Romila Thapar, Professor Emeritus in Ancient History, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, delivering the Second Rukmini Devi Memorial Lecture, organised by Kalakshetra Foundation, Chennai, on Dec. 20, 2014. Photo: M. Karunakarann

*The Second Rukmini Devi Memorial Lecture delivered by **Romila Thapar**, Emeritus Professor in Ancient History, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, on Dec. 20, 2014, at Kalakshetra Foundation, Chennai.*

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It is indeed an honour for me to have been invited to give this lecture, and I greatly appreciate it. Kalakshetra has been something of a legend from the time it was founded by Rukmini Devi and subsequently for the work that it

sustains. The respect for the institution grows both for the attention it gives to what we regard as our heritage and for helping in the construction of an on-going heritage. Since both history and heritage conduct a dialogue between the past and the present, we have much to talk about.

'Heritage' means that which is inherited. It is used for many things – from genes to geometrical patterns, from property to culture. It was once assumed that heritage is what has been handed down to us by our ancestors, neatly packaged, which we pass on to our descendants, as is implicit in the term, *parampara*. We sometimes call it tradition. This is what goes into the making of our cultures and our civilization. Heritage is thought of as static whereas tradition is said to mould our way of life. We prefer to think that these have been passed down from generation to generation, relatively untouched. But the more we seek to understand them, the more we realize that each generation changes the contents, sometimes marginally and sometimes substantially.

More recently it has been argued that tradition is actually the inter-play, of what we believe existed in the past, combined with our aspirations of the present. In exploring this inter-play and the new ideas it generates, our concept of heritage takes shape, or can even be invented to serve the needs of the present. Rituals and ceremonies, thought of as ancient, are often on investigation found to be recently invented. The past therefore can even be invented in order to legitimize our actions. Historians now investigate what we call, the invention of tradition.

The on-going discussion of what constitutes heritage or tradition leads to analyzing concepts such as culture and civilization. There is no easy definition of these and there have been intense arguments about their meaning especially at times when existing norms are questioned. The European Enlightenment in the seventeenth century resulted from striking historical changes and became a time when new questions were asked. Basic concepts needed fresh exploration. In India too, we are experiencing similar change and the constituents of heritage need to be examined afresh.

Heritage can be of two kinds. One is natural heritage that came from the physical creation of the earth. This is the heritage that we are currently busy depleting because we cannot control our greed for the wealth that comes from destroying natural resources. But by linking environment to history, this heritage is now being seen as essential to the other one.

The other heritage is the one that was cultivated and created by human effort. What we refer to as *sanskriti* and *shrishti* also involve creating and constructing and interestingly is often either juxtaposed with or contrasted with *prakriti*, that which is natural. This is what goes into the making of what we call 'cultural heritage'. It includes objects and ideas that determine our pattern of life. They define our concepts of culture and civilization. This heritage is the subject of my talk. I shall try and explain how the historical assumptions that went into the making of these concepts have changed. Consequently, historians now see heritage not so much as something inherent and inexplicable, but as constructed and changeable.

Let me begin by defining the terms that I am using. Culture was once linked to the achievements of a society listed as in literature, the visual and performing arts, architecture, philosophy, and in extending the frontiers of knowledge – of what we would call the life of the mind. In pre-modern times these activities were associated with the elite. So it was viewed as high culture to differentiate it from popular forms. But this was too narrow an assessment. The essentials of these activities come from a wider social range. The definition of culture needed to reflect this range. So culture came to mean both the pattern of life of all segments of a society, and the forms in which they expressed their ideas.

Culture then can refer to something as simple as the pattern of life of hunter-gatherers, pastoral people, farmers or urban dwellers. Out of this simplicity rise the complexities of what people make and do both to render life more meaningful and to understand the world and the cosmos within which they live. But then it was found that cultures change and are both vulnerable and porous. Patterns have changed often enough in history. So we speak of successive cultures registering these changes.

The past therefore does not conform to a single culture as some would like to believe but is made up of multiple cultures. The cultures of the elite were dominant, as elite cultures have been everywhere. These were linked to the pattern of life of royalty, the upper castes, and those that controlled power and economic resources. But the cultures of the rest of society sustained the elite culture and therefore were essential.

A number of questions arise. Were they all integrated as we assume when we paint rosy pictures of the past, or were they segregated by caste, language and religion. Are we doing something different now in our attempt to integrate them? The attempt seems restricted to the slogan of 'unity in diversity'? I call it a slogan because we have never defined as far as cultures go, what constitutes unity or how far we extend the diversity in terms of culture. Are we instead, trying to indirectly justify the segregation through using colonial categories such as majority and minority communities determined by religion? And when we look back at the cultures of the past do we confine ourselves to the easily recognizable dominant cultures alone or do we attempt to search for the ways of life of the rest of society?

There was additionally as there still is, a tension between change and permanence. A seeming continuity when analyzed can point to change. For example, it is said that the four-fold system of caste society with its established hierarchy, has been prevalent in the sub-continent for many centuries. Yet the hierarchy differs quite noticeably in various regions. The dominant caste is not always the same. In the Punjab it was *khatri* traders, whereas in some other regions it was the *brahmana*, or it was rulers claiming *kshatriya* status. And in some areas the *varna* stratification is absent. Such differences invariably affect the form of the local culture.

The presence of dominant and subordinate groups is characteristic of all societies. Who belongs to them can change over time, as do the cultures that they patronize. A single dominant pattern is neither uniform nor eternal. Until recent times, the upper levels of society were in a better position to leave records and markers of their culture. Reading between the lines has been one way of trying to ferret out the culture of those of lesser status who have not left records. Archaeology provides some information on this. Even the culture of the elite can be better understood if we can follow its interactions with the rest of society, rather than see it isolated.

Cultures, as we know, can also change because of external factors. The effect of ecological change in the past is now being noticed. Deforestation, a changing river course, climate change, all happened in the past. These are now among possible explanations for the decline of the Indus cities. Technological innovations as also adjusting to social and economic changes are often required in such situations.

Contact with new people through trade or in-coming migration, or the political dynamics of conquest, introduces new patterns of living. Conquest is more prominent as a new political pattern. Trade and migration are defining features because they affect larger numbers of people across bigger areas, yet we always give greater prominence to invasions. This is illustrated by what happened at the turn of the Christian era in the Northwest of India with the coming of Greco-Bactrian Hellenistic forms that evolved into the influential Gandhara art.

The art highlighted the aesthetic differences between Buddhist art in this region and in Mathura and Central India as well as further south, as in Amaravati. These differences were sharply debated among art-historians during the last couple of centuries, in defining the Indian aesthetic. Were Indian artistic forms, resulting from contact with Hellenistic forms, superior to those not influenced by the Hellenistic? Nineteenth century art historians did not think to ask the craftsmen still sculpting icons and friezes, to give their reactions to these earlier forms. The art under discussion all came from guilds of artisans. Unlike the art, the languages of the region remained distinct. Both Greek and Prakrit were spoken.

In the same region, a thousand years later came the arrival of Turkish, Afghan and Persian migrants from Central and Western Asia. We dismiss this experience as one of invasions and conquest, and leave it at that. But the flip side of invasions is that they enhance trade connections and attract migrants. The impact of these can sometimes redefine the culture of a region to a greater degree than invasion alone. This time round it was not the style of sculpture that changed, but language intertwined with religious belief.

I am not referring to the introduction of formal Islam but to the more creative side of the infusion – the Sufis and their influence on local languages. New ideas entered the indigenous languages requiring the induction of new words, or else existing words were given a new meaning. With a large popular usage of these ideas, the languages themselves took a new form. A new word for God – *rab* – entered the Punjabi language. Derived from Arabic it had common currency among all religions using Punjabi. Poets and teachers of the likes of Guru Nanak, Bulleh Shah, Waris Shah and others, composed their poetry not in Persian or Sanskrit but in this commonly spoken language, creating a new cultural idiom. This would extend to other cultural aspects as language always does.

All languages change. Traces of change are carried in grammar and style with each fresh generation that uses the language, introducing new forms of expression. The grammarian Panini makes a distinction between the Sanskrit of the *Vedas*, and the more commonly used somewhat later Sanskrit. Changes in the language is one way in which we can date texts that have been composed over long periods of time. For example, the text of the *Arthasastra* as we have it now took a few centuries to put together. It registers recognizable linguistic differences between the earlier segments and those added later. Where a language is in contact with other languages there is bound to be mutual borrowing. The nature of what is borrowed, is the clue to recovering the relationship between the speakers of the languages. Thus, it has been argued that one of the words for the plough, *langala*, in Vedic Sanskrit is of Dravidian origin. This raises a host of interesting questions about one aspect of the relationship between the speakers of the two languages, Indo-Aryan and Dravidian.

Migrants come in various ways. One is that of pastoral groups searching for pasture-lands who establish themselves and their annual circuit and interact with the settled farmers in a region. They are carriers of oral traditions as is evident in the folk music and epics of pastoral communities. Migrant communities of traders settle in new places for a variety of reasons. Establishing trade routes brings in settlements of traders that foster new communities and create new cultural patterns. This has happened repeatedly in India, with the coming of peoples from Central and West Asia. They settled, inter-married locally and became a part of the Indian population. These communities so established identified themselves with the local culture and this resulted in new patterns. Caste/*jati* names, such as Huna and Durrani, among many others point to these origins.

The coming of the British was however, different. They did not settle in India. Their control was through re-organizing the economy of India to enable them to drain its wealth and take it back to Britain. Nevertheless they were curious about the Indian past and applied modern methods to advancing our knowledge of this past. This information contributed to the construction of heritage.

Dominant cultures backed by wealth leave the maximum traces. They have texts, describing their ideas, icons in stone and metal, and their architectural forms indicate their religious and social preferences. Subordinate groups in society leave few such traces. They do not have the wealth to build monumental temples and mosques or to house manuscripts in libraries. Those at the lower end of the social ranking, provide the wherewithal for the wealth, but are not participants in elite culture, as for example they have been excluded from places of worship. Their culture has been different and much of it from the past has to be inferred from how they are viewed by the elite. This information inevitably carries the perspective of the author, not always free of bias. But we should recognize that the living patterns of the wealthy are ultimately dependent on the aesthetics and the expertise of those who make the artifacts and work the resources.

Culture that is said to constitute heritage is not static, whether object or idea, although it is often treated as such by us in the present. In claiming an ancestry for cultural items, we are inducting the past into the present and thereby giving it continuity. We should perhaps investigate what has been retained, replaced or discarded in this believed-to-be unchanging continuity.

Claiming ancestry is also a way of acquiring legitimacy from the past. Such a claim can be a stamp of desired status and thus a demonstration of social success, or it can be an attempt to deny questioning an identity - one that may be acceptable to some but questioned by others. By insisting on a particular ancestry for a cultural item we may be denying its other possible ancestry. There could be many reasons for this if it is deliberate. Possibly its other ancestry comes from sources that earlier were quite acceptable but have now become less so. But recognizing the entire ancestry may be crucial to understanding the cultural form. By not recognizing it we are either distorting or inventing a tradition.

To take an example that is much discussed. It is generally agreed that some among the forms of performing arts that we treat as Classical are traced back to the *devadasi* performances, together with ideas derived from textual sources. Is it enough to know the technicalities of the form or should we not also relate it to the context. In this case it was women choosing or being chosen for a profession that was contrary to the norms of the caste code. They created their own social nucleus distinct from the mainstream. Many other groups of women asserted their autonomy but in a entirely different way when they became Buddhist and Jaina nuns. Did this social code give them the flexibility of experimenting with their professional expertise? How did they relate to the bigger civilizational context through both their performance and their social culture?

The concept of civilization has now become complex. The earlier simplistic definition of its conforming to an elite culture is now giving way to the idea that it encompasses many cultures. This change comes from the new ways in which historical connections of the past are being viewed.

In the seventeenth century, the core of a civilization was a Classical period from the past. 'Classical' referred to a style, seen as the high-point in a culture, chosen from a particular historical period. It was the exemplary norm, typifying excellence and against which successors were measured. There was a suggestion of the static in this description and it was not expected to change. All societies with a long history had to have a Classical Age that was viewed as the cultural and intellectual pivot.

The concept of civilization had four components, each of which are now being questioned – territory, language, religion and the classical. Each civilization had a demarcated territory. This was feasible when cartography became common and boundaries of territories could be mapped. Prior to that frontier zones between states were marked

by natural features, such as rivers, mountains, forests, deserts etc. These were areas where people came and went so cultures were mixed or overlapped.

The borderland of Northwestern India functioned as a frontier zone for centuries. It hosted peoples from Afghanistan, Central Asia, Iran, and India. Nodal points of trade and of advancing religions were located there and it also provided spring-boards for invasions in various directions. Buddhist monks travelled with traders and established important monasteries in Afghanistan and Uzbekistan and through the Gobi Desert to China. A few centuries later these same routes were taken by Sufi orders coming from Western and Central Asia.

For the east coast of India, the sea was a frontier. This was traversed through close links with Southeast Asia and southern China, as is evident from the impressive monuments still standing. On the other side the long coast of western India had its own history of large settlements of Arab traders that inter-married and founded new communities of Indo-Arab cultures – the Bhoras, Khojas, Navayats, and Mapillas. The Northern frontier zones were land-based, and in communication with cultures across the Eurasian land-mass. The peninsula experienced a different factor, the geographically extensive networks of the Indian Ocean, projecting as it did into the centre-point of the Ocean. These provided a different perspective that we now have to induct into our narrative of Indian civilization.

Where then should we mark the territorial boundary of Indian civilization? We have defined it from the perspective of the Ganges heartland, the perspective from which histories were written until recently. But civilization when seen from the rim, reflects other more distant but significant contacts. Cartographic boundaries enclose and isolate lands, frontier zones extend them and open them up. The concept of civilization has become territorially open-ended.

We apply labels of indigenous or foreign to people of past times. But the boundaries of British India, that defined the concept of Indian civilization according to colonial writers, were meaningless for pre-colonial times. Foreignness in the past was assigned by cultural features – language, custom, ritual – and not by boundary lines. The term *mleccha*, can mean alien or out-of-caste. There were areas of what were regarded as *mleccha* culture even within the sub-continent as for example, the communities of forest-dwellers, marginalized in Sanskrit texts and described as *raksasas*. They were seen as alien. So too were the Yavanas and Turushkas initially. But such aliens and their culture were gradually assimilated.

Looking east the rulers of Cambodia built Angkor Wat with its magnificent sculptured panels depicting the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* in Khmer style; or the rulers of Java built Borobudur as a gigantic *stupa* to honour Buddhism. Did they think of themselves as patronizing a foreign culture?

A second component of civilization was that it should have a single language of culture and communication. It was said to be Greek in Europe, Arabic in West Asia, and Sanskrit in India. This meant that the texts written in this language had priority and were treated as the norm encapsulating the entire body of local cultures. To research the past using the texts largely of one language in a multi-lingual area, is historically untenable.

The earliest deciphered records pertaining to Indian cultures are inscriptions in Prakrit and date to the first millennium BC. The earliest surviving written use of Sanskrit, is again in inscriptions, and dates to the start of the first millennium AD. Manuscripts from a slightly later period have survived. Vedic and epic texts composed in Sanskrit were earlier than the inscriptions but were to begin with part of an oral tradition. The major ideologies that opposed Vedic Brahmanism, such as Jainism and Buddhism, initially taught and wrote in various Prakrits and in

Pali. From the turn of the Christian era Sanskrit began to replace Prakrit as the language of the elite. But Prakrit continued to be used although with a lowered status, spoken by women and lower castes.

Colonial scholars investigating the Indian past, began with the Sanskrit texts given the highest status by their *brahmana*informants. It was a while before attention was directed to texts in other languages such those of the Buddhists and Jainas.

This differentiation was also made in defining the single religion of Indian civilization, as Hinduism. This was before it was discovered that Buddhism had once been a major religion, and had been exported to Asia, and had subsequently declined in India. Making religion the third component of civilization and arguing for Hinduism in India and Confucianism in China, tended to eliminate Buddhism in Asia, whereas it can arguably be described as the main religion of the early history of Asia. That other religions, Jainism and Islam for instance, had been important in specific times and regions in India, was not thought relevant.

Since the structure of Hinduism was different from Christianity and Islam, the attempt was to reformulate it so as to make it comprehensible to European scholars and colonial administrators. This created problems of another kind. Hinduism did not grow around the teaching of a single, historical personality with a relatively precise chronology. It was instead a mosaic of sects, independent and some linked, each associated with a particular deity and its rituals. Its extraordinary survival lay in the legitimacy of the segment. It was not monotheistic and did not preclude reverence for other deities. More attention was given to the performance of rituals – orthopraxy, rather than the dogma of theology – orthodoxy. It did not have an overall ecclesiastical authority. The sectarian identity could be and often was linked to particular categories of castes. Inevitably the ranking of sects was not impervious to the hierarchy among castes.

The fourth component of civilization is the existence of what was called a Classical Age. For Greco-Roman civilization it was Athens under the rule of Pericles, and Rome in the time of Augustus, for Islam it was the Caliphate based in Baghdad, and for India it was the Gupta period. But neither cultures nor civilizations can be confined to a single period. That makes them static and stasis is not what governs a golden age. Variant aspects of a culture develop in different periods and they are all inheritors and contributors to an on-going evolution.

Dynasties are more often chronological labels, rather than the handlers of cultural idioms. Of the many rulers in a dynasty only some chose to patronize particular cultural forms. Thus when a new form of devotional worship, *bhakti*, that virtually radicalized Hinduism emerged from the seventh century onwards, not every ruler of the dynasties in the area uniformly patronized it, but some did. Similarly Firuz Tughlaq ruling in Delhi in the fourteenth century, was the first major Indian conservator of objects from the past. He moved the Ashokan pillars from out-of-the-way places where they lay in a neglected state, to secure locations. He recognized them as heritage even though no one could tell him what was written on them. But he was the only Tughlaq to do so. The Mughals however were remarkably creative in inter-weaving cultures. Akbar was curious about ancient Sanskrit texts and had some translated into Persian. This doubtless facilitated his discussions with religious scholars. He would have received a rather different picture of the tradition of belief and practice of the majority of the Indian people, if his discussions had included the*yogi*, the *sant*, the *pir* and the *fakir*.

Indian cultural items were not a source of heritage for the British. They were a source of information on the colony and fed their curiosity about its culture. Nineteenth century Europe held the view that the world consisted of the civilized, the barbaric, and the savage peoples. The civilized was the society predictably of the European colonizers.

The Others constituted the primitive. This incorporated both the barbaric and the savage depending on the area colonized.

So deeply rooted was the distinction between the civilized and the primitive that it was even included in the British Indian court of law as a valid legal differentiation. The transgression of laws by the natives was explained as due to their being primitive and not civilized.

The concept underwent a radical change in the next century. Instead of a single Classical age it was argued that any age with the required characteristics could be a Classical age. This emerged largely from the efforts of archaeologists and historians to periodize the past. In India the dual division of history into Hindu and Muslim periods was discontinued as it was an inaccurate explanation of historical change. The changes in material culture noticed by archaeologists also called for a systematic explanation.

Civilization now meant a society that lived in cities and communicated through a writing system. Control by a state system and a stratification of society was assumed. The city manufactured articles that could be traded. It was dependent for food from the surrounding agricultural settlements. There was no single period of urbanization and city cultures arose in different regions at various times. This culture, both material and intellectual, was believed to be the cradle of sophisticated aesthetics and the life of the mind accompanied by a distinct improvement in material conditions. This allowed more people to think beyond the mundane.

The new definition opened up many hidden aspects of cultural expression and brought them together in diverse ways. There was a move away from seeing just a narrow vertical space of a dynasty, or a text or a monument that called for attention. The horizontal lateral view provided an entry into far more than had been earlier seen as contributing to either culture or civilization. What was evident was already known but now the search began for the less evident or for the hidden within what was thought to be the evident. The making of a cultural item began to be viewed as the consortium of many ideas and artifacts. Civilization was no longer a static entity but had developed a kinetic form.

What this allowed for was the idea that everything does not have to be traced back to the earliest beginning or to a single point. Some facets of culture may have evolved later and this process reflects on what went into its making. This in turn introduced the idea that items of heritage are selected by a society. Who does the selecting and what goes into the making of heritage is another question. This is reflected and some would say sadly so, in some of the current formulators of culture – state patronage, Bollywood and the visual media. But citizens can and do demand alternatives even if they remain at the margin. The Khond tribe in Orissa did insist on preserving their sacred site of Niyamgiri and not have it eroded by the mining corporates. The pluralities of Indian culture require that we give such questions more thought than we have done so far.

Cultural innovation can give a new meaning to heritage. Earlier forms presented in contemporary ways have often been the trajectory of cultural items. This not only links the present with the past but can convey additional meaning. The contemporary presentation can open up new ways of understanding the item. This is most commonly seen when the aesthetics of elite groups have to be extended to include those of other segments of society. What is incorporated however different in origin, can create new forms. The juxtaposition of these with existing ones tells its own story. One thinks of Chandralekha inter-facing Bharata-natyam with Kalari. Dialogues between the presumed authors of existing forms and the new authors making the transposition, become meaningful.

An example from literature comes to mind. In the early eighteenth century when the Mughal court wanted to host a performance of the story of Shakuntala, the drama of Kalidasa was adapted to the occasion. The language was changed from Sanskrit to Braj Bhasha, currently used in the royal court and outside. Shakuntala herself was a feisty, forthright woman rather than the more shy, demure woman of the Kalidasa version. The episodes of the ring and the curse were deleted. Unlike the Kalidasa version that has largely remained within the upper caste-upper class cultural norms until recently, the Braj version had a wider audience. Such extensions express a changing aesthetic. Maybe one day we too shall see Shakuntala performed in a contemporary adaptation.

Much is made of the centrality of memory as a component of heritage. But memory is amazingly short and few cultures take pains to remember the past. When they do, the earlier memory is reshaped to accommodate the aspirations of the present. Slivers of remembrance can hardly go beyond a couple of generations after which they are grist to oral narratives. Buddhist rock cut monasteries went into oblivion with the decline of Buddhism. Even when texts are memorized as were the Vedic compositions, their previous contexts are forgotten. When scripts change texts can no longer be read. The edicts of the emperor Ashoka that we quote as a valuable heritage were unread and ignored for a millennium and a half until their script was deciphered in the early nineteenth century. That is a long cultural hiatus for the message of non-violence and tolerance that they carried. And when the edicts were initially read none knew who he was. Only the Buddhist texts tell us about him. But these Pali Buddhist texts ceased to be read in India when Buddhism declined.

The colonial definitions that we have internalized have often been divisive in slicing apart common cultures, separated by religion and caste. Within these divisions, the cultures of the elites were given priority. This often disallows dialogue between cultures such as those that exist at lower social levels. Now that we are searching for a national heritage it is again elite cultures that surface more readily, whilst much remains hidden. Heritage can give prominence to or submerge aspects of its own history. Earlier forms may continue or new ones be described as the old. My argument is that we need to explore in greater depth what we refer to as our traditions and to recover from these explorations, the diverse strands of our cultural inheritance that might currently be submerged. If heritage is not a fixed item and can be added to and subtracted from then we have the opportunity to construct it and perhaps argue over the construction.

The definition of national heritage is invariably contested since there are many competing for inclusion, especially in societies that host multiple cultures. Sometimes the contestation leads to the deliberate destruction of heritage, possibly for political reasons, as for instance with the Babri Masjid. Contestation can also but not invariably be linked to competition among dominant groups, as with the destruction of sacred places by rulers of various religious persuasions. Sometimes the opposite happens and an item of heritage over time absorbs much more than it started with and takes on incarnate forms. This quieter and gentler history of heritage is more often linked to those of lesser status with smaller ambitions and aspirations. Knowing the link between cultural forms and the societies from which they come helps in assessing these connections.

An interesting case of both absorption and contestation is the current confrontation over the narrative of the *rama-katha*. There are a few hundred versions of the story familiar to the Indian sub-continent and Southeast Asia and some go back many centuries. Each version is special to its authorship and its audience. This plurality has always been viewed as the strength of this particular cultural idiom. Amoeba-like, it has fissioned off, each segment growing and absorbing diverse ideas and incarnated in new forms, including dramatic presentations and exquisite poetry. The range is quite remarkable. Then comes the contestation when the story becomes a pawn in modern politics. The Valmiki version is declared to be the sole acceptable version, encapsulating a religious and social identity, to the exclusion of other versions. Where such political moves are successful, the definition of this cultural idiom will

inevitably change and shrink. National heritage will then include only the items that survive. The Valmiki*Ramayana* is undoubtedly of the highest quality, but can we exclude the other versions? Some of these give us extended insights into the meaning of the story as well as the communities that associate with that version of the story.

We are perhaps somewhat ambivalent about constructing our heritage. We should search for and discuss insights that will give meaning to this construction. To give priority to certain patterns of culture, be they of the elite, or of any particular religion or language or region, leaves the search incomplete. We have to accommodate many more aspects of our diverse cultures if we are to justify the richness of this diversity. Such an accommodation requires sensitivity, both to the constant adjustments made by cultural forms, and to a changing history.

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