

CHAPTER FIVE

HERMENEUTICS AS ALTERNATIVE APPROACH
TO SOCIAL UNDERSTANDING

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THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE HERMENEUTIC TRADITION

In this chapter we shall look into the possibility of an alternative approach that has been much popular in the sphere of interpretative understanding on many methodological issues. This is the hermeneutic approach. Joseph Beicher writes: "Hermeneutic reflection aims at uncovering the conditions of science and its truth-claim by considering it as a 'project' : a mode of mastering and using objectifiable processes which is linked to a particular way of viewing the world and of knowledge acquisition"¹. To day, hermeneutics has become a key-concept in cultural studies covering various disciplines. But let us have a retrospection of its development.

The term 'hermeneutics' literally means 'a science of interpretation' - but of what. Hermeneutic problem first came into being within the circle of exegesis, that is, within the framework of a discipline which proposes to understand a text. Etymologically the term comes from the name 'Hermes', a mythological (Greek) figure who used to interpret the messages of God to men. In any case the invariant essence is that the understanding or interpretation must begin with the genuine intention of the 'text' or 'message' to decipher properly what has been'sought to be said'. So we may trace a proto-type of

objectivity in that remote days too. Where does the root of hermeneutic problem, lie? The problem is because every perusal of a text always occur within a community, a tradition or a live stream of thoughts and ideas, all of which manifest some presuppositions or biases. The very task of interpretation reveals deep intention for overcoming distance and cultural differences in order to match the reader or hearer to the text or context.

Hermeneuticians include various lines of emphasis on method and matter. According to Richard Palmer,² different divergent theories of hermeneutic can be brought under six typical heads : 1. The theory of Biblical interpretation, 2. A general method of philosophical analysis, 3. The methodological foundation of Geisteswissenschaften, 4. The science of linguistic understanding, 5. Understanding from the view point of phenomenology and existentialism, 6. The system of interpreting the meaning behind myths and symbols by man in both recollective or iconoclastic way. But for the present purpose, hermeneutics appeal to us so far as it challenges the scientific claim to universality and truth, and thereby aims at humanistic understanding.

Ancient hermeneutics has passed through a continuous transformation in order to assume the present stage.³ Hermeneutics could not remain a mere technique for specialists — the technē hermeneutikē of those who interpret oracles and marvels, and looked for a general problem of comprehension. So there took

place a transformation from the technical problems of textual exegesis to the more general problems of meaning and language. Thus came a secondary development of classical philology. But the real emphasis on hermeneutics as a method of philosophy and the human sciences, was felt when the Enlightenment tempo was diffusing the method of natural sciences in every area. It is with philosophers like Schleiermacher (1768-1834) and then Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) that the hermeneutics achieves its philosophical significance. Hermeneutics for them became a recourse to combat the onslaught of positivism.

The most general feature of any hermeneutical enterprise is to advance a critique of objective or aperspectival knowledge of any thing that is a part of the life-world. The province of physical objects as taken for granted by a physicist however may be excluded from this area, however. In short hermeneutics, is trying to overpass any kind of "social physics". But by this, we should not mean mere relativism but a relatedness to the horizon of the interpreter. There can be no interpreter without any or some personal-traditional-historical co-ordinates, which are irreducible but, not irrerecognizable. Later on such dimensions of men have been termed and tombed as well, in the form of prejudice, ideology etc. Enlightenment had been a critique of prejudices in any form, while socialist movements have been arrogant to ideologies. But in turn both have become what they tried to counter. Phenomenology of Husserl, forwarded a methodical suspension of presuppositions, but had to retreat itself

consequently.

Phenomenology has adopted a hermeneutic paradigm after relinquishing earlier ideal of a rigorous science. Bleicher has nicely narrated it as the "... late grafting of hermeneutics onto phenomenology" by Husserl. Hermeneutics has been grounded in phenomenology in two ways. On the one hand, it is the last phase of phenomenology that the critique of 'objectivism' is carried to its final consequences by challenging positivist methodological - individualism for both natural and humanistic sciences. On the other hand, Husserl's final discovery of life-world as a level of experience anterior to the subject-object dictomy, opens a new theme like 'ontology of understanding' as an essential pre-condition.

Schleiermacher was an adherent to the romantic movement in hermeneutics. He effected the transition from the textual or regional hermeneutics to a general one with greater scope. Hermeneutics for him meant a 'science' or 'art' of understanding in a two-fold manner — composition by the author and grasping its meaning by some reader or listener. Thus he distinguished between grammatical interpretation and psychological interpretation. The first one is concerned with the linguistic elements, rules and styles of any text, so that the discourse could be meaningful within the culture. But psychological interpretation concentrates on the originality and relevance-structure of the author's message in a way of peeping into his inner world — the network of intentionalities. In the words of

Bleicher "With Schleiermacher a similar conception (of the fixedness of the meaning of a text as the author intended) led to the principle of an 'affinity of minds' that would do justice to the intellectual stature of the author"⁴. Though language is an indispensable medium for interpretation, the pivotal role is played by the psychological interpretation — as 'divinatory' process of apprehending the 'inner origin' or creativity. However, this stage of hermeneutic movement paved a way for a historicist orientation.

It is Wilhelm Dilthey, who developed this trend much further to work out the methodological foundation of the Geisteswissenschaften or humanistic sciences. According to Dilthey, cultural or humanistic sciences differ from the natural sciences or Naturwissenschaften, not in regard of method or matter. The distinctive feature between the two different sciences is the relationship between subject and object. In any branch of the Geisteswissenschaften, the interpreter is required to enter in a lived-experience with the object. Dilthey actually was much serious about the hermeneutical aspects of historical knowledge. Janet Wolff says; "The historian, according to Dilthey, must attempt to perform the emphatic act of transporting himself into the past, and thus becoming part of the culture he is studying, at the same time eliminating his present ego and transcending the contemporary factors influencing his experience, his view of the world and, particularly, his research"⁵. Dilthey's emphasis on such an

such an empathic relation between the studier and the studied, later or proved effective to the formulation of the notion of Verstehen in social sciences.

But in spite of his critique of 'scientism of the positivist type', Dilthey could not do away with the notion of an equal objectivity for the knowledge of history or culture. For him, objectivity of humanistic sciences can be achieved only by virtue of the self-discipline of the interpreter or researcher himself. A citation as found in William Outhwaite's Understanding Social Life, The Method Called Verstehen may be relevant here : "If there are to be human sciences in the strict sense of the word science, they (i.e. the individual researcher) must set themselves this aim ever most consciously and critically"⁶. This is how he is bound with both objectivism and individualism. He believed that through genuine emphasis on hermeneutic understanding the individual researcher can ascend to the level of universal historicity of his being. In short universalization of the individual is possible through hermeneutic self-reflection.

Anthropocentrism of understanding and cognition has been led further by existentialist-phenomenologist philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). The interpreter, according to him, has not only a psychological horizon but an existential definitiveness also. His major work Being and Time has the chief task of describing the notion of Dasein or 'Being-there' of man. He criticized any form anthropological Cartesianism,

where man has been looked as a pure or transcendental being free from existential-situational co-ordinates. Accordingly neither man nor any of human endeavour can be understood without the notion of Dasein's relativity. Thus his project may be characterized as a hermeneutic phenomenology in proving the untenability of presuppositionless activity and at the same time the groundedness of science in Dasein. Thus, in spite of any explicit philosophy of science in Heidegger's work it is undeniable that he carried on the Husserlian tradition of meta-science based on 'life-world-a priori'.

Hans Gadamer is one of the most recent prominent hermeneuticians. His aim is not to develop any particular method of understanding rather to explicit the very act of understanding. Thus in him hermeneutics achieves its maximum extension. But historically hermeneutics, according to Gadamer⁷, is the converging point of three seminal trends of Geisteswissenschaften as Husserl's phenomenology, Dilthey's historicism and Heidegger's hermeneutic-ontology. Gadamer has developed a linguistically-mediated model of hermeneutic consciousness, which has been criticized by Jürgen Habermas, propounder of the critical theory in hermeneutics. He has emphasised on some extra-linguistic factors of understanding. These two philosophers will be discussed in the following sections.

GADAMER'S HERMENEUTICS OF HISTORICAL
UNDERSTANDING

Bildung is a very important notion for Gadamer since for him it means the idea of self-formation or cultivation as the distinguishing mark of the human sciences. The concept of Bildung is old enough and its meaning has been refined by many philosophers like Kant, Hegel, Husserl etc. But for him this term essentially stands for the idea of culture. It designates mainly the proper human way of developing one's inherent talents and potentials.

The concept of Bildung differs from that of a technical construction, which is just a means to some other end. On the contrary there is no goal outside Bildung. Here the concept of Bildung transcends what is mere cultivation of given talents, because the latter is a means to some end. But in Bildung the process of formation is absorbed and preserved, without getting lost or relinquished. So Gadamer says; "Bildung is a genuine historical idea and because of this historical character of 'preservation' is important for understanding in human sciences"⁸. Here Gadamer manifestly concedes with Hegel in declaring, "Hegel has worked out very acutely what Bildung is. We follow him initially. He saw also that philosophy (and, we may add, the human sciences, Geisteswissenschaften) 'has in Bildung, the condition of its existence'. For the being of Geist (spirit) has an essential connection with the idea of Bildung".⁹ Gadamer's concern for grounding the Geisteswissenschaften within the matrix

of human existence has been evident in the explication of the notion of Bildung.

Gadamer goes on mentioning the nature of man and that of Bildung in a reciprocal way. Humanity involves a deviation from the immediate and natural mode of being for which Bildung is required. On the other hand the universal nature of Bildung is to promote the psycho-physical man to a universal intellectual being : "It requires the sacrifice of particularity for the sake of universal". But this is the domain of theoretical Bildung, which determines the path of human rationality as a whole. Theoretical Bildung, which is not just a theoretical attitude, stretches beyond the particular and immediate human knowledge and experience.

Gadamer is not much occupied with working out a methodology of the human sciences. Rather his hermeneutics consists in understanding the nature of human sciences and their relation to the totality of our experience of the world. Though Gadamer subsequently tries to establish an ideal ontology of language, tradition etc. in a macro way, he is of the view that Bildung is linked with individual consciousness. Man individually is the substratum of Bildung or any other modification of consciousness. He writes; "Every single individual that raises himself out of his natural being to the spiritual finds in the language, customs and institutions of his people a pre-given body of material which, as in learning to speak, he has to make his own. Thus every individual is always engaged in the process

of Bildung and in getting beyond his naturalness, inasmuch as the world into which he is growing in one that is humanly constituted through language and custom¹⁰". This is taken by him to be the basic movement of spirit.

The hermeneutic trend emphasizes a sort of directedness of human existence. This is the cultivation of a naive and mundane consciousness, which is limited to one particular sphere at a time. But a cultivated consciousness is active in all directions. This can be achieved through Bildung, but definitely not in the narrow sense of Bildung as a means. According to Gadamer the idea of Bildung in a middle term between humanity and human sciences. He criticizes the modern concept of science and its method to be insufficient. Any human science may be worthy to its name relying only on the humanistic tradition and the concept of Bildung. But any so-called positivist or scientific theory does not consider the inner propensities of mind involved in the process of cognition and conceptualization.

Now let us try to follow the trail that Gadamer has taken in his hermeneutic enterprise. It is better to mention beforehand that he does not after all aim at establishing a novel methodology for interpreting tradition or culture. Instead his target is to reveal the structure and categories of the very act of understanding. Yet it seems that his notion of effective-historical-consciousness has some normative feature.

From the foregoing discussion we may infer that Bildung is productive of self-knowledge but through an enlightenment of tradition and historicity. Self-awareness is possible only through a to-and-fro journey between self and what is alien to self. Bildung comprises of an openness to what is other for the self. "It is worthless to observe more closely, to study a tradition more thoroughly, if there is not already a trained receptivity towards the 'otherness' of the work of art or of the past".¹¹

Hermeneutic consciousness is guided by the insight that all self-knowledge proceeds from historically given 'substance' which is the basis of all subjective meaning and attitude. Here Gadamer sharply demonstrates his difference from the behaviouristic or materialistic conception of self or man, which does not require any historical consciousness. Even the account of sociality proposed by Schutz lacks necessary elements of the historicity. But Gadamer develops the point of philosophical hermeneutics that understanding is essentially historical. Thus hermeneutics is bound with a tradition that has been handed down.

But what may be the thematic of such a consciousness which is historical and hermeneutic? This is nothing but the tradition which correlates to effective-historical consciousness. "The hermeneutical experience is concerned with what has been transmitted in tradition".¹² According to Gadamer, tradition is not an object but is expressed like a 'Thou'. But what is the

mode of being of any tradition. Tradition, which is not something just left over but something handed down, exists virtually in the medium of language. The ideal pieces of tradition are written tradition, through which a past humanity itself becomes present to us. "Thus written texts present the real hermeneutical task. Writing involves self-alienation. Its overcoming, the reading of the text, is thus the highest task of understanding"¹³.

So we obtain an understanding which is co-extensive with linguisticity. Again writing is to be viewed as the abstract ideality of language in that it is the 'detachment both from the writer or author and from a specifically addressed recipient or reader'. This is why writing, according to Gadamer, is crucial for the hermeneutic phenomenon. Now what has been written, can be deciphered or made intelligible to someone only by means of a reading. When confronted with a written tradition, the counterpart of the writer, i.e., the reader acquires his full sovereignty. Gadamer designates it as a reading consciousness. "A reading consciousness is necessarily historical and communicates freely with historical tradition"¹⁴. An authentic reading aims at reproducing what has been written, but with openness as well as recognition of its otherness. Understanding is the fusion of the two horizons - reading and writing. This is comparable to a conversation where the horizons of the speaker and the hearer melt for a new dimension.

There is a general tendency to make a phase-distinction between understanding and interpretation. It is often claimed

that one is to understand something first and then interpretation follows. But this is a confusion between the tacit and verbal dimension of the same hermeneutic phenomenon. Or better to say one is the private while the other is public. In the words of Gadamer, "Understanding and interpretation are indissolubly bound up with each other ... Reading fundamentally involves interpretation"¹⁵. This is because reading and grasping the meaning of a text is not possible without the play of the prejudices which form the personal horizon of the reader cum interpreter. The hermeneutical problem enjoys its real thrust for the recognition that all understanding essentially involves some prejudice. 'Prejudice' means taking some position or stance before examining a situation. However 'prejudice' need not be a false judgment always. It possesses both positive and negative values. It is the Enlightenment that was critique of the prejudices. Gadamer's opinion is that the enlightenment is 'the prejudice against prejudice itself'¹⁶.

Ultimately Gadamer raises the question that how far the reflection on language is to be carried out. For the elucidation of the question, he however refers to the 'anxiety about human existence' inasmuch as the present global predicament of self-destruction is concerned. Now if we are to redirect our momentum, what is urgently required is to remould our pattern and content of thought. Thought is nothing but an infinite and interior dialogue within oneself, performed through the medium of language. "To think is to think something with oneself and to think something with oneself is to say something to oneself"¹⁷.

Gadamer goes on identifying the process called socialisation or growth into the social with 'the apprenticeship of language'. Nevertheless, he admits the existence of a pre-linguistic experience of the world but that must be proto-human or proto-cultural or rather bluntly natural. But humanity means, as has been discussed earlier, a break of the natural continuation in the Bildung. This Bildung being a phenomenon of self-evolution is inevitably bound with language. Our misunderstanding or a fatal prejudice is that language is a bondage. So we are to bring about an effective-historical-consciousness that is nothing but, "... the corrective by means of which the thinking reason escapes the prison of language, and is itself constituted linguistically"¹⁸. Language is hence both binding as well as liberating. Proper hermeneutic method unveils this hermeneutic truth, as Gadamer sees, "In reality, language is the single word whose virtuality opens up the infinity of discourse, of discourse with others, and of the freedom of 'speaking oneself' and of 'allowing oneself to be spoken' "¹⁹.

Gadamer presents the entire tradition of hermeneutic thinkers, in his Truth and Method. He carries on well the distinction between the natural sciences and the human or historical sciences. However, there may arise a debate about the co-extendability of the scope of the human sciences and that of the social sciences of the present day. By-passing it, let us say that this differentiation had been reinforced by Dilthey on the point of recognition of human experience, which

was introduced earlier by Schleiermacher. But according to Gadamer, Schleiermacher's hermeneutic comprises of a con-natural understanding that can be found in the relation between two people²⁰. Here, just as the people are both present, the interpreter is also absolutely contemporaneous with his author. This is at par with the natural sciences which too examines some present thing.

Again, Dilthey, borrowed the concept of inductive procedure from the natural sciences, which, according to Gadamer, suffers from inadequacy²¹. Dilthey's starting point is romantic hermeneutics because it helps him to harmonize the methodological criteria of the natural as well as the human sciences. But for this Dilthey had to neglect the essential historicity of the human sciences and at the same time he attributes to them the same kind of objectivity. Thus his view is that the historical world is like a text which is to be deciphered objectively and meaningfully. According to Gadamer, romantic hermeneutics is not adequate as the basis of history. The knowledge of the human sciences has a quite different kind of objectivity, which cannot be grasped by the method of the inductive sciences. But what may be the nature of the human sciences according to Gadamer? He argues that 'human sciences stand close to moral knowledge'²². The purpose of this knowledge is to govern action.

In discussing the characteristics of the human sciences, Gadamer frequently talks about historical research and knowledge.

He emphatically asserts, "Modern historical research itself is not only research, but the transmission of tradition. We do not see it only in terms of the law of progress and verified results; in it too we have, as it were a new experience of history, whenever a new voice is heard in which the past echoes"²³. In case of the natural sciences, scientific research as such develops according to the law of the object under investigation. The object of the natural sciences can be described idealiter in that research penetrates deeply into nature yielding exact knowledge. There is hardly any role of the historical interest.

But on the contrary there is not 'perfect knowledge' in the human sciences like history, because here "... historical research is based on the historical movement in which life itself stands and cannot be understood teleologically in terms of the object into which it is enquiring. Such an object clearly does not exist at all"²⁴. Gadamer's perpetual stress is on the notion of tradition, which is to be thematized in any human science. Tradition is an all-embracing matrix that can not be objectified. Interest in tradition, so far as human sciences is concerned, is motivated in a unique way by the 'present and its interests'. To carry out it a noticeable change is to be brought in our naive and pragmatic awareness as well as attitude. Firstly, we are to understand the role of prejudice in a non-pejorative sense. Secondly, a temporal distance is to be created by suspending the basic prejudices. Finally, we are to ascend to effective-historical consciousness, which

opens the course of eternal dialogue with self through the mediacy of linguistic understanding.

The role of Prejudice in Understanding:

Understanding of anything requires some footing, i.e., a standpoint or framework as a starting-point. Again an understanding is aimed at some meaning in its wholeness, but that cannot be attained at a time. Some initial and component-like fore-meaning is needed, provided that it is replaceable by suitable ones when felt necessary. Gadamer suggests, "... understanding achieves its full potentiality only when the fore-meanings that it uses are not arbitrary"²⁵. These fore-meanings are unique in function as they may give rise to both understanding and misunderstanding. Understanding does not occur in the air but in some perspective and context under which such fore-meanings are subsumed. But difficulty arises when the set of fore-meanings determining one's understanding 'go entirely unnoticed'. So what is required is that mind should be 'hermeneutically trained' in raising questions. Consciousness can not be totally purged of such elements but the 'bias' is to be made apparent. In the words of Gadamer, "... this kind of sensitivity involves neither 'neutrality' in the matter of object nor the extinction of one's self, but the conscious assimilation of one's own fore-meanings and prejudices"²⁶.

From such a hermeneutical approach the omnipresence of prejudices in all understanding is indispensable. But at the same time there is a 'tyranny of hidden prejudices' which virtually renders tradition imperceptible to us. Gadamer forwards an etymological analysis of 'prejudice' too. His chief suggestion is that we should begin from the concept of 'prejudice', taking it as a hermeneutic category of understanding. Prejudice is not a false judgment essentially. It is the Enlightenment when a sharp polemic had been launched against any sort of prejudice, viewing it to be a hindrance to rationality. Two major divisions were made : the prejudice due to human authority and the prejudice due to over-hastiness²⁷. The enlightenment thinkers conceived prejudice only in a negative way — as a paradigm of blindness. But prejudice has also another dimension - a vastness to openness and horizon of understanding: "What is necessary is a fundamental rehabilitation to the concept of prejudice and a recognition of the fact that there are legitimate prejudices, if we want to do justice to man's finite, historical mode of being"²⁸.

But there is an apparent problem here. To select which prejudice or prejudices may be taken as legitimate, is not an easy task. We live and continue ourselves in a tradition that has been handed down to us. Here, understanding is not an action of one's subjectivity, rather the placing of oneself within a process of tradition. Tradition is a process of continuous fusion of past and present. So, what is needed in

principle, is a 'special critical effort' to free oneself from the induction of the prejudice by raising questions.

Suspension of prejudices through 'temporal distance':

In course of analysing the notion of temporal distance, Gadamer brings in the contrast of historical distance²⁹. In historical studies, according to some methodology, objective knowledge is arrived only when there has been some historical distance, thereby excluding the subjective involvement of the observer. But temporal distance is something more fundamental and somewhat heuristic in nature. It is over and above the drive which satiates our interest in an objective manner aiming at some final truth. Hermeneutic understanding is an infinite process through which novel understanding emerges in every encounter with the text or any embodiment of tradition, "The temporal distance which performs the filtering process is not a closed dimension, but is itself undergoing constant movement and extension"³⁰.

According to Gadamer, this is only temporal distance by means of which distinction can be made between the true prejudices that help understanding and the false prejudices that lead to misunderstanding. But what is the mode of operation of temporal distance? It has been stated by Gadamer that our mind is at random under the sway of prejudices but in an unnoticed way. So for the isolation of the useful prejudices or judgments those must be into inaction. This may be compared

to the phenomenological idea of 'bracketing' of the naturalistic attitude. Gadamer calls it 'the fundamental suspension of our own prejudices'³¹. He further characterises this suspension as having 'Logically the structure of a question'. It is really an insight on the part of Gadamer to highlight the point that the structure and function of a prejudice can be unveiled only its operation is discontinued. This reminds us of the ethno-methodological device called 'breaching experiment'.

A qualitative change occurs in consciousness which is guided by practical interest after this methodical suspension of prejudices. Reflection on tradition now is likely to be permeated with much methodological self-awareness. Naive historicism fails to grasp its own historicity. But true historical thinking must be cautious about its own historicity — the underlying network of prejudices. Thus past is to be glanced from the 'present-with an in-built past'. Historical object is the relationship of the reality of history and the reality of historical understanding. Now we shall look into Gadamer's 'Effective-historical consciousness'.

'Effective-historical Consciousness' as a form of cultivated intentionality.

In Gadamer's view there is nothing as history that does not tell upon our mode of being and thinking, irrespective of whether we admit it or not. In other words no one can get above the effectivity of history on the ground that 'extra-tradition' human existence is absurd. The role of proper

hermeneutics is to explore how our understanding is an effective-historical relation in essence. Actually the power of effective-history is at work, escaping our notice and withstanding our refutation. But the receptivity and openness to newer, situation are reduced significantly when effective history is taken to be a prejudice in the pejorative sense. That would be a claim to quasi-objectivity. So Gadamer contends that we must learn to recognise and relive this effective-history in our interpretative consciousness. This is what is meant by effective-historical consciousness as the theoretical Bildung. Such an effective-historical consciousness is necessary for 'scientific consciousness'. Without effective-historical consciousness, self-knowledge is an impossibility because the latter descends from what is historically given. But knowledge of oneself can never be complete in that it always moves acquiring new meaning in new situation. In Gadamer's expression, "Effective-historical consciousness is primarily consciousness of the hermeneutical situation"³².

Now let us discuss about the task and technique of the effective-historical consciousness in some detail. Understanding is the fusion of horizons and forming of a new horizon of higher universality. In fact from a higher hermeneutical standpoint horizons are not isolated, but we imagine them to exist in themselves by virtue of our prejudices and interests prevalent in the tradition. However tradition itself does not escape from the reflexivity of interest. So the concept of

horizon needs some exposition.

The 'horizon' is something into which we move and that moves with us. There is a multiplicity of horizons the nucleus of which is a perceiving and understanding man. The same man may have various horizons, e.g., that of the past, that of the present etc. As has been stated, these horizons are not idealiter. It is the demarcation of the regions of seen and unseen. But, a person must have some horizon otherwise his vision can not be stretched afar, and no recognition of the otherness can be made. Otherness is that which stands against and curtails the 'sphere of my ownness'. Thus my horizon comes into being only when encountered with the horizon of other person. Again my finite personal horizon stands only in the face of a larger horizon of tradition. All of these horizons are capable of undergoing fusion and giving rise to self-understanding as a whole. So there is no understanding without horizon and no horizon without historicity.

The person who wants to understand must have the capacity to widen the horizon and 'place himself in the other-situation'. Situation is undoubtedly a limiting condition. But the elevated historical consciousness is endowed with the power of transcending a particular stance and station. This is a legitimate hermeneutical requirement. Once this process is initiated one's own horizon is likely to extend upto the all-encompassing horizon of history. Gadamer writes, "This placing of ourselves is not the empathy of one individual for another, nor is it the application to another person of our own criteria, but it

always involves the attainment of a higher universality that overcomes, not only our own particularity, but also that of others" ³³. It is the ultimate task of effective-historical consciousness, to bring about real fusion of such horizons.

Gadamer describes the effective-historical consciousness as a heightened form of hermeneutic experience. To elucidate, it is first necessary to discuss about his general view about experience. Experience is an element of the historical nature of man. Just like the ever-continuity of history, human experience 'always contains an orientation towards new experience' ³. In this regards Gadamer takes help of the analogy of an 'experienced' person who is not so, for having cumulative stock of experience only, but having a vast openness to any contingent experience. The dialectic of experience generated by sedimentation and fermentation, results in not any definitive knowledge but an undogmatic receptivity.

Experience, in Gadamerian sense, is unique to man only in that it is constituted of a fundamental negativity. Incidences of smooth fulfilment and accomplishment of expectation do not generate any vivid experience. "Every experience worthy of the name runs counter to our expectation" ³⁵. This indeed corresponds to a basic psychological fact that a break or discontinuation of any given pattern of stimulus causes distraction and draw our attention. Through the frustration of our expectation we happen to gain some insight — the limitations of humanity. This insight is a remarkable element of self-knowledge .

Exploration of this fundamental negativity of experience — the experience of human finitude, is in effect against positivism, which rests on utter confirmability through experience. Gadamer remarks, "The experienced man knows the limitedness of all prediction and the uncertainty of all plans"³⁶. This structure of experience must be viable in hermeneutic experience too. But the understanding of tradition has a further significance in that the tradition which has been transmitted expresses itself like a 'Thou'. Now let us see what is the salient feature of such a relational experience.

According to Gadamer, tradition is not an alienable process that can be known and dictated as one likes. But, tradition is not also like a coercive force acting on individuals as is supposed to be by Durkheim. In a 'Thou-orientation'. The 'Thou' is not an object but stands in a relationship. "... tradition is a genuine partner in communication, with which we have fellowship as does the 'I' with a 'Thou' "³⁷. Yet the experiential content of a tradition is not to be taken as the meaning of another person, who is a 'Thou'. Gadamer has worked out three types of experience of the 'Thou', in this context.

1. This is the experience of the 'Thou' in which typification is made of the behaviour of one's fellow men and predictions are formulated. Such a body of statements is called 'knowledge of human nature', which, as a whole is the ground of all positivist social sciences. In it, the behaviour of 'Thou' is

considered as a means to some end of the beholder. Moral point of view is at stake here. When applied to the hermeneutical problem, such a modality reduces tradition into an object and the historical horizon is impaired. Moreover, the interpreter or the person engaged in research, in his attempt to disengage himself from the traditional continuity, destroys his own horizon. Both of the horizons being constricted, the course of fusion gets thwarted.

2. There is an experience of 'Thou' and resulting understanding thereof not so unilateral like the previous one. Here the 'I-Thou' relation is reciprocal and dialectic. Experience of each of the partners depend upon the mutual recognition as well as reaction of the other. No side is adequate on complete in itself. But experience of either 'I' or 'Thou' sustains and develops itself by undoing the counterpart. So the relation is not immediate and autonomous, but respondent and antagonistic. In the field of social science, the so-called Marxian conflict-tradition of sociologists may be speaking of such a framework of human relationship. Gadamer, however thinks this type of experience of 'Thou' to be more adequate than the previous one. Historical consciousness is parallel to such an experience of the 'Thou'. Past is generally sought to be interpreted uniquely. According to Gadamer such a naive historical consciousness is likely to create a dialectical illusion. As a result a wrong pattern of interaction may take place between men and tradition. Perhaps Nazism or 'cultural revolution' are examples of such

dialectical illusion. Man has been a victim of sheer self-misunderstanding due to remaining deaf to the echoes of the past. Past, being an ideality, the responsibility of misunderstanding must be enshouldered by the particular man or group concerned. So what is the imperative is a correct account of our own historicity and prejudice-awareness. Gadamer seems justified to write, "To stand within a tradition does not limit the freedom of knowledge but makes it possible"³⁸.

3. Now we arrive at that type of experience of the 'Thou' which is the highest and subliminal hermeneutic experience. Here 'Thou' is experienced in its entire dignity and worth. On the part of the interpreter in the role of 'I', there is no condition-imposing attitude but a transparent openness to other. Without openness to one another no genuine human relationship is conceivable. But obviously openness does not mean that one should be submissive or subservient to other. Gadamer says, "Openness to the other, then, includes the acknowledgement that I must accept some things that are against myself, even though there is no one else who asks this for me"³⁹.

Effective-historical consciousness, according to Gadamer, possesses the same openness to tradition in its otherness. It allows the past to speak freely and lends a sincere auditorium. Peter L. Berger also says that a genuine sociologist must be an untiring listener to the social phenomena⁴⁰. So the modus operandi of this hermeneutic experience is like a conversation where the horizon of the other person is grasped without

any necessary agreement. The analogy of 'the experienced person' adopted by Gadamer is really artistic as he observes, "The hermeneutical consciousness has its fulfilment, not in its methodological sureness of itself, but in the same readiness for experience that distinguishes the experienced man by comparison with the man captivated by dogma. This is what distinguishes effective-historical consciousness, as we can now say more exactly, in terms of the concept of experience"⁴¹.

From the concept of hermeneutic experience, which assumes the form of conversation or dialogue Gadamer has switched over to the concept of linguisticity. He has developed an interesting and illuminating account of language in its fullness. Remarkable is the insight with which he describes the phenomena of writing and reading. But to enter into that aspect is not within the relevance-structure of the present thesis. Nevertheless dialogue leads to a new level, "To reach an understanding with one's partner in a dialogue is not merely a matter of total self-expression and the successful assertion of one's own point of view, but a transformation into a communion, in which we do not remain what we were"⁴².

Now let us have a rear-view of an initial point with which we began, namely the notion of Bildung. Bildung is achieved through an effective-historical consciousness. Our naive and dogmatic consciousness has been transformed into an open and conceiving-consciousness. Thus we cease to remain what we were and will be something more. This is 'the way to research into ourselves'. But in this ultimate and perennial

'dialogue of the soul with itself' language is the only resort. It is only the effective-historical consciousness instead of the so called social sciences, which is the genuine panacea for the 'widespread anxiety about human existence'. In Husserlian term, it is a cultivated-intentionality towards universal horizon. But is not the intentionality suffering from an over-unidirectionality — i.e., understanding of the past? It is true that present can not be constituted without the past. But is not at the same time present is looking forward — to the future? Gadamer rightly discerns three components in hermeneutics — understanding, interpretation and application. In course of the emphasis he lays on the interpretation of the text, which is a written tradition, language is no doubt an essentiality-though not the only one. But regarding application or praxis, language is most likely to prove inadequate.

Gadamer however refers to the animadversion made against him by Jurgen Habermas. Habermas alleges that Gadamer has overlooked the pre-linguistic or extra-linguistic elements of experience. Horizon comprises of so many aspects. Gadamer also does not deny it. But what he wants to establish is that "... every linguistic experience of the world is experience of the world not experience of language"⁴³. Language is the gateway between mind and reality. But it demands a separate inclination to the philosophy of language. What seems to me is that Gadamer is after all guided by a pan-rationalistic model. This is why he does not look beyond the linguisticality and takes it for granted as an intersubjective medium of communication.

HABERMAS AND THE CRITICAL THEORY

Jurgen Habermas is an heir of the hermeneutic tradition and is at the same time an opponent of the positivist trend which believes in the absoluteness of knowledge not vitiated by anthropocentric elements. Positivist methodology, according to him, is unaware of or better to say, a 'wishful-concealer' of the truth that knowledge in any field is the result of the accomplishment of subjectivity. Habermas is much careful in discovering the situational components that inhere in the psycho-physical subjectivity. He is equally concerned, like Gadamer, about the 'self-destruction' in the name of positivist self-understanding. Similar to Gadamer's 'prejudice', Habermas speaks about 'interest' that constitutes knowledge. Gadamer fought against naive historicism while Habermas waged opposition against positivism. "Historicism has become the positivism of the cultural and social sciences"⁴⁴.

Now we may raise question about the real interest that works behind the philosophy proposed by Habermas. He actually places before us a hermeneutically universal goal - the goal of self-reflection. Self-reflection depends on emancipatory cognitive interest and it releases mind from the domination of coercive hypostatized powers. Habermas, however considers this emancipatory theory having been renewed in critical theory and originated with Socratic dialogue. But men under the sway of objective delusion insist on denying the role of subjectivity. He puts it as follow : "Thus positivism could forget that the

methodology of the sciences was intertwined with the objective self-formative process (Bildungsprozess) of the human species and erect the absolutism of pure methodology on the basis of the forgotten and repressed" ⁴⁵ .

According to Habermas a radical critique of any knowledge is possible only as a critical social theory. The systematic sciences of social action like economics, sociology, political science etc. rest on a set of taken-for-granted presuppositions and motives, and produce nomological knowledge. But a critical social science can not be confined within this frame work. Its purpose is to determine the origin and reach of various theoretical statements and laws. Instances of such a critical enterprise are psychoanalysis which operates in the psychical life, and Ideologiekritik or critique of ideology applicable in collective life also. Through it, a significant transformation can be brought about in the unreflected consciousness. So the notion of Ideologiekritik is very relevant for our purpose. But before that, let us enumerate several theses of Habermas.

1. "The achievements of the transcendental subject have their basis in the natural history of the human species" ⁴⁶ .

2. "Knowledge equally serves as an instrument and transcends mere self-preservation" ⁴⁷ .

3. "Knowledge-constitutive interests take form in the medium of work, language and power" ⁴⁸ .

4. "In the power of self-reflection knowledge and interest are one" ⁴⁹ .

5. "The unity of knowledge and interest proves itself in a dialectic that takes the historical traces of suppressed dialogue and reconstructs what has been suppressed"⁵⁰ .

Critical theory is the generic name of some hermeneutic perspectives, under which fall Habermas and the other members of the Frankfurt school. In their view, 'critical philosophy' intends for the development of a maximally enlightened self awareness of its practitioner. Among these other members, Raymond Guess is a remarkable one who worked out an interesting outline of the Ideologiekritik (however, in congruence with Habermas). For the discussion on it, we should first begin with the notion of ideology.

Habermas defines ideology to be a form of 'false consciousness'⁵¹ . While the popular notion of ideology is an ideal programme to be retained, he takes ideology in a pejorative sense and pathological way. Its aim is to make and impose a justification in support of some detrimental status quo. In his own words : "From everyday experience we know that ideas serve often enough to furnish our actions with justifying motives in place of real ones. What is called rationalization at this level is called ideology at the level of collective action"⁵² .

Guess has specified three senses in which a form of consciousness may be false and hence become an 'ideology'. Firstly the incorporated or constitutive set of belief(s) may be false; secondly it may operate in a reprehensible

pattern, and finally; it may have some tainted origin. "I will call these three kinds of criticism : criticism along the epistemic, the functional and the genetic dimensions..."⁵³

Here the falsity of consciousness has no truth-functional meaning - rather it means 'reflective unacceptability' for its having been generated under condition of coercion. More fundamental, for Habermas, is the false belief about the genesis of the set of judgments. For him the functional approach is, however secondary. Yet it is undeniable that in order to be a form of consciousness ideological, the former must thwart some human demand, dignity and development. Thus an ideology is a world-picture but distorted and malign.

Now, consciousness can be purged off this falsity and ingenuity by means of a special effort named Ideologiekritik, which is like a touchstone for human mind and cornerstone for a critical theory. Ideologiekritik inaugurates an emancipatory self-consciousness and thereby almost reverses the dependence-relation between individual and society. A structure of the social reality, hidden hitherto, comes to the fore. Hermeneutic Ideologiekritik is different from a positive Ideologiekritik, in which one just changes one's belief instead of moving oneself to a more rational set of beliefs. Guess mentions of three theses of Ideologiekritik held by the members of the Frankfurt Schol.⁵⁴

1. Ideologiekritik is an integral part of a critical theory of society.

2. Ideologiekritik is itself a cognitive enterprise, and not just a form of 'moralizing criticism'.
3. Ideologiekritik differs significantly from natural science as regards the cognitive structure.

So, equipped with Ideologiekritik, a critical theory is emancipatory, self-referential and reflectively-acceptable while naive scientific theories are instrumental, objectifying and verifiable. Critical theory is both reflective and reflexive. Scientific theories can not again attain ultimate clarification without recourse to critical theory which is hermeneutically ~~subject-centered~~. From a critical-theoretical point of view, a complete social analysis must include both social institutions as well as the beliefs the agents have about their society. So it is evident that Habermas lays importance upon belief, just as Gadamer emphasises experience. Hence a social theory is a theory about agents' beliefs about their society and at the same time is itself such a belief.

From the notion of ideology, as Habermas and the Frankfurt School maintains, the basic situation of man is that of 'unfree existence'. Without accepting the coercive and uncongenial society as a datum, the delusive feature of ideology can not be sustained. But is the social reality ontologically more stable than the people under influence? There is a peculiar dialectics involved here. The coercion of society on individual prolongs until the ideology legitimizing and stabilizing the process can act on men. In other

words, men hypostatize a social reality as if independent of themselves and in turn get hypnotized by the so called reality. It will be relevant here to quote a long para from Guess: "It is also not hard to see in what sense the 'unfree existence' from which the agents suffer is a form of self-imposed coercion. Social institutions are not natural phenomena; they do not exist of and by themselves. The agents in a society impose coercive institutions on themselves by participating in them, accepting them without protest, etc. Simply by acting in an apparently 'free' way according to the dictates of their world-picture, the agents produce relations of coercion" ⁵⁵.

Habermas is of the view that, all the bondages and sufferings are transcendently self-reinforced. At the first glance we incline to believe wrongly that there is a society 'out-there' to mould me from without. But, as the critical theory induces self-reflection I intuit that the persistence of the 'world-picture' owes to my belief. Self-reflection accomplishes the following:

1. It dissolves the 'self-generated objectivity' and the 'objective delusion'.
2. It makes the subject aware of its own formation.
3. It illuminates the subject about the unconscious determinants of action and thought.

The critical theorists have proceeded much further to work out how Ideologiekritik can be executed individually

and be infected to others, so that collective emancipation is possibilized. But that is beyond the scope of my project. What concerns here is the phenomenological aspect of Ideologiekritik . It seems to me that it may be compared to the epochē' . In epochē' the naturalistic attitude, consisting of both idealism and realism, is said be put under question to grasp the basic and constitutive intentionalities. And this has led to a transcendental subjectivity as the source of all meaningfulment.

Ideologiekritik also leads to radical self-reflection and discovers why such a self intends to dwell in a cocoon of self-projected world-view. 'Social reality' is hence an ideal-creation out of a life-word. Can it be said that, for Habermas, society is empirically real but transcendently ideal? From this is deduced the real interest of 'self-understanding', which is an emancipatory cognitive impetus leading to freedom. But there is a disagreement among the critical theorist about the nature of self-reflection and freedom. Guess discerns two brands, namely the contextualist view and the transcendentalist view carried out by Adorno and Habermas respectively.⁵⁶

In the pan-ideological model of normal forms of consciousness, Habermas is atune with the hermeneutic thinkers about the role of language. Guess writes, "The starting point of Habermas' 'transcendental argument' is a set of views about language-use and its preconditions. To be a human agent, he

argues, is to participate at least potentially in a speech community..."⁵⁷ . The importance of language in hermeneutics can be understood from Habermas' own words, "... the quasi-inductive course of the hermeneutic sciences is based on the specific capacity of ordinary language..."⁵⁸ .

Now to delineate the features of freedom, Habermas uses the term 'ideal speech situation'. It is a situation where dialogue between completely free and equal human agents can be possible. To express it more radically, to be free means to be able to take part freely in a dialogue. But for this what is required is a 'pure language' — unvitiated by the conditions of life. He asserts that hermeneutic understanding is directed to a traditional context of meaning but in a dialogic way. What Habermas contends about dialogue, is overt ~~from the~~ passage: "Dialogue in ordinary language moves half-way between monologue and the impossibility of linguistic communication at all. "It always expresses conditions of life"⁵⁹ . But what is the precondition for a real dialogue. Habermas puts, "The dialogic use of language always requires hermeneutic understanding"⁶⁰ .

Hermeneutic understanding is essentially a journey of the spirit with fusion and formation of horizons. To enhance it they suggest either 'effective-historical consciousness' or 'Ideologiekritik'. Only with this radical self-transportation, social-sciences derive their meaning .

Habermas considers ideology only in a pejorative sense. Raymond Guess however has given two more senses of ideology namely, descriptive and positive sense. Paul Ricouer has also advanced a parallel claim; "... that the basic meaning of the word 'ideology' should not be the Marxist one, which is merely pejorative and more or less identical with a distortion of reality under the influence of covert class interests"⁶¹. In his self-styled 'phenomenology of ideology' he raises a very fundamental question against Marxian 'science of ideology', where ideology is to be taken in the pejorative sense. The question is : 'Is a non-ideological science of ideology possible?'⁶²

Ricouer thus becomes ultra-critical (if the Frankfurt School is just critical) in pointing out that not only the concept of ideology needs a critique, but at the same time that of science invites questioning. Insofar as the antithesis between science and ideology is concerned, both are equally problematic. A critical theory as is supposed to be by Habermas should be scientific as well as social in order to effect an Ideologie-kritik. But Ricouer's opinion is that, "... a social (critical) theory cannot tear itself away from ideology because it cannot reach the perspective which would dissociate it from the ideological mediation to which the other members of the group are submitted"⁶³. So, Ricouer modifies the earlier notion of Ideologiekritik in a critical manner.

His proposals are fourfold. 1. To execute Ideologiekritik a critical distanciation from the class, nation, tradition to which one belongs, is necessarily required. The belongingness can yet never become completely transparent to self-reflection. To be a man, needs to participate in a set-up while to be reflective is to distanciate. This is the obvious dialectic.

2. Participation and distanciation are mutually inseparable and none of this dialectic can be carried out to the extreme. Participation makes no absolute knowledge possible. Distanciation makes only partial critique possible. Thus there is a somewhat dynamic equilibrium between these two belligerent tendencies.

3. Knowledge obtained by Ideologiekritik can not become total -- "it is condemned to remain partial, fragmentary, insular"⁶⁴. This incompleteness is a hermeneutic feature otherwise historical understanding would lose openness and horizontality.

4. Ideologiekritik is good in-itself and hence it should be always initiated by us, though we would be hardly able to complete it. This is Ricouer's deontological assertion that practice of this virtue may reduce our vanity and enhance humility.

In this way, Ricouer curtails to some extent the high ambition cherished by the earlier proponents of Ideologiekritik.

In spite of this moderation of intensity and scope, it may work to usher in us a self-reflection, though limited upto certain plane. Limitation of Gadamer's hermeneutics based on idealism of language is shown by Habermas, but the latter's hermeneutic sociology too in turn falls prey to same lacuna.

SOME CRITICAL OBSERVATIONS

The notion of objectivity was an implicit feature for the classical hermeneutics. But their objectivity meant a correct understanding of the text or sermon or symbol, with the simple presupposition that the inner structure of the interpreter is not complicated, somewhat like a tabula rasa. The notion of self-transparency of the interpreter's mind gradually became questionable under the influence of Kant's notion of a priori categories. It is our civilization which has seized our simplicity. Aurobindo Ghose⁶⁵ also admits that in our present age we are unable to understand the symbolism and symbolic institutions of the prehistoric age on account of our pre-occupiedness with politico-economic frame of reference .

So while the romantic hermeneuticians were concerned about an access to the author's or composer's inner realm, contemporary hermeneuticians are concentrating on the Dasein of the interpreter himself. But it is a phenomenological-existential insight that the horizons of either the Lebenswelt

or the Dasein are infinite and inexhaustible. Phenomenologists miss of historicity. But hermeneuticians are busy with the historicity of individual's Dasein at the cost of his synchronication with 'others' — which is an unfathomable givenness.

Gadamer begins with culture and historicity of consciousness. For him a text is the crystalized form of tradition in the 'handed down' sense while archaeological relics are just 'left over'. Human beings are in a pool of prejudices (in a non-pejorative sense) and are quite unable to come out of it. In this sphere he denies the notion of Diltheyean objectivity of historical knowledge : 'the universalization of individual'. Instead he advocates for a new criterion of objectivity guaranteed by 'Effective-historical consciousness' — which gives us a knowledge of our inevitable historicity. According to this new viewpoint, the correlation between the horizon of the interpreter and that of the text (as an embodiment of culture) should be pre-understood as a result of which a fusion of horizons can take place. A genuine pre-understanding of the part is necessary for the subsequent understanding of the whole. This is the role of hermeneutic circle.

Due to his exclusive past-orientedness within the given continuity of a single cultural pattern the medium of hermeneutic understanding has been chosen to be language in the ideal form of 'writing-and-reading'. It is undeniable that within a cultural continuum language is more or less adequate for giving a world

picture. But this model can not work in case of cross-cultural understanding, unless we subscribe to a very farfetched notion of universal human culture as the ideal-type of specific cultures. This point has been beautifully raised by Janet Wolff when she asks, "... whether it makes sense to advocate a hermeneutic anthropology" in a Gadamerian model.⁶⁶

Nevertheless, Gadamer carries on confidently the idea of Bulding which had also been taken by Husserl as a vocational-cum-existential goal of transcendental philosophy. Husserl prescribes intentional phenomenology for Bildung while Gadamer talks about the 'interior dialogue' with one's self. In this dialogue, language is indispensable because self has been considered as a closed system of thought and language. In this way excluding the existential co-ordinates from the domain of understanding Gadamer makes an emphatical success in creating another brand of transcendental subjectivism.

Habermas has advanced his hermeneutic sociology with a polemic against the idealist view of linguistic hermeneutics formulated by Gadamer. His exposition on ideology reveals the role of interests that constitute knowledge. Ideology is a 'falsified consciousness' which produces a justification in support of the domination and coercion. But a critical study guided by Ideologiekritik reveals the self-imposed nature of the 'objective social' by the individuals who participate in the belief-system. Though understanding requires an infrastructure of work, power and language, the very medium of Ideologiekritik is surely linguistic in order to emancipate the consciousness of the practioner. Moreover, he goes on

much further in identifying a free situation as 'an ideal speech situation'. His last recourse is to a 'pure language' which is filtered off ideology and conditions of life. Habermas leaps beyond the domain of 'ordinary language' when he forms the notion of 'pure language' abstracting from life.

In spite of his proposed empathetic hermeneutics aiming at proletarian upliftment, the same sort of idealization of language may bring about some speculative and word-oriented world-view, in the last. It may not be denied that Ideologiekritik is really ineffective, rather it may not only just emancipate one from ideology but at the same time alienate him from the mundane ideologized world. Here dialogue as conceived by Habermas would take place among partners of a self-contained 'ideal speech situation'. If we do not pay heed to the meta-critique of Ricoeur, then we may say that the number of partners in an 'ideal speech situation' is likely to increase gradually. But it is not definite that whether such an 'ideal speech situation' would not prove to be an epiphenomenon of this 'ideology-bound-situation', lived by the multitude of man.

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