

### From the General Editor's Desk . . .

More than half a century has elapsed since India became free. During this long period we have undertaken reconstructions and reformations of many aspects of our society and economy. Many ups and downs have occurred in politics. Many significant and even some epoch-making achievements have been made in the fields of science and technology. Many models have been attempted for the progress and development of the nation. Many commissions have submitted their recommendations for improvement in the field of education and culture. In short, it may be said that attempts after attempts have been made by the nation-builders, educationists, scientists and social workers to improve the quality of life and make India a great nation.

Despite these efforts, India appears to be still groping in the dark in its quest for identity. The search for its identity is the domain of its culture and tradition. 'What is Indianness?' is still a very relevant question for the nation-builders because it is on this basic concept of India's personality that policies, programmes, plans and visions of the nation-builders are formulated or reformulated for a correct and suitable model for the progress and development of the Indian society as a whole. It is unfortunate that the search for India's identity is forgotten in the glamour of western notions of progress, development and modernity. With the beginning of scientific, technological and industrial revolution in the West, disciplines like sociology, anthropology, archaeology and various models like the positivist, materialist, rationalist, etc. emerged on the scene to study Indian culture and tradition from their own point of view, of course, with the claim that their approach is really scientific. On the one hand there occurred a breach between science and spirituality and on the other hand too much obsession with physical, materialistic and object-oriented interpretation of cultural evolution was observed. Indian culture became a victim of such superfluous physical, materialistic and artifact-related interpretations. Max Müller, who is considered a sympathiser of Indian culture, expressed the view that India cannot teach us anything because the Vedic religion is on its way to decline due to its polytheistic, naturalistic and ritualistic orientations and it is Christianity which has to take advantage of it and take its place. Keith viewed Sanskrit literature as inferior to Latin literature. Fergusson branded Indian art as decadent. Elphinston did not find any progress done by Indians in any field. Louis Renou and others viewed Vedic and Buddhist traditions as full of magic and ritual. In brief, Indian culture was interpreted by these Western savants as a decadent, unscientific and unprogressive phenomena which needed to be replaced by a scientific and progressive religio-philosophic religion like Christianity as well as by a scientific, rational and progressive model of socio-economic development and liberal, democratic tradition of the Occident.

Similarly, archaeologists interpreted Indian culture on the basis of material culture, because in their opinion this is the only scientific method of studying the past. Archaeology as a methodology with its various scientific techniques has made lot of contribution in understanding the material and social evolution of the civilization from pre-historic times to the present. However, a valid question arises as to what is the sum total of Indian culture and whether archaeologists' interpretation of culture has really anything to do with the heart and soul of Indian culture which is really value-based and value-oriented. Culture is not simply the outer manifestation of the inner values and ideals of man and society. Archaeology is incomplete in interpreting Indian culture as a whole unless it takes recourse to the

literary traditional sources for knowing the values and ideals of the society which make the foundations of the modern culture as such.

Another interpretation that became quite popular in the twentieth century is the materialist interpretation of history and culture. It interprets history and culture on the basis of relationship and means of production. D.D. Kosambi, a great exponent of this model in India, considers the Aryans as barbaric and inferior to the Harappans; and takes the *bhakti* of the *Gīta* as a perfect example of the feudal ethos of medieval India. In the opinion of the so-called progressive and scientific historians, Indian culture and tradition can be interpreted only in the light of socio-economic formation and mode of production. As if man is firstly and lastly merely an economic being without any values and ideals. This interpretation suffers from the lacunae that it projects man as an animal—a physical body—or as a material object. But it is wrong to say that man is only a physical entity or a machine as Decarte and Newton thought. Man has values, ideals and beyond body he has mind, emotions, consciousness and ultimately a soul. He lives and dies for this inner self popularly known as *prāṇa-śakti*. The sociologists and anthropologists interpret culture in the light of universal elements, for instance, tribal culture and try to superimpose these ideas on cultures. These are probabilistic trends and not scientific laws. Consequently, culture and history, which are particularistic in terms of time, space and tradition cannot be studied deeply by resorting to such universal laws and trends as sociologists and anthropologists adopt.

In short, it may be said that various interpretations of Indian culture such as imperialist (liberal orientalist), sociological, anthropological and archaeological, cannot give us a true insight into the heart and soul of Indian culture mainly because all of them are embedded in materialist, object-oriented and one-sided view of man and his life.

Aurobindo has rightly visualised Indian culture as a dialogue between soul, body and mind. It is this internal dialogue among soul, mind and body which has formed Indian culture. And it is this spiritual tradition which has given vitality and life to the tradition. It is not simply a theory or a logic but a practical style of life termed as *sādhanā*. It is this perennial philosophy of an invisible but meaningful dialogue among soul, mind and body that has given life and breath to Indian culture. He has rightly termed it as *Bhārata-śakti*. Similarly, Coomaraswamy has interpreted Indian culture as based upon universal, eternal spiritual values expressed through myths and symbols in religion, art and philosophy. The great philosopher Śaṅkarācārya has correctly said that there is a continuous reflection of the self on the non-self. And it is this reflection which is the basis of values in life. Vivekananda, Gandhi, Radhakrishnan and many others have emphasised this spiritual orientation of Indian culture. Without understanding this interpretation of Indian culture, no personality of India can be evolved.

It is in the light of this idealistic interpretation of Indian culture, on the lines of Hegel, Plato, Vivekananda, Aurobindo and Coomaraswamy that a true identity of India and Indianness may be developed. It is only on the basis of this identity that India's concept of progress and development may be formulated or reformulated. It is in the light of this identity rooted in the soil and tradition of India that India may emerge as a great force in the community of nations and perform its noble task of revitalising the world order by its mission of spirituality and peace.

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