has emphasized the special nature of Asian values, and has made powerful use of the general case for resisting Western hegemony to bolster the argument for Asian particularism. The rhetoric has extended to the apparently defiant declaration that Singapore is "not a client state of America." This fact is certainly undeniable, and it is an excellent reason for cheer, but the question that has to be asked is what this has to do with the issue of human rights and political liberties in Singapore, or any other country in Asia.

The people whose political and other rights are involved in this debate are not citizens of the West, but of Asian countries. The fact that individual liberty may have been championed in Western writings, and even by some Western political leaders, can scarcely compromise the claim to liberty that people in Asia may otherwise possess. As a matter of fact, one may grumble, with reason, that the political leaders of Western countries take far too little interest in issues of freedom in the rest of the world. There is plenty of evidence that the Western governments have tended to give priority to the interests of their own citizens engaged in commerce with the Asian countries and to the pressures generated by business groups to be on good terms with the ruling governments in Asia. It is not that there has been more bark than bite; there has been very little bark, too. What Mao once described as a "paper tiger" looks increasingly like a paper mouse.

But even if this were not the case, and even if it were true that Western governments try to promote political and civil rights in Asia, how can that possibly compromise the status of the rights of Asians? In this context, the idea of "human rights" has to be properly understood. In the most general form, the notion of human rights builds on our shared humanity. These rights are not derived from citizenship in any country, or membership in any nation. They are taken as entitlements of every human being. These rights differ, therefore, from constitutionally created rights guaranteed for specified people (such as American citizens or French nationals). The human right of a person not to be tortured is affirmed independently of the country of which this person is a citizen, and also irrespective of what the government of that country-or any other country-wants to do. Of course, a government can dispute a person's legal right not to be tortured, but that will not amount to disputing what must be seen as the person's human right not to be tortured.

Since the conception of human rights transcends local legislation and the citizenship of the individual, the support for human rights can come from anyone-whether or not she is a citizen of the same country as the individual whose rights are threatened. A foreigner does not need the permission of a repressive government to try to help a person whose liberties are being violated. Indeed, insofar as human rights are seen as rights that any person has as a human being (and not as a citizen of any particular country), the reach of the corresponding duties can also include any human being (irrespective of citizenship).

This basic recognition does not suggest, of course, that everyone must intervene constantly in protecting and helping others. That may be both ineffective and unsettling. There is no escape from the need to employ practical reason in this field, any more than in any other field of human action. Ubiquitous interventionism is not particularly fruitful or attractive within a given nation, nor is it across national boundaries. There is no obligation to roam the four corners of the earth in search of liberties to protect. My claim is only that the barriers of nationality and citizenship do not preclude people from taking legitimate interest in the rights of others and even from assuming some duties related to them. The moral and political examination that is central to determining how one should act applies across national boundaries, and not merely within them.

To conclude, the so-called Asian values that are invoked to justify authoritarianism are not especially Asian in any significant sense. Nor is it easy to see how they could be made, by the mere force of rhetoric, into an Asian cause against the West. The people whose rights are being disputed are Asians, and, no matter what the West's guilt may be (there are many skeletons in many closets throughout the world), the rights of Asians can scarcely be compromised on those grounds. The case for liberty and political rights turns ultimately on their basic importance and on their instrumental role. And this case is as strong in Asia as it is elsewhere.

There is a great deal that we can learn from studies of values in Asia and Europe, but they do not support or sustain the thesis of a grand dichotomy (or a "clash of civilizations"). Our ideas of political and personal rights have taken their particular form relatively recently, and it is hard to see them as "traditional" commitments of Western cultures. There are important antecedents of those commitments, but those antecedents can be found plentifully in Asian cultures as well as Western cultures.

The recognition of diversity within different cultures is extremely important in the contemporary world, since we are constantly bombarded by over simple generalizations about "Western civilization," "Asian values," "African cultures," and so on. These unfounded readings of history and civilization are not only intellectually shallow, they also add to the divisiveness of the world in which we live. The authoritarian readings of Asian values that are increasingly championed in some quarters do not survive scrutiny. And the grand dichotomy between Asian values and European values adds little to our understanding, and much to the confounding of the normative basis of freedom and democracy.

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