Cultural autonomy in an age of globalisation

BY FERDOUS AZIM

THE best way to discuss the notion of self-reliance in the cultural sphere would be by looking at efforts at cultural self-definition. Basically we need to talk about spaces from where a cultural expression can take place, and looking around us today we can see how those spaces are being squeezed out. At one level, we have the established notions of culture, which are entrenched and do not bode any questioning or experimentation. At another level, cultural production today is tied in with the forces of globalisation, which make it difficult for small countries such as ourselves to carve out spaces where local and national expressions can take place. Perhaps we do need a serious discussion on ways that the cultural scene in our country can be made more tolerant as well as more dynamic, so that many forms of cultural activity can take place, so that various sections of society can find avenues of expression.

CULTURAL PLURALITY AND MARGINALISATION

Culturally, we have certain icons, and in the month of February, culture becomes of special significance with the celebration of 21st February. This very special date in the Bengali cultural and political calendar has acquired added significance with its recognition by UNESCO as the International Mother Language Day. This has been widely hailed within Bangladesh as an international recognition of the sacrifice made by people for the recognition of Bengali as a state language in the state of Pakistan. But the conferment of the status of International Language Day to 21st February has had the result of shifting the significance of the day.

There has been a slight but very significant shift in the significance of the celebration of 21st February. From a symbol of linguistic unity and nationalism, February 21st has now become a day that celebrates cultural and linguistic plurality, and hence points to the difficulty of holding on to cultural identities and definitions as key components of nationhood. It is this shift from national to international arena that points to the struggles that notions of cultural autonomy and self-definition are faced with today.

Before going on to look at international onslaughts (which in our case can be considered regional) let us look at how culture is effaced from within the national arena. The Lalon Bachao movement comes directly to mind at this juncture. The status of Bauls and of Lalon has always been that of a marginalised group, but their influence on mainstream Bengali music and writing has been immense, and hence they have occupied an important space in the cultural celebration of Bengal. The latest attack on them is dictated by commercial and perhaps even political interests. In the way that the movement to prevent the building of a tourist complex right within the boundaries of the akhra is being articulated, it comes after other protests against buildings which had articulated themselves in environmental terms, i.e., as a movement to save trees. The momentum that the movement has gathered maybe because it is able to talk about the protection of culture and our cultural artefacts following these environmental concerns, rather than as purely part of our cultural heritage and symbol of cultural plurality.

In our country, we feel that many of these crass building projects go on because of the weaknesses in our cultural understanding, of the confusions regarding cultural heritage, because of gaps and divisions in the way that our nation and culture are viewed. While this is true, it is equally true that what we may want to hold on to as 'pure' culture will come into contact and even attack when viewed from the profit motive, or even that of 'development'. Thus the strategising aspect in the cultural sphere becomes important we have at one level to look at the cultural sphere as part of the developmental, and at another, perhaps to make culture part of the profit motive. That we can talk of a sphere of 'pure' culture seems to be increasingly impractical.

We have seen different strategies at work in the Lalon Bachao movement, including using environmental considerations. Our cultural history, as we have seen, is one of a struggle to protect Bengali as a language from being annihilated. While the 1952 Language Movement took a strong stand on the issue of language, colonial history shows us the ways in which Bengali modified itself to fit into the literary/linguistic and pedagogical sphere in colonial Bengal. Now is the time to look at ways that may be available to us in the new economy which is so largely based on the construction of images to carve out areas of cultural expression which are not mere echoes or imitations of forms and images forged elsewhere.

At this juncture, it will also be useful to remind ourselves of a danger that of cultural atavism. It has become somewhat of a truism to say that with the demise of the Soviet Union militant Islamic movements are the only successful challenges to the forces of economic and cultural globalisation. The success of these movements is also attributed to their globalising potential. At this level, what we are actually talking about is an ideology-based challenge. There are other possible challenges, potentially based on local expression, and it is this interface between the global and the local that perhaps has to be confronted when we talk about cultural self-definitions. However we define ourselves, as Muslims, as Bengalis, as both or as neither, we need to carve out a cultural sphere that is innovative, creative and not imitative and repetitive. Looking around us, we can say pessimistically that all the negative qualities pertain in the sphere of cultural production in Bangladesh today. A meaningless harping on cultural icons of the past which do not have the same significance in the altered contemporary world (and one of the main differences is that today we are an independent nation) is proof of a creative bankruptcy. Music, literature and media become boring and uninspiring. On the other hand, meaningless imitation of cultural forms and images from the west via media India (through satellite TV and Bollywood) also make a second-rate cultural sphere which is equally boring and uninspiring. The strategy perhaps is for a placement in between, culling from both and creating a 'third' sphere, which would be novel, culturally relevant and meaningful, be able to bring out the diversity in the national, and establish the national or the Bengali/Bangladeshi in the global.

THE CONCEPT OF CRITICAL REGIONALISM

The concept of a 'critical regionalism' that has come out of architectural theory and practice may be of significance in this area. Critical Regionalism is a critical engagement with the local and the development of regional architectural styles that are not a mere amalgam of what is regional with the demands of the moment, but that transforms the local and the traditional to speak and respond to the needs of the contemporary. A Critical Regional approach would not result in the multiplication of shopping malls and high-rise apartment buildings. Even while recognising the commercial validity of these buildings, a critical regionalism would reshape and reform them so that the buildings echoed not merely financial considerations, but was sensitive to environment and to the creation of recognisable forms and images. Such an architectural style would not be repetitive, but creative and innovative and would be sensitive to issues of environment and be able to distinguish need from greed. If that is a solution that architects are forging for themselves, let us see how a similar strategy can be used in other spheres of cultural production.

ON THE QUESTION OF LANGUAGE

What function does the 'new' literatures in English or literary production from cultures that do not primarily function in English perform? Macaulay in the 1835 had seen the role of the English-speaking native as a 'conduit'. Today's writer in English seems to serve another purpose that of the 'native informant' as described by Gayatri Spivak. Between these roles of 'conduit' and 'tourist guide', there surely is a 'third' role, where the writer in English places Indian literature within a globalised arena as well as speaks to India and Indians in the global cultural tongue. Hence literature in the local languages has to contend with literature from that same place written in English. Moreover, literature also has to contend with another much more dominant and powerful, and perhaps at this moment, more creative field of cultural production that is the film and media industry.

Bangladesh has basically stayed out of this 'new' literatures in English scene. We have seen the effects of this, and perhaps its reasons lie in the political history of Bangladesh and its cultural configurations that need to be theorised and understood in this context. Bengali spans two countries, and we share our 'rich' literary heritage with fellow Bengalis across the border. But it is Bangladesh which has been specifically concerned with national identity and its cultural ramifications. In common with all 'non'-global languages or languages that do not have the political and economic purview/dominance Bengali has to struggle to take its place in the globalised world. In other words, writing, publishing and broadcasting media have to compete on a worldwide scale, and then produce something that is somehow different, distinguishable, and not mere imitations of images created in more dominant cultural centres. This is the point at which the concept of Critical Regionalism may be brought back as a strategy and a tactic.

FILM AND TELEVISION

The media industry, especially television has really changed over the last 2 decades. With the spread of satellite TV, it was thought that global audiences would emerge the 'global village' concept. But the way that it has worked out is that instead of global audiences, regional broadcasting networks have created regional audiences. The local, national or terrestrial TV now has to tailor itself to these new influences. It has to compete with them for viewers, and perhaps even adopt some of their broadcasting styles and techniques to suit changing audience tastes. In Bangladesh, the distinguishing feature of both the nationalised TV service and the private TV companies, is the use of Bengali as the medium of broadcasting. But does the mere use of language distinguish it from any other regional broadcasting? There is a scramble for imitation at many levels, and it is this very imitative tendency then that makes us wonder about the creative potential of this medium. TV producers and viewers are constantly reminded that this is a sphere of cultural production that is completely locked in with the world of finance and profit, and that attracting large audiences is of primary importance. The space for innovation and experimentation somehow seems to be very limited within this medium which on the surface looks very dynamic and full of creative energy.

On the other hand, film seems to have more of a creative and experimental potential. Film technology, especially the development of the camcorder, has had the effect of decentralising film production, and making it more independent of commercial producers and networks which guide TV production. Short films from documentaries to short features, are low-budget independent productions. The steady growth in the number of films and filmmakers in our country definitely shows a way that the media industry can experiment with forms of story telling, of documenting, of creating cultural icons and images in a more independent way. These films may not bring in large audiences, but we have already seen how audience fragmentation is part of the new developments in the culture industry. The small audiences that are a part of a critical engagement may have a more critical role to play in the forging of cultural images.

But even having said that I would like to cast a glance at a mainstream film produced recently, i.e., through a film production company, albeit owned by the director, but which more importantly is somehow different. This is Humayun Ahmed's film Srabon Megher Deen. The rural setting of the film and the story of conflict and difference between urban and rural life that it narrates, attracted large audiences. Drawing on rural tradition, and creating the gap between the rural and the urban is one of the ways in which cultural expression can remain autonomous and uniquely Bengali. This emphasis on the rural and the regional, however, can be read just as a romantic gesture of 'return to the soil'. It is analogous to the division of the private and public spheres in the 19th century, which had identified the private with the pre- or uncolonised aspects of national life, and the public with that sphere that had to deal with the coloniser at every step. Culture and the language of literature, at that time, straddled these two spheres, and could not be easily contained within

THE HIERARCHIES OF CULTURE

Culture and reading culture is a Janus-faced task. It seeks to identify uniqueness, and hence holds on to what it considers its own defining elements. At the same time, it is a protean phenomenon, and is constantly having to make and negotiate spaces for expression in ever-changing circumstances. The emphasis on the rural and the regional, thus, has to not only express a desire to protect and identify or to return to a form of pristine identity, but has also to provide the space of expression of contemporary national and personal struggles. That such an emphasis has the potential to do that is visible in our contemporary cultural scene.

One of the problems or issues we have to deal with at this juncture is the way that cultural expression can be seen merely as a reflection of what happens around us. Much of the discussion on culture avoids talking about politics and social hierarchies. It is only a critical approach that helps to unmask or undo many of such hierarchies, or we are left to reinforce the inequalities and inequities that pertain to society and pervade through our culture. The emphasis on plurality would help to highlight those aspects. The notion of gender and of women's positioning needs to be kept in focus as well. The nineteenth-century linguistic divide between the public and the private had its gendered connotations in the sense that the private belonged to the woman, and the public to the male, and hence culture, literature etc become the special purview of women. This gendered hierarchised sphere in which literature and culture language resides, needs also to be examined and undone through dynamic cultural interventions.

EDUCATION AND CULTURE

While we explore the ways in which Bengali can be widened and used in rich and exciting ways, we cannot ignore the ways in which a global audience evades us, and the ways in which global literary production impact on us. The global dominant impact of English is all around us. Leaving aside the literary, we just have to turn to the educational arena to discover how Bengali has to contend with the competing claims of English. This is not merely a colonial hangover, but is part of the new cultures that we have to negotiate in the contemporary world. The technological revolution, which has had such an impact on our media cultural industry, has had a similar effect in the educational debates in the country. All these fluctuations in the status of English have now had a fresh dimension added to it with the contention that English is the language of the worldwide web. Perhaps at this point it may be the case that the stress on the language of education does not address the real issue of innovation and creativity, both in the technological and cultural sphere. Because if culture is becoming more technologised, and if changes in the cultural sphere are part of this phenomenon, then to be an effective cultural producer or participant, the ability to innovate and intervene technologically is equally necessary. Where small nations like ours really lag behind then, is in the sphere of science and technology, and how that question is going to be addressed within our educational institutions and policies is really not clear.

A culturally independent, self-reliant and distinct national sphere is an illusion, and hence not a goal to be pursued. But a culturally vibrant, innovative and dynamic society is absolutely desirable and an indicator of the well being of a society and/or nation. That no culture grows in an isolated way is a statement too often and too easily made, but while we talk of cultural interaction, we often forget the positions of power and powerlessness that different actors occupy in the process. How we define and function within these hierarchised zones of interaction depends on how we negotiate between these various positions. Officially at the level of educational policy, for instance, and creatively, as we write our novels and poems, as we sing new songs and make new films and build new buildings and towns, we have to learn to be cultural innovators rather than imitators. The factor of resource constraints of course cannot be ignored. Where does the intervention need to take place? at the primary level of education, in the setting up of more IT institutes, in media technology training, in setting up more departments of literature in universities? It is not an either/or situation, but identifying areas in which the impact will be more immediate or startling is an important task.

The task at this moment seems to be that of negotiating a cultural space within a world where even while notions of cultural diversity are being propagated, dominating forces tend to wipe away specificity and distinctness.

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...ublic dialogue on RETHINKING SEL-FRELIANCE: Aid and development –a report

ZAKIA HUQ

A day long public dialogue on "Rethinking Self- reliance" was held on 17 February, 2001 at the BIDS conference center. It was jointly organized by the BIDS, The Daily Star and Center for Alternatives. The dialogue was divided into two sessions. The morning session dealt with Economic Self-reliance while the afternoon session discussed issues of Cultural and Intellectual Self-reliance.

The morning session was introduced by Dr Abu Abdullah, DG BIDS, Mr Mahfuz Anam of The Daily Star and Dr Imtiaz Ahmed of the Center for Alternatives. The session was chaired by Dr Omar Haider Chowdhury of BIDS. The keynote presentation was made by Dr Binayak Sen of BIDS. The participants agreed that the old notions of self-reliance defined in pure economic terms are increasingly becoming quite obsolete. Nonetheless it was agreed that in economic terms the country is moving towards self-reliance, especially in the food sector. Yet 50% of the population continue to live under poverty line. The challenge therefore lies in channeling resources to this 50% in order to get over vulnerability. It was also felt that there was a need to change the mindset of the donors as well as the recipients. Attainment of economic self-reliance also requires changes in our political and social institutions. The participants agreed that one needs to de-colonize the mind in order to de-colonize the self. Participants also emphasized on the need of coordination between researchers and policy planners so that ideas can be put into practice.

The following major points were raised in the dialogue.

Redefining Self-reliance

The participants agreed that the concept of self-reliance has acquired and attained varied meanings over the years which provided the scope and need for its reconceptualization. It was felt that the need for reconceptualization and rethinking emerges from the changed global circumstances (with increasing globalisation of trade, production, services and communication) as well as from the failure of state-led modernisation projects following the autarchic inward-oriented models of development. Different notions and shades of self-reliance were discussed. It was emphasized that self reliance is not only about what we get, but how we get it. Abu Abdullah pointed out that with time the concept was acquiring greater clarity and precision. He emphasised that it was fundamental for our development policy to move to support various means of attaining total autonomy that would range from household to nation.

For Mahfuz Anam self-reliance implies the decolonization of mind, which cannot be a short cut affair rather it includes the entire gamut of economics, politics, culture and also intellectual. Imtiaz Ahmed also saw the need for viewing it as a multi-dimensional phenomenon and establishing the linkage between individuals and institutions since these constitute the key to self-reliance.

Debopriya Bhattacharya suggested that self-reliance is a process, and at times a trend which has lots of indicators. According to him self-reliance implies the attainment of relative autonomy in policy making and implementation. It also entails the expansion of choices at the macro and household levels. Again it is about reduction in vulnerability both in the state economy and households. He further pointed out that in recent years the extent of our aid dependence (in terms of aid-GDP ratio) has declined but this may not be seen as an indicator of our growing self-reliance, as reliance on aid has been replaced by reliance on domestic borrowing in financing the national budget which might have a long term effect on domestic private investment.

Aid, Development and Self-reliance: The Food Sector

The participants pointed at the significant change in the food aid scenario in the backdrop of increased food production. Omar Haider Choudhury argued that food problem has both, the budgetary as well as balance of payment implications so if these two indicators improve then the food problem will resolve and also vice versa.

Quazi Shahabuddin of BIDS made a brief presentation on Food Aid, Development and Self-Reliance in Bangladesh. He pointed out that Food aid is a controversial form of development assistance. It may be categorised into three types viz.,(a) programme (non-project), (b) project and (c) emergency food aid. The differences between these are however increasingly becoming thin. Its detractors point to the political and commercial motives that have sustained food aid flows. Policies and practices of donors and recipients differed and the impact of food aid transfers too have not been identical.

Government motives in our country emanate from long experience with erratic food production in the fertile but unpredictable flood-prone river delta that makes up most of the country. Government motivations and actions have also been conditioned by public perceptions, financial and foreign exchange constraints and the need to maintain the support of the middle class in a fragile political environment. Also the government has some leeway in controlling the dispositions of stocks, despite specific donor conditions, because all food aid shipments come under its control and are mingled with other stocks in the government system. The current food aid to Bangladesh in 2000/2001 is projected to be 629 thousand MT (589 thousand MT of wheat and 40 MT of rice). However, the long-term trend in food aid is sharply downward. An important factor in recent years is that increased domestic production of food grains has reduced the country's so-called "food-gap", suggesting that in terms of availability of food grain, there is less need for food aid.

Donor motivations have also evolved over time. Between 1955 and 1971, the original disposal and trade promotion goals of U.S. Public Law (PL) 480 provided much of the rationale for food aid. But during the 1970s, development and humanitarian motivations became increasingly important for aid flow and aid donors in Bangladesh.

Food problem with target group

Omar Haider pointed out that though we have now become self reliant in food at the aggregate level. Yet 50% of our people live below poverty level, so there might be a trade-off between this kind of self-reliance and poverty reduction.

Quazi Shahabuddin, argued that Bangladesh is less vulnerable in targeting food insecurity. However, despite relative abundance of food grains in the country, a case can be made for continued food aid- not to increase availability of food grain, but to provide increased access to food for poor households. Thus food aid resources, targeted to the poor through various PFDS (Public Food Distribution System) channels (e.g. FFW, FFE, VGD etc.), can still have a major positive impact on household food security even when the overall supply situation might suggest that no food aid is needed. He added that further reduction in food aid would necessitate derivation of budgetary resources from development and poverty alleviation programme.

In this context Binayak Sen argued that the new ideas of self-reliance include the outcomes of the process and it implies the eradication of nutritional deprivation along with food insecurity. So unless food entitlement is ensured for people it is impossible to become self-reliant in food.

Raisuddin Ahmed of International Food Research Institution pointed out that the whole game of foreign-aid is not a zero-some game. Al-Hussain of Swanirvor Bangladesh opined that although we have moved from PL480 days the question of uncertainty in aid remains static.

Foreign aid and poverty alleviation

Rushdan Islam of BIDS argued that in recent years foreign aid has entered a new era in the sense that it is being channeled in the name of poverty alleviation programme. The same type of projects are packaged differently, highlighting the poverty alleviation aspect. For example, rural roads are being made in the name of employment which carry the market goods. This is not desirable for poverty alleviation for three reasons:

1) It is deceptive ensuring no significant change for poor.
2) Such a notion may substitute for real and practical actions, which would be adopted if the illusions created by such "Aid" was not present.
3) This will act as a hindrance to future initiatives for self-reliance. She also mentioned that foreign assistance with rudimentary technology and exploiting the comparative advantages with low cost unskilled labor cannot be called self-reliance.

Al-Hussain of Swanirvor Bangladesh said that none can be literally self- reliant. Availability versus supply is the main focus of poverty alleviation. Purchasing power capacity is the main pre-requisite

Institution and Self-reliance:

Sajjad Zahir of BIDS pointed out the importance of institutional self-reliance. He argued that self-reliance is the anti-thesis of aid dependence. He added that to achieve self-reliance institutional self-autonomy is important. In our country too much dependence on garment sector is going to be an element of vulnerability because the outcome indicators which enable particular institutions to assert self-autonomy does not arise only with sector specific self-reliance. In this context the institutions may be both, public and private. There remains pessimism about the sustainability of such institutions in our country. Institutions are considered as mediators between donors and local community and many institutions run with foreign aid. It may generate institutions to promote self-reliance in the long run. Again development of these institutions are largely dependent on the changes in social, political scenarios. Monzur Elahi of APEX and Omar Haider Chowdhury also re-iterated the need of political stability in our country in order to attain institutional autonomy. Moshiur Rahman of ERD pointed out that the government, as an institution in many instances does not have proper negotiating power with donors which comes from substantive economy.

Channels of communication

The participants agreed that easy modes of communication with the people are essential to make the people understand the essence of self reliance.

Raisuddin Ahmed of International Food Research Institute emphasised the need for the implementation of research and ideas. He also argued the importance of transparency in research. In this regard It was agreed that the civil society should create a development agenda of its own.

Globalization and Policy Choices

The participants strongly felt the need for evolving policy changes in consonance with globalization. In this context a lively discussion took place highlighting the problematics of globalization. Binayek Sen pointed out that globalization is an agenda setting model of the West due to which the nation is being extended into a diaspora or replicated even in a vigorous manner. According to him it has become a question over whether global forces will change local reality or local mass will be critical to influence the global conditions. Binayek also suggested that the problems of globalization often have contradictory impacts upon domestic production exports as regional attributes will also undergo changes in the globalization process.

Debopriya Bhattacharya opined that our domestic resource mobilization did not allow for full policy making autonomy. At the same time participatory policy is almost a rhetoric. In the process of globalization access to overseas capital and market access issue in the context of labor, commodity and technology are crucial factors.

Monzur Elahi argued that while the economy must respond to the changing signals at the global market place, the latter has also generated new vulnerabilities arising out of compelled withdrawal of protection, WTO regulations, and volatility of the various markets. He therefore stressed on the need for the free flow of raw materials in the globalization process.

Hussein Zillur Rahman of BIDS saw the famine of 1975 as the crucial point when policy planners started thinking of self reliance. He pinned his hope on the power of people and said that people are responding to the new realities with a new world of aspirations.

Global value package and de-colonization of mind

The participants strongly felt that a de colonization of the mind was a pre requisite for the de colonization of the self. Imtiaz Ahmed pointed out that with colonization the self got corrupted and the mind got colonized in an unthinkable manner and extent. Citing Gandhi he urged the need for genuine swaraj, which begins with the self. Maksuds Ali also emphasised on the de-colonization of the mind. He argued that the globalization process starts with a global value package to adapt the world into the Western pattern. In this context he pointed out that one could counter it with Asian values and the South-Asian cultural diversity. The poor have their own ways of survival so they would be able to swim through; it is the rich who have to evolve their survival strategies and mechanisms.

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Self-reliance: Is there a need for re-thinking?

concept of national citizenship, leading to transcultural and multicultural identities, often defying, subverting, and redefining our "hidden nationalism". Collapse of actually prevailing socialismparty-socialism of the kind demonstrated by the Soviet and East European modelsalso played an important role in removing the last vestiges of the old views of self-reliance. By the turn of new centurywith or without WTO—the need for re-thinking the old model from within became a historical necessity.

New Views and Measures of Self-Reliance

Old measures focus on indicators of import-substitution, reduced aid-dependence, greater nationalization, and increased state-control. It is easier to criticize the old models than to suggest the alternatives. In this section we shall try to pinpoint some desirable features of the new viewsand measuresof self-reliance.

Old measures of self-reliance mainly focus on some quantitative measures of import-substitution. The case of food-grain self-sufficiency provides an interesting parallel. An achievement of 100% self-sufficiency at the national levela measure favoured by the old views of self-reliancemay not guarantee that most people will be fed adequately. Bangladesh has already come close to this national target, yet 50 per cent of children under five remain malnourished judged by any acceptable anthropometrical measure. Similarly, the conventional discourse on self-reliance was mainly pre-occupied with the idea of reducing the extent of aid-dependence without aiming at decolonizing our minds towards the goal of self-development, or atmashakti, as Tagore would have put it. The very same people who propagated the virtues of curtailing external aidand for good reasons in assuming an activist position towards the aid questionalso became the staunch supporters of the state control and state-led modernization projects seen as the conscious tool of history. It has rarely been the case when the Bengali middle class intellect tried to avoid the pitfalls of the extreme views--the deep-seated populism that goes with blatant statism and autarchy, on one hand, and the blind replication of the West in the name of modernity, on the other. The almost delicate balance between East and West, between nation and civilization, between state, civil society, community and market, between the so-called growth (often seen as the right-wing agenda) and the re-distributive (often portrayed as the left-wing agenda) concerns never found its desired expression in the intellectual history of Bengal. This left a considerable mark on the ideas in other parts of South Asia as well. Here in this enterprise, both intellectually and morally, the ideas of Tagore could have provided the much-needed corrective and served as a potent ally for those who seek the middle-way. But, Tagore's moral and intellectual engagements with West and East, with progress and tradition, with knowledge and imagination remained largely outside the scholarship of the modernist discourse.

The problem with old measures of self-reliance lies in its insensitivity to more substantive concerns about well-being and freedom. Efforts to reduce foreign aid were not accompanied by effective measures to attract foreign capital, or even by commensurate stepping up of the domestic tax revenue efforts. Besides, it is not altogether self-evident that quantitative progress in aid-reduction is a good measure of our extent of independence on donors. While apparently the aid-GDP ratio has declined in recent years the incidence of aid conditionality has not declined and it is not at all certain whether our ability to deal effectively with the donors on the basis of our own developmental agenda through self-defined tasks and targets has increased over time. The stunning absence of any economic and social policy cell within the government with adequate mandate and empowermentan institutional equivalent to the Council of Economic Advisors in USA for examplemakes the pretensions of being increasingly self-reliant even more remote from reality. If self-reliance means increasing relative autonomy in policy making and policy implementation based on rational economic calculations, leading to the expansion of policy and institutional choices and reduction in vulnerability to fast changing global, regional, and national circumstances our overall record must be deemed as being pathetically dismal.

The new measure of self-reliance must focus on reducing vulnerabilities to economic and political, anticipated and unanticipated, risks and shocks and improving distributional outcomes rather than on aggregate measures of economic growth and availability. Within the aggregate measures, the focus should be on indicators that are sensitive to the qualitative progress. Within quantitative measures priority should be accorded to indicators with desirable focus on outcomes. Thus, balance-of-payments deficits would be a more desired indicator of self-reliance than any quantitative measure of aid dependence. All roads matterincluding routes dictated by market, community, and statefor achieving the needed self-dignity and self-development capacity. The indicator of self-reliance should not be consistence with any ideology but improvement in quantitative as well as qualitative respect for the least favoured position in society.

The new views of self-reliance rest on several ideational sources or discourses. Following the collapse of the state-led modernization projects, there has been a resurgence of the two apparently opposite but mutually reinforcing tendencies, one associated with new communitarianism and the other linked with new globalism. New communitarianism gives expression to the development aspirations and initiatives of the local (sub-national) communities, focusing on the importance of local government, social capital, and local public goods. It emphasizes the need for rejuvenating the local voices and traditions in the best of the post-modern sensibilities and revolt against the hegemony of global homogeneity imposed on the local in the name of modernity, progress, technological advance and the ideology of catching up. It is bent on protecting biodiversity and social pluralism, and claims the rights for environmental and cultural conservations and reproductions.

New globalism, in contrast, points to the growing inter-dependence between economies, cultures and nations, as expressed in globalised production and services, revolution in global communications, increased international migration on an unprecedented scale, enhanced role of external and transboundary factors in domestic economic and cultural processes. It also contains the seeds of subversions and inversions through the politics of Diasporas, complex negotiations with multiple identities involving citizenship, colour, race, ethnicity, language and religion. It provides the possibility of new transcultural and post-national alternatives in defining the very idea of citizenship, national identity, and civil rights. The debate on globalization is far from yet it has been so since Marx wrote about all that is solid melts into air in his Manifesto celebrating the demise of modernity. There are contesting views and visions about globalization ranging from the market-liberal view (as typified by the global corporations and hedge-fund ideologues) to the anarcho-syndicalist view (as it found expressions in the street-fighting days of Seattle protest). A middle positionknown as the adverse incorporation viewacknowledges the inevitability of globalization, but upholds the status of the Third World adversely incorporated in the international system of exchange.

The purpose of this essay is to develop a critique of the old views of self-reliance as routes to self-delusions. Both new communitarianism and new globalism are influential processes of our time, bringing new imagination and new changes in the very structure of our feeling, re-constituting the old configurations of our "selves". It is on the basis of this "re-constituted self" that the process of re-thinking the very project of self-reliance and the articulation of new views and measures of it must begin.