
“Shall India die?” Then from the world all spirituality will be extinct, all moral perfection will be extinct and in its place will reign the duality of lust and luxury [with] human soul its sacrifice. Such a thing can never be.”

S. Vivekananda

Arise Awake

to the New Indian Age

“Our call is to young India. It is the young who must be the builders of the new world — not those who accept the competitive individualism, the capitalism or the materialistic communism of the West as India’s future ideal, not those who are enslaved to old religious formulas and cannot believe in the acceptance and transformation of life by the spirit, but all who are free in mind and heart to accept a completer truth and labour for a greater ideal.”

Sri Aurobindo

The Angry Young Indian

Michel Danino

If I were to picture myself as a twenty-year-old Indian today, I would have to ask my elders how in fifty years they managed to bring the nation to such a state of degradation. I would feel both anger and contempt for the hordes of politicians and bureaucrats who have been dutifully bleeding this country white and have turned the daily life of honest Indians into a hopeless hell. But I would also ask the many good, honest, capable, cultured people of this country why they have done so little to stem the rot ... And I may possibly be tempted to do like many of my friends : go abroad, leave this hell, and fly to some “heaven” across the seas, where you do not have to pay a bribe at every step, where your talents can be used rather than crippled—in a word, where you do not have to feel ashamed of your country.

This, as I have frequently seen, is what many, if not most, young Indians carry in their hearts.

But I have also seen that it often goes a step or two further, and our “angry young Indian,” as I will call him or her, may voice the following feelings:

“See how Westerners live : their cities are modern and clean, people don’t dump garbage all around, trains and buses run on time, there is no corruption, no illiteracy, they are hard-working, they have discipline, a civic sense—while we Indians have none, we are lethargic, we have no courage to fight the system ... All right, maybe we were

great two or three or five thousand years ago ... [but] today, it is the Westerners who are superior ; they have conquered the world with their abilities and hard work. They wanted to be ‘achievers’ and they achieved ; they hunted after success and they succeeded. And if there is any hope for this country, it is only in adopting their methods, their science and technology, their management and trade—nothing else is going to bring us prosperity, certainly not our traditions which have degenerated into so much ignorant superstition : Are temples going to make the country prosperous ? Will smearing ashes on our foreheads help us build the future ? Let’s face it : culture is good for people who have nothing to do. The sooner we throw out those relics of the past and turn to healthy rationalism and progressive thinking, the better for all of us.”

That, with endless variations of course, is what most of our young people are fed with more or less subtly from their schooldays, and every day through our Westernized media. It represents fairly well today’s conventional thinking ... [and] there is a certain amount of truth in those statements, and we will do well to admit it ; but there is much blindness and facile thinking too, and we will have to confront it.

The part of truth is there for all to see : True, our cities are generally congested and unclean ... true, we have millions of illiterates ... very true, it is revolting to have to give a bribe for the smallest certificate, to pay one’s admission to a College and often one’s way to a job ... And true also, Indian tradi-

tion has often become cluttered with meaningless minutiae or a convenient excuse for rigid and retrograde attitudes.

Western “Culture”

So far so good. But there is also an ignorant part in our angry young Indian’s diatribe, a hopelessly idealized view of the West, and a hopelessly distorted view of India’s heritage. Life in Western society is not as rosy as all that, and it has its share of corruption, poverty and illiteracy. But it also has far more essential problems—otherwise why should a number of Western thinkers speak with anguish of the West’s degeneration ? Why do we constantly hear of some American snatching a semi-automatic weapon and spraying passers-by with bullets ? Why do a hundred thousand U.S. students go to school and college every day carrying a weapon ? Is it the West or India which invented manic depression, child abuse, the psychopath and the serial killer ? Or even simply the “killer” instinct ? Why is it that few Western economies can survive without massive arms sales, most of the time to Third-World countries, thus fuelling hundreds of wars around the globe while at the same time preaching peace and human rights ? In France, supposedly the most cultured of the West, hunters organized in powerful associations and lobbies fiercely defend their right to kill ; the law permits them to enter your property in pursuit of an animal, you have no right to

stop them ; every year they will sit in the path of migratory birds and shoot thousands of them in flight. Killing cranes or ducks or pigeons which have been tirelessly flying over country after country to their distant nesting grounds is the most refined of pleasures for those brutes who call themselves men and are proud of their “advanced civilization.”

I could go on with this sinister enumeration for hours. But every society has its aberrations, you may say again, haven’t we got quite a good number of them in India ? We certainly do, and apparently more and more as Indian society clumsily tries to westernize itself, believing there lies the supreme panacea. But the instances I have quoted are not aberrations, they are the logical outcome of the selfish values of Western society, which is why those monstrosities are growing not rarer and rarer, but increasingly frequent, widespread, and insane.

Not long ago, an Indian observed the West closely and said :

[Its] institutions, systems, and everything connected with political governments have been condemned as useless ; Europe is restless, does not know where to turn. The wealth and power of a country are in the hands of a few men who do not work but manipulate the work of millions of human beings. By this power they can deluge the whole earth with blood. . . . All those things that you hear about—constitutional government, freedom, liberty, and parliaments—are but jokes. . . [1]

(contd. in page 2)

The Angry Young Indian

(contd. from page 1)

This Indian's birth anniversary we are commemorating today, and he spoke those words more than a hundred years ago, on his return from his first journey to the West. In case you find Swami Vivekananda too extreme, let me quote one of the Western thinkers I alluded to just before, a French historian of science, Pierre Thuillier, who wrote a few years ago a penetrating analysis of the maladies afflicting the West for all its talk of "progress" :

Westerners remain convinced that their mode of life is the privileged and definitive incarnation of "civilization" ; they are unable to understand that this "civilization" has become as fragile as an eggshell. . . . Those who profess to be progressive clearly no longer know what a culture is ; they no longer even realize that a society can continue to function more or less normally even as it has lost its soul. . . . In their eyes, a society is dead only when it is physically destroyed; they do not realize that the decay of a civilization is inner before anything else.[2]

I could quote other Western thinkers to show that there was nothing extreme about Swami Vivekananda's statement, but let me remind you that he criticized India's own maladies equally severely, perhaps more severely than anyone else. Yet he saw too deeply to fall into the common trap of throwing out the baby with the bathwater, and he always kept his rock-solid faith in Indian civilization. Moreover, in America and Europe he met with many dissatisfied Westerners who were anxious to understand India's message. Their number has been steadily growing since then, among scholars and common people alike. The so-called "New Age" trend of the 1960s owed as much to India as to America ; a number of Western universities offer excellent courses on various aspects of Indian civilization, and if you want to attend some major symposium on Indian culture or India's ancient history, you may have to go to the U.S.A. ; some physicists are not shy of showing parallels between quantum mechanics and yogic science ; ecologists call for a recognition of our deeper connection with Nature such as we find in the Indian view of the world ; a few psychologists want to learn from Indian insights into human nature ; hatha yoga has become quite

popular, ashrams of various hues are not hard to come by, and gurus and lamas proliferate, some genuine, others less so. In France, Buddhism is at present the fastest growing religion, and more than half of the French population is said to believe in reincarnation and karma. All that, reflects an undeniable need, which neither science nor Western religions have been able to meet.

The historian Will Durant, writing in the 1950s, anticipated this phenomenon when he wrote :

It is true that, even across the Himalayan barrier, India has sent us such questionable gifts as grammar and logic, philosophy and fables, hypnotism and chess, and, above all, our numerals and our decimal system. But these are not the essence of her spirit ; they are trifles compared to what we may learn from her in the future.[3]

So, if we want to understand things at a slightly deeper level than that of the clichés of the day, we must allow our anger, however justified, to subside, and start asking a few serious questions. The first must be : Would there be in the West such a steadily growing interest in India—I mean in her spirituality and culture, not in her political and bureaucratic systems—would there be such a search for deeper things, however clumsy and confused, if our modern world was as perfect as we are told ?

The Tree of Indian Civilization

Now, let me ask you a simple question : If you have in your garden a huge old tree with some dead branches, overgrown with creepers and thorns, its foot hidden by weeds of all kinds, will you decide to fell it, even though it is still giving you shade, cool air and fruits ? Or won't you rather set to work, clear the weeds and creepers, chop off the deadwood, prune a few branches here and there, and give the tree a new youth ?

The tree is Indian civilization. It needs to be cleared and pruned, not felled. "But is it needed at all ;" you still ask, "isn't it unsuited to our modern age ?" I will answer with a truism : "modern" has no meaning—today is always modern, and yesterday always behind the times ! When Indians living in Harappan cities invented the decimal system, they were modern ; when, about the same time, they measured the periods of rotation of the planets,[4] they were mod-

ern ; when later they cast the Iron Pillar which still stands in South Delhi and challenges today's metallurgists with its non-rusting properties, they were modern ; when they pioneered discoveries in mathematics, astronomy, surgery, construction and agricultural techniques, they were modern. Now what is so special today that suddenly Indians can't be modern anymore ? Aren't our bright students who migrate to the West quite successful there, even more so than the average Westerner ? Withdraw overnight all Indians from the U.S.A., and that country will be paralyzed. So Indians can still be modern, efficient, hard-working—but abroad, not in India !

Our second serious question must therefore be : Why this terrible stagnation here in India ? There is no time to detail here the historical causes up to Independence, so let me just say, rather sketchily, that from the time of the Indus-Saraswati civilization up to the Gupta period at least, that is three to four millennia, we find the Indian subcontinent bursting with vitality and creativity in every field, constantly adapting and renewing itself ; the decline clearly began with the repeated waves of Muslim invasions, which increasingly exhausted that vitality, though without succeeding in killing it altogether. That made the British conquest ridiculously easy, and India's torpor was to the best advantage of the new rulers, who were shrewd enough to encourage it, slowly and systematically destroying the remaining life in the country, its native industries, crafts, and educational system.

Post-Independent India

That was India's condition at Independence. But there is no point blaming Muslim or British invaders when the country has had a full fifty years to rebuild and revitalize itself. India's tragedy was the direction imposed upon it after Independence with a blind faith in a Soviet-type socialistic system, a rigid five-year planning with a huge and ruinous public sector, an absurd degree of centralization and nationalization, and a constant interference in every field of life which did nothing except grow ever more unwieldy, inefficient, self-contained, arrogant, corrupt, unaccountable, oblivious and contemptuous of the man-in-the-street or the man-in-the-village. Thus have the many "good, honest, capable, cultured people"

whom I mentioned at the beginning come to shun Indian politics as the dirty field it has indeed become, a "goonda-raj"[5] in Sri Aurobindo's words of 1935.

Blaming India's present degradation on her ancient culture or civilization is not merely ignorant, it is dishonest. And those who are fond of such self-deprecation are usually the very ones who profit from the present system. They will criticize village superstitions but will overlook the far worse superstitions of our perverted "socialism," "secularism," and other high-sounding isms. They will throw a fit at the least mention of sati but will not mind if thousands of young Indians commit suicide every year out of desperation. They will condemn the caste system while raising one community against another even more systematically than the British did.

What has all this degeneration to do with Indian culture or tradition ? Indian culture is largely about dharma, which is doing one's duty sincerely and with all one's strength. Is that a crime ? Ancient scriptures have thousands of pages on a ruler's duties towards his subjects—and what do our modern rulers do ? Step No.1 : perversely equate dharma and religion ; step No.2 : declare that secularism demands that religion must be kept separate from politics ; step No.3 : therefore, dharma must be carefully kept out of politics ! And not only out of politics, but out of education and public life as well—out of our brains, out of our lives. And indeed, that is exactly what has happened over the years : dharma has been uprooted. So it is no surprise if countless Indians have developed a mixture of disgust and hatred for all symbols of authority.

"There is no power in the universe to injure us unless we first injure ourselves,"[6] said Swami Vivekananda, as always to the point. "Too much of inactivity, too much of weakness, too much of hypnotism has been and is upon our race."[7]

The only way to rebuild India is to reverse the tide and get men and women of quality to reconquer the battlefield instead of running away from it. Quality means substance, it means "culture" in the true sense of the term. Indian culture has always been concerned with the quality of the human being, because it has always taught that life is not as it appears, that we have a

(contd. in page 3)

... there is one thing to know : Great sages come with special messages for the world, and not for name; but their followers throw their teachings overboard and fight over their names — this is verily the history of the world. I do not take into any consideration whether people accept his name or not, but I am ready to lay down my life to help his teachings, his life, and his message spread all over the world. What I am most afraid of is the worship-room. It is not bad in itself, but there is a tendency in some to make this all in all and set up that old-fashioned nonsense over again — this is what makes me nervous. I know why they busy themselves with those old, effete ceremonials. Their spirit craves for work, but having no outlet they waste their energy in ringing bells and all that.

I am giving you a new idea. If you can work it out, then I shall know you are men and will be of service.... Make an organized paln. A few cameras, some maps, globes, and some chemicals, etc. are needed. The next thing you want is a big hut. Then you must get together a number of poor, idigent folk. Having done all this, show them pictures to teach them astronomy, geography, etc., and preach Shri Ramakrishna to them. Try to have their eyes opened as to what has taken place or is taking place in different countries, what this world is like, and so forth. You have got lots of poor and ignorant folk there. Go to their cottages, from door to door, in the evening, at noon, any time — and open their eyes. Books etc. won't do — give them oral teaching.

Them slowly extend your centres. Can you do all this? Or only bell-ringing?

Come! Apply yourselves heart and soul to it. The day of gossip and ceremonials is gone, my boy, **you must work now**. Now, let me see how far a Bengali's religion will go. What is wanted is a power of organization — do you understand me? Have any of you got that much brain in your head? If you do, let your mind work. Brother Tarak, Sharat, and Hari will be able to do it. — has got very little originality, but is a very good workman and persevering, which is an essential necessity, and is executive to a degree... We want some disciples fiery young man — do you see? — intelligent and brave, who dare to go to the jaws of Death, and are ready to swim the ocean across. Do you follow me? We want hundreds like that, both men and women. Try your utmost for that end alone. Make converts right and left, and put them into our purity-drilling machine.

...We must electrify society, electrify the world. Idle gossip and barren ceremonials won't do. Ceremonials are meant for householders, your work is the distribution and propagation of thought-currents. If you can do that, then it is all right....

Let character be formed, and then I shall be in your midst. Do you

see?

We want converts at any risk. Go and tell them, and try yourselves heart and soul.

Let each one of you have a hundred heads tonsured — young educated men, not fools. Then you are heroes. We must make a sensation. Give up your passive attitude, gird your loins, and stand up. Let me see you make some electric circuits between Calcutta and Madras. Start centres at places, go on always making converts.

A huge spiritual tidal wave is coming — he who is low shall become noble, and he who is ignorant shall

become the teacher of great scholars —

through his grace.

“Arise! Awake! And stop not till the



goal is reached.” Life is ever expanding, contraction is death. The self-seeking man who is looking after his personal comforts and leading a lazy life — there is no room for him even in hell. He alone is a child of Shri Ramakrishna who is moved to pity for all creatures and exerts himself for them even at the risk of incurring personal damnation, “others are vulgar people”. Whoever, at this great spiritual juncture, will stand up with a courageous heart and go on spreading from door to door, from village to village, his message, is alone my brother, and a son of His.

Those that care for their personal

comforts and seek a lazy life, who are ready to sacrifice all before their personal whims, are none of us; let them pack off, while yet there is time. Propagate his character, his teaching, his religion. This is the only spiritual practice, the only worship, this verily is the means, and this the goal. Arise! Arise! A tidal wave is coming! Onward! Men and women, down to the Chandala are pure in his eyes. Onward! Onward! There is no time to care for name, or fame, or Mukti, or Bhakti! We shall look to these some other time. Now in this life let us infinitely spread his lofty character, his sublime life, his infinite soul. This is the only work — there is nothing else to do. Wherever his name will reach, the veriest worm will attain divinity, nay, is actually attaining it, don't you see it? Is it a child's play? Is it silly prattle? Is it foolery? - “Arise! Awake!” Great Lord! He is at our back. I cannot write any more — Onward! I only tell you this, that **whoever reads this letter will imbibe my spirit!** Have faith! Onward! Great Lord!... I feel as if somebody is moving my hand to write in this way. Onward! Great Lord! Everyone will be swept away! Take care, he is coming! Whoever will be ready to serve him — no, not him but his children — the poor and the downtrodden, the sinful and the afflicted, down to the very worm — who will be ready to serve these, in them he will manifest himself. Through their tougue the Goddess of Learning Herself will speak, and the Divine Mother— the Embodiment of all Power — will enthrone Herself in their hearts

Yours affectionately
Vivekanda.

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(contd. from page 2)

divine something within us, that we essentially are that divine something. That is why, with all its faults, the Indian substance remains among the best in the world— early European travellers to India said it, Swami Vivekananda said it, Sri Aurobindo said it, others said it, and the slightest opportunity can still show it to the eye that looks deeper than the surface. So if you want to revitalize the country, tap the real source of life and strength in yourself to start with. Keep the essence of this country's long journey through time, keep the core of its experi-

ence ; give it as many new forms, as many new expressions as you wish. No one says we should bring back the bygone past ; that would be a foolish and fruitless attempt. “Our past with all its faults and defects should be sacred to us,” said Sri Aurobindo, “but the claims of our future with its immediate possibilities should be still more sacred.”[8] Then, if you find some aspects of Indian culture outdated, first understand them, then get rid of them—chop off the dead-wood. If you want a prosperous country, tackle the root causes instead of being brainwashed by the slogans of the moment —remove the weeds and creepers. If you want to imitate the West, imitate

its hard work, its energy and self-discipline, not its crude greed and tragic lack of direction—don't fell the tree. Preserve it, water it, nourish it, care for it—it is a magic tree, a life-giving tree, and its most important fruit is yet to come.

(Extract from the keynote address by the title **‘Is Indian Culture Obsolete ?’** presented at the Vivekananda Jayanthi Lecture for Youth organized by the BVK at Thiruvananthapuram (Trivandrum) on 12 January 2000.)

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- [1] Swami Vivekananda, *Lectures from Colombo to Almora* (Calcutta : Advaita Ashram, 1992), p. 64-65.
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Report on the Collapse of the West 1999-2002 (Paris : Fayard, 1995), p.17-19. [My apologies to the author for taking the liberty to use the present tense in this extract, while his whole book is written in the past tense, being humorously presented as a “report” written in 2081 by a commission of inquiry on the West's collapse.

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[8] Sri Aurobindo, *India's Rebirth*, p. 110.



There are two kinds of men in this world; those who do things and those who get the credit for them. It is much better to belong to the first class because there is less competition.

Physics & Vedanta: So much in common

Mani Bhaumik

The ancient Vedantic concepts that we all cut our spiritual teeth on are a part of the grand reconciliation now going on between science and religion.

We find these concepts embodied in the extensive literature starting with the four Vedas and their subsequent elaborations in the Upanishads. The recurring theme of these perceptions is that, underlying all physical reality, there is one abstract entity, Brahman, with the quality of consciousness. Having created the universe, Brahman remains present everywhere today, administering basic aspects of everything in our cosmos.

Recent scientific discoveries seem to validate the concept of Brahman. Physicists and cosmologists are close to proving that there is one source behind the physical universe, and they call this source the unified field. In a profound sense, Brahman, the Vedantic concept and the unified field of physics appear to be synonymous.

All the physical objects and phenomena around us are not illusory or maya, but are quite real. However, what we see is only the tip of the iceberg. Underneath it is the interplay of an abstract substance called energy, which in turn

is controlled by something even more abstract: The fields that underlie all physical reality.

The puzzle that Albert Einstein attempted to solve and which contemporary physicists are coming close to explaining is: Why, if everything is eventually made up of one single substance, energy, does nature provide different types of fields for energy to work its magic? Physicists now realise that these divisions of fields are nothing but different aspects of a single entity, the unified field.

The biography of the universe, as related by cosmologists and physicists, account for everything in its nearly 14-billion-year history except for an extremely small fraction of a second after the onset of time itself.

We find that very close to the big-bang beginning, the unified field was present in an infinitesimal nugget, and the various fields were unified at incredibly high temperatures. As the universe cooled by expansion, the fields sequentially unfolded, creating everything.

There are manifest and unmanifest fields. For example, the earth's gravitational field is a manifest field, whose operation we see

in our everyday life. So are the other fields manifest in the contents of the earth, providing various functions. But if we took the earth away from its orbit, all the manifest fields will go away with it.

However, the very significant feature of the universe is that the unmanifest fields, the essence having the blueprint, will still be there, even in empty space. Because the unmanifest quantum fields fill all space and time.

Understanding this inherent primary reality of our cosmos is an essential element in grasping the concept of Brahman. The unmanifest unified field, possessing the blueprint of everything, pervades all space being encoded in space itself. How can that be?

Space appears to us to be nothing more than a stage where events are played out. However, Einstein showed that space, time and fields cannot exist separately, but are always magnificently intertwined in their operation.

It seems inevitable at this point that we should wonder whether the unified field possesses the quality of consciousness which is an integral part of the total picture of the universe.

At first glance, the phenomenon of consciousness looks utterly incompatible with our general scientific view of the world. However, when examined in light of the bizarre revelations of quantum physics, consciousness is not unlike the primary reality of the quantum fields.

Some prominent contemporary physicists indeed believe that the mysteries of consciousness and quantum physics are linked. Most quantum systems have properties that are complementary and inseparable.

From this perspective, the primary realities of unified field and consciousness may be viewed as inseparable aspects of the same underlying process, permeating all space and time.

Today, science and religion seem to be saying the same thing: A single entity created the universe and is still present everywhere, maintaining and governing the fundamental machinery of everything in this universe.

(Mani Bhaumik is an elected fellow of the American Physical Society as well as the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers and is the author of the bestseller **Code Name God**)

(Courtesy : The Times of India)

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Test your Culture Quotient

Why do we say Namaskar when we meet each other?

To greet another person, a friend or acquaintance, to pay respect to an elder, a holy person or a temple deity, a Hindu joins his or her hands with palms together, bows down in front of the other person, and says Namaskar, Namaste, or Pranam — meaning Reverent Salutations.

In Hindu view, the Supreme One dwells in the heart of each being as the individual self. The joining of hands symbolizes the idea that in the meeting of two persons, the Self actually meets Itself. Joining hands also symbolizes humility.

Thus when a Hindu joins his hands and says Namaskar, he actually says in humility, "I bow to God in you; I love you and I respect you, as there is no one like you."

"A human being is part of the whole called by us as universe... We experience ourselves, our thoughts and feelings as something separate from the rest. A kind of optical delusion of consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from the prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. The true value of human beings is determined by the measure and the sense in which they have obtained liberation from the self. We shall require a substantial new manner of thinking if humanity is to survive." — Albert Einstein

We invite your comments, suggestions and relevant articles at patra.alaap@rediffmail.com

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