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A close-up photograph of a young woman with long, dark hair, looking down intently at a globe. The globe is positioned in the lower-left corner of the frame, showing a map of the world with various colors and lines. The woman's face is the central focus, with her eyes and nose clearly visible as she gazes at the globe. The lighting is soft, highlighting her features.

**60 Years of Friendship with  
India**



**INDIA:**

People in many parts of the world are receiving letters this month postmarked with a unique tribute.

The Indian Government commemorated the first anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi's death on 30 January by stamping every letter mailed that day with a quotation from the great leader's favourite prayer.

The postmark, much more than a mere stamp collector's item in today's world, says: "May God grant good sense to everyone."

(The UNESCO Courier, 1949)

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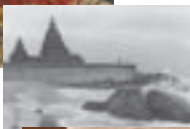
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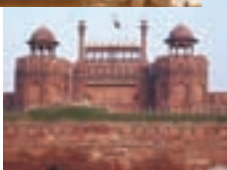
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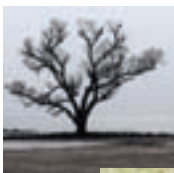
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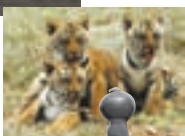
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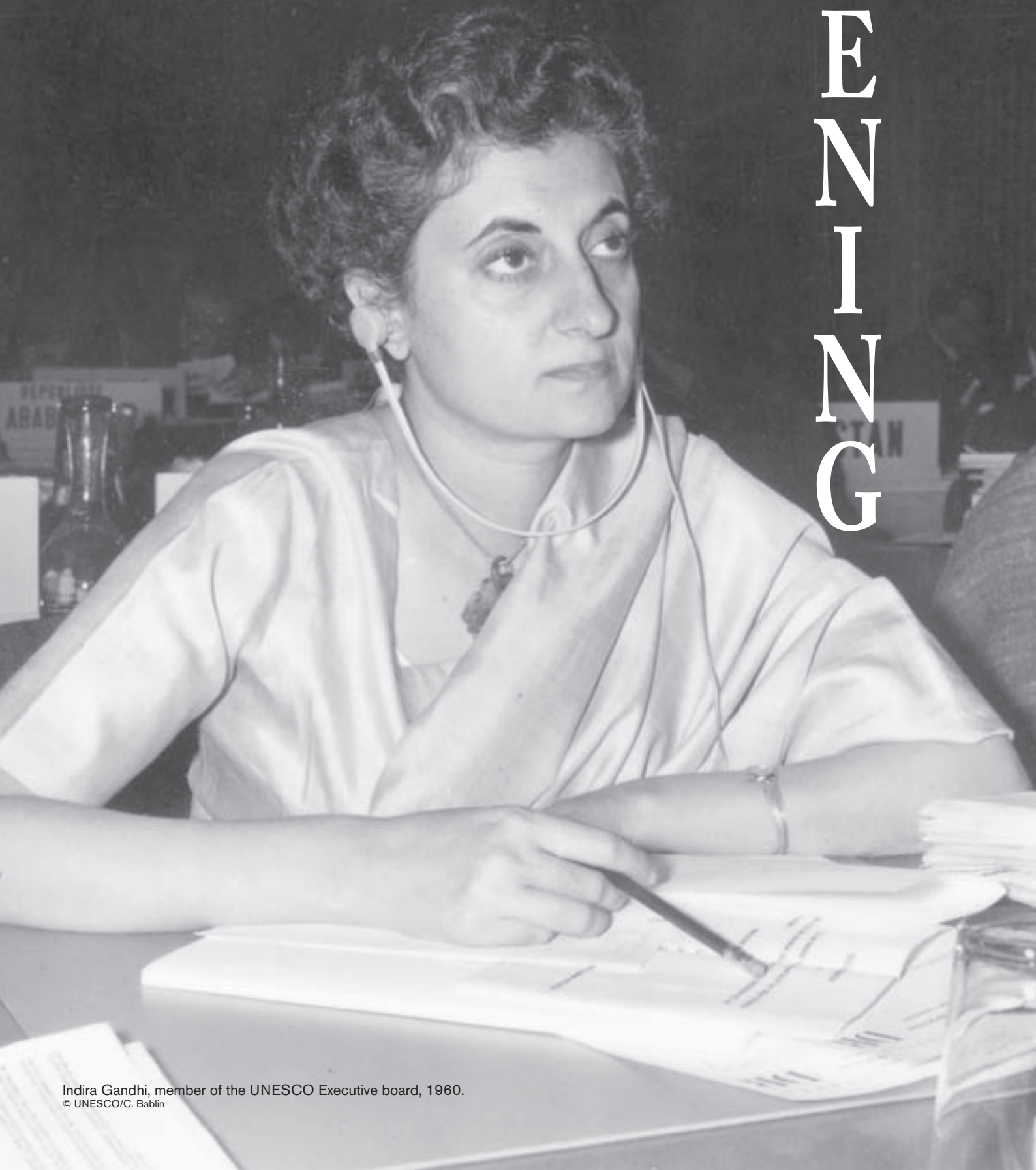
Young girl discovering the world during a geography class, New Delhi.

## 60 Years of Friendship: India in The Unesco Courier 1949 - 2009

"November 29th was celebrated widely in India as UNESCO Day", read the June 1948 edition of *The UNESCO Courier*. Six decades later, on 11 November, 2009, India is inviting our Organization to celebrate its National Education Day. We are proud to do so, since education goes to the heart of UNESCO's mandate. It is also a key element of India-UNESCO cooperation, as we can read in the very first articles on India to appear in this special issue of the magazine, such as 'The Gandhi Method of Education for Life' or 'The Bonds Uniting India and UNESCO', which were most recently reaffirmed with the approval by the General Conference of India's generous proposal to create the Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development as an invaluable new tool in promoting UNESCO's mission. As the pages of this special issue show, our cooperation has covered a spectrum of other subjects ranging from tangible and intangible cultural heritage and biosphere reserves to human rights. These articles are trend-setters in their significance, as they are penned by such prestigious names as Sir Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Satyajit Ray, Vishwanath S. Naravane, Amartya Sen, Rajendra Pachauri, Sundara Ramaswamy, and Romila Thapar, to mention just a few. Although sixty years of close collaboration cannot be summarized in sixty pages, this special issue of *The UNESCO Courier* aims to present a glimpse of India's presence over the years in the magazine.

KōICHIRO MATSUURA, Director-General, 11 November 2009

# O P E N I N G



Indira Gandhi, member of the UNESCO Executive board, 1960.  
© UNESCO/C. Babin



The UNESCO Gift Coupons Programme has made this discussion group at the Bombay City Social Education Centre possible.

# The Bonds Uniting India and UNESCO

by Sir Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan

India is a young nation, but it has inherited prodigious, economic and educational problems which affect nearly 350 million people. Our illiteracy figure is as high as 85%. Though 70% of our people work on agriculture, we are short of food grain. Our standard of living is low. These are a few illustrations. Our leaders are aiming at building up a welfare state, at improving agriculture, at industrializing the country. We have undertaken schemes for large-scale irrigation, scientific research, and are building up technical institutions to train scientific and technical personnel. And so we look to UNESCO for all the assistance it may render us in transforming ourselves.

India has been a foundation member of UNESCO, whose objectives have always appealed to the Indian mind and conscience. The delegations to UNESCO included some of our foremost scientists and scholars. We have set up a National Commission to cooperate with UNESCO and carry out its principles in our country. Above all, India believes in the healing power of the principles of UNESCO. We live in an age which is torn by conflict, fear and hatred. If we look below the surface of political events we become aware of the massive emotional currents which are working to produce a new life in society. At the heart of the nature of things, there is always a dream. The greatest gift of life is the dream of a higher way of living. At the heart of the universe there is this dream of justice for all men. When the framework of society becomes a cramped prison, it explodes by the explosive power latent in society. This is revolution. And every revolution causes suf-

fering to innocent people, who have to pay for the atrocities and arrogance, laziness and selfishness of the forerunners or leaders. This does not, however, justify embracing social systems that cramp the free spirit of the individual. Democracy is a balance between the organizing power of the state and the enterprise of the individual. Enterprise, adventure is what saves civilization from staleness, from boredom. A civilization that is adventurous is free, vigorous, and creative. Where adventure is lacking, we have life without depth; literature without spirit, science concerned with the elaboration of details, art busy with trivialities. The spirit of man craves for freedom, for co-operation. We must choose between wisdom or folly, co-operation or extinction. No nation has a monopoly of either wisdom or folly. UNESCO attempts to work for a just and enduring peace, for constructive adjustment or conflicting interests. Humanity's inability, nay refusal, to use the UNESCO method and deal with world problems in a civilized way is the most distressing feature of our time. India believes in UNESCO, in the paths of peace and co-operation. We are using all the instruments, the visual arts, theatre, dance, music, cinema, wireless etc., for this one supreme purpose of fostering the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind.

(*The UNESCO Courier*, 1951- 5)

President of the Executive board of UNESCO in 1949, **Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan** (1888 - 1975), was Indian Ambassador in Moscow when he wrote this article. He was President of India from 1962 to 1967.



# COURIER

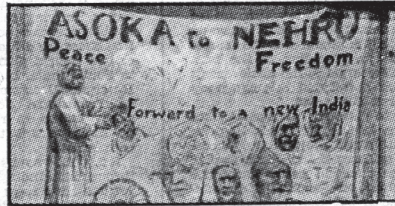
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Volume II.—No 4.

MAY 1949.



Mahatma Gandhi greets an old Muslim peasant during a tour he made in 1947 in an effort to bring about Hindu-Muslim unity.



## INDIA IN THE WORLD TODAY



Pandit Nehru, Indian Prime Minister (right) with Maulana Azad, Education Minister (third from right) and Sir S. Radhakrishnan (head partly shown on left), at last month's inaugural meeting of the Indian National Commission for Unesco.

LAST month, the Indian National Commission for Co-operation with Unesco held its inaugural meeting in New Delhi to affirm the increasingly important role that India and the countries of Asia are playing in the development of education, science and culture.

"Already, India is numbered among the greatest States of an ancient Continent which history now summons to new responsibilities. Already, under the enlightened leadership of H.E. Pandit Nehru, she has played a worthy part in the United Nations and their Agencies," Dr. Torres Bodet stated in a message to the Indian Commission.

"You have a rich and ancient culture," the Director-General of Unesco wrote, "and a conception of Man's nature and destiny which is a rampart against the materialism which stalks mankind today. India has her appointed place within Unesco. Her consequence will grow yet more and I myself expect great things from her. It will be the high duty of your Commission to secure the co-operation from your thinkers, scientists and artists which we need to sustain and enrich us."

Echoing the spirit of Rabindranath Tagore, Dr. Torres Bodet continued: "To the universal goals Unesco seeks, there is but one path—that of joint effort by all cultures, to which they bring, not the drabness of uniformity, but the fullness of their rich diversity, with mutual understanding to cement the whole.

### Gandhian Ideals for Peace

"Of all the men of our day," he said, "he whose whole life best exemplified the ideals of peace and human brotherhood was your own Mahatma Gandhi. May I, then, pass on to you his definition, for Unesco, of the moral and philosophic bases for a universal declaration of human rights:

"I learned from my illiterate but very wise mother that all rights to be deserved and preserved came from duty well done. Thus the very right to live accrues to us only when we do the duty of citizenship of our world."

"We have taken to our hearts that message," the Director-General concluded, "It will guide our future efforts, as it will—I know—your own."

THE Indian National Commission, at its final meeting, unanimously adopted a resolution recognizing that "Mahatma Gandhi was the greatest exponent of peace, non-violence and international understanding" and that "in the troubled state of the world today, the people in all countries need his message and methods," and agreed to set up a committee to "initiate, direct and stimulate the study of ideas and techniques expounded by Gandhiji."

In the light of these studies, the resolution added, a world-wide programme of action to promote universal peace and goodwill among all nations should be

*Asian culture is a vast mosaic, with a discerning nucleus in India. That mosaic has, through the ages, been put together and taken apart, many times.*

*Last month, the Indian National Commission for Unesco was officially inaugurated in the presence of the leading thinkers, scientists and statesmen of India and Asia.*

*To mark this occasion, the Unesco Courier is devoting this special Supplement to some of the aspects of education, science and culture which are shaping the New India of today.*

prepared for presentation to the Fifth General Conference of Unesco, to be held in May 1950.

Inaugurating the Indian National Commission Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister of India, told the meeting—which was attended by over 300 persons from different parts of Asia—to look at world problems against the massive background of rapidly changing Asia. He stressed the new and vital importance of Asia in the world today, and the need for moral and spiritual values, and an understanding of the basic problems which have caused "the vast upsurge in men's minds all over Asia."

"We are today passing through a very vital and important stage in world history," Pandit Nehru declared, "when another shift takes place in the centre of gravity. What happens in Asia is likely to have a powerful effect not only on Asia but also on Europe and the rest of the world."

In the past, he said, the great problems of Asia were rather neglected and enough attention had not been paid to them either in the political or economic sphere.

NOW, he went on, "things have happened in the world which have resulted in giving an inevitable importance to Asia and that importance is likely to be greater and greater."

"I know that there is a good deal of goodwill and a desire to help, but what I want is a mental appreciation of the fact that Asia will be dominant in the sense that certain problems dominate the world."

Behind the political aspect, Nehru continued, lay all kinds of mass upsurges and there Unesco could do a tremendous job.

"I am glad that Unesco is spreading out more and more, spreading out not only to the countries of Asia and Africa, but spreading out in the sense that it has descended from the 'ivory tower' attitude."

Noting that most people, in the world today, do not have some standard by which they can judge events or policy or even their actions, the Indian Prime Minister said: "Unless you find some yard measure, some standard of values, it will not be good for us or for humanity. I think it is the business of Unesco to see to it that these values are maintained."

In an impressive extemporaneous speech, Sir S. Radhakrishnan, chairman of Unesco's Executive Board and one of the leading thinkers of India today, stressed the non-political character of Unesco, reminding his audience that if they had a quarrel with certain political leaders this did not mean that they were quarrelling with the literary figures of those countries. He cited Goethe and Kant, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky as examples. "Mankind must learn," he said, "if it wishes to survive—and the only way it can survive is by surrendering part of its sovereignty and serving a common world society."

If humanity desired to develop a world society, he added, it must develop and educate people in world citizenship and make them understand that their national loyalties must be subordinated to the patriotism of the whole human race.

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Minister of Education, in his inaugural address, expressed the hope that the Indian Commission would serve as the focus of the nation's educational, scientific and cultural activity, that it would help to enrich national life in those fields and also make for better co-operation and understanding with other countries.

# All Men Are Brothers



(c) American information service

Mahatma Gandhi.

## UNESCO's Tribute to Mahatma Gandhi

UNESCO is paying a special tribute to Mahatma Gandhi. It renders homage to both the person and the writings of a man whose spiritual influence has extended throughout the world in a new book entitled *All Men Are Brothers*, which presents the life and thoughts of the great teacher as set down in Gandhi's own words. The aim of the texts is to illustrate and make better known the different aspects of Gandhi's personality and writings. The English edition will be followed by French and Spanish versions. On pages 10, 11 and 12 we publish a section of Gandhi's thoughts taken from *All Men Are Brothers*. The complete introduction to the UNESCO volume specially written by Sir Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, is presented on the opposite page.

(The UNESCO Courier, 1949 - 4)



**A** great teacher appears once in a while. Several centuries may pass by without the advent of such a figure. He is known by his life. He first lives and then tells others how they may live like him. Gandhi is such a teacher. These selections from his speeches and writings compiled with great care and discrimination by Sri Krishna Kripalani will give the reader some idea of the workings of Gandhi's mind, its development and the practices he adopted.

Gandhi's life was rooted in India's religious tradition, with its emphasis on a passionate search for the truth, a profound reverence for life, the ideal of non-attachment and the readiness to sacrifice all for the knowledge of God. He lived his whole life in the perpetual quest of truth: "I live and move and have my being in the pursuit of this goal!"

A life which has no roots, which is lacking in depth of background is a superficial one. There are some who assume that when we see what is right, we will do it. Even when we know what is right, it does not follow that we will choose and do right. We are overcome by powerful impulses, we do wrong and betray the light in us. "In our present state we are, according to the Hindu doctrine, only partly human; the lower part of us is still animal; only the conquest of our lower instincts by love can slay the animal in us." It is by a process of trial and error, self-research and austere discipline that the human being moves, step by painful step, along the road to fulfilment.

**G**andhi's religion was a rational and ethical one. He would not accept any belief that did not appeal to his reason, or any injunction which his conscience did not commend. If we believe in God, not merely with our intellect but with our whole being, we will love all mankind without any distinction of race or class, nation or religion. We will work for the unity of mankind. "All my actions have their rise in my inalienable love of mankind." "I have known no distinction between relatives and strangers, countrymen and foreigners, white and coloured, Hindus and Indians of other faiths whether Muslims, Parsees, Christians or Jews. I may say that my heart has been incapable of making any such distinctions." "By a long process of prayerful discipline I have ceased for over forty years to hate anybody." All men are brothers and no human being should be a stranger to another. The welfare

of all, 'sarvodaya', should be our aim. God is the common bond that unites all human beings. To break this bond even with our greatest enemy is to tear God himself to pieces. There is humanity even in the most wicked.

This view leads naturally to the adoption of non-violence as the best means for solving all problems, national and international. Gandhi affirmed that he was not a visionary but a practical idealist. Non-violence is meant not merely for saints and sages but for the common people also. "Non-violence is the law of our species, as violence is the law of the brute. The spirit lies dormant in the brute and he knows no law but that of physical might. The dignity of man requires obedience to a higher law – to the strengths of the spirit."

**G**andhi was the first in human history to extend the principle of non-violence from the individual to the social and political plane. He entered politics for the purpose of experimenting with non-violence and establishing its validity. "Some friends have told me that truth and non-violence have no place in politics and worldly affairs. I do not agree. I have no use for them as a means of individual salvation. Their introduction and application in everyday life has been my experiment all along." "For me, politics bereft of religion are absolute dirt, ever to be shunned. Politics concerns nations and that which concerns the welfare of nations must be one of the concerns of a man who is religiously inclined, in other words, a seeker after God and Truth. For me God and Truth are convertible terms, and if any one told me that God was a God of untruth or a God of torture I would decline to worship him. Therefore, in politics also we have to establish the Kingdom of Heaven."

In the struggle of India's independence, he insisted that we should adopt civilized methods of non-violence and suffering. His stand for the freedom of India was not based on any hatred for Britain. We must hate the sin not the sinner. "For me patriotism is the same as humanity. I am patriotic because I am human and humane. I will not hurt England or Germany to serve India." He believed that he rendered a service to the British in helping them to do the right thing by India. The result was not only the liberation of the Indian people but an increase in the moral resources of mankind.

In the present nuclear context, if we wish to save the world, we should adopt the principles of non-violence. Gandhi said:

"I did not move a muscle, when I first heard that an atom bomb had wiped out Hiroshima. On the contrary I said to myself: unless now the world adopts non-violence, it will spell certain suicide for mankind." In any future conflict we cannot be certain that neither side will deliberately use nuclear weapons. We have the power to destroy in one blinding flash all that we have carefully built up across the centuries by our endeavour and sacrifice. By a campaign of propaganda we condition men's minds for nuclear warfare. Provocative remarks fly about freely. We use aggression even in words; harsh judgements, ill-will, anger, are all insidious forms of violence.

In the present predicament when we are not able to adjust ourselves to the new conditions which science has brought about, it is not easy to adopt the principles of non-violence, truth and understanding. But on that ground we should not give up the effort. While the obstinacy of the political leaders puts fear into our hearts, the common sense and conscience of the peoples of the world give us hope.

With the increased velocity of modern changes we do not know what the world will be a hundred years hence. We cannot anticipate the future currents of thought and feeling. But years may go their way, yet the great principles of satya and ahimsa, truth and non-violence, are there to guide us. They are the silent stars keeping holy vigil above a tired and turbulent world. Like Gandhi we may be firm in our conviction that the sun shines above the drifting clouds.

**W**e live in an age which is aware of its own defeat and moral coarsening, an age in which old certainties are breaking down, the familiar patterns are tilting and cracking. There is increasing intolerance and embitterment. The creative flame that kindled the great human society is languishing. The human mind in all its baffling strangeness and variety produces contrary types, a Buddha or a Gandhi, a Nero or a Hitler. It is our pride that one of the greatest figures of history lived in our generation, walked with us, spoke to us, taught us the way of civilized living. He who wrongs no one fears no one. He has nothing to hide and so is fearless. He looks everyone in the face. His step is firm, his body upright, and his words are direct and straight. Plato said long ago: "There always are in the world a few inspired men whose acquaintance is beyond price."

## “The World is sick of hatred”

Mahatma Gandhi

“I have nothing new to teach the world. Truth and non-violence are as old as the hills.”

“It has always been a mystery to me how men can feel themselves honoured by the humiliation of their fellow-beings.”

“*Hate the sin and not the sinner* is a precept which, though easy enough to understand, is rarely practised, and that is why the poison of hatred spreads in the world.”

“You have to stand against the whole world although you may have to stand alone. You have to stare the world in the face although the world may look at you with bloodshot eyes. Do not fear. Trust that little thing in you which resides in the heart and says: *Forsake friends, wife, all; but testify to that for which you have lived and for which you have to die.*”

“God has created different faiths just as He has the votaries thereof. How can I even secretly harbour the thought that my neighbour’s faith is inferior to mine and wish that he should give up his faith and embrace mine? As a true and loyal friend, I can only wish and pray that he may live and grow perfect in his own faith. In God’s house there are many mansions and they are equally holy. Let no one even for a moment entertain the fear that a reverent study of other religions is likely to weaken or shake one’s faith in one’s own. The Hindu system of philosophy regards all religions as containing the elements of truth in them and enjoins an attitude of respect and reverence towards them all. This of course presupposes regard for one’s own religion. Study and

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Young Gandhi. Photo reproduced from *The UNESCO Courier*, October 1969.

appreciation of other religions need not cause a weakening of that regard; it should mean extension of that regard to other religions.”

“Non-violence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man. Destruction is not the law of the humans. Man lives freely by his readiness to die, if need be, at the hands of his brother, never by killing him. Every murder or other injury, no matter for what cause, committed or inflicted on another is a crime against humanity.”

“My experience, daily growing stronger and richer, tells me that there is no peace for individuals or for nations without practising Truth and Non-violence to the uttermost extent possible for man. The policy of retaliation has never succeeded.”

“My love for non-violence is superior to every other thing mundane or supramundane. It is equalled only by my love for truth which is to me synonymous with non-violence through which and which alone I can see and reach Truth. My scheme of life, if it draws no distinction between different religionists in India, also draws none between different races. For me *A man’s a man for all that*.”

“My non-violence does not admit of running away from danger and leaving dear ones unprotected. Between violence and cowardly flight, I can only prefer violence to cowardice. I can no more preach non-violence to a coward that I can tempt a blind man to enjoy healthy scenes. Non-violence is the summit of bravery. And in my own experience, I have had no difficulty in demonstrating to men trained in the school of violence the superiority of non-violence. As a coward, which I was for years, I harboured violence. I began to prize non-violence only when I began to shed cowardice.”

“Not knowing the stuff of which non-violence is made, many have honestly believed that running away from danger every time was a virtue compared to offering resistance, especially when it was fraught with danger to one’s life. As a teacher of non-violence, I must, so far as it is possible for me, guard against such an unmanly belief.”

“I am not a visionary. I claim to be a practical idealist. Religion of non-violence is not meant merely for the rishis and saints. It is meant for the common people as well. Non-violence is the law of our species as violence is the law of the brute. The spirit lies dormant in the brute, and he knows no law but that of physical might. The dignity of man requires obedience to a higher law, to the strength of the spirit.”

“Often does good come out of evil. But that is God’s, not man’s plan. Man knows that only evil can come out of evil, as good out of good... The moral to be legitimately drawn from the supreme tragedy of the atom bomb is that it will not be destroyed by counter bombs, even as violence cannot be by counter violence. Mankind has to go out of violence only through non-violence. Hatred can be overcome only by love. Counter hatred only increases the surface, as well as the depth of hatred.”

“It is impossible for one to be an internationalist without being a nationalist. Internationalism is possible only when nationalism becomes a fact, i.e., when peoples belonging to different countries have organized themselves and are able to act as one man.



Gandhi at 40, as a lawyer in Johannesburg, South Africa. Photo reproduced from *The UNESCO Courier*, October 1969.

It is not nationalism that is evil, it is the narrowness, selfishness, exclusiveness which is the bane of modern nations which is evil. Each wants to profit at the expense of, and rise on the ruin of, the other."

"Interdependence is and ought to be as much the ideal of man as self-sufficiency. Man is a social being. Without inter-relation with society he cannot realize his oneness with the universe or suppress his egoism. His social interdependence enables him to test his faith and to prove himself on the touchstone of reality. If man were so placed or could so place himself as to be absolutely above all dependence on his fellow-beings he would become so proud and arrogant as to be a veritable burden and nuisance to the world. Dependence on society teaches him the lesson of humanity."

"What is the cause of the present chaos? It is exploitation, I will not say of weaker nations by the stronger, but of sister nations by sister nations. And my fundamental objection to machinery rests on the fact that it is machinery that has enabled these nations to exploit others."

"My notion of democracy is that under it the weakest should have the same opportunity as the strongest. That can never happen except through non-violence."

"The true source of rights is duty. If we all discharge our duties, rights will not be far to seek. If leaving duties unperformed we run after rights, they will escape us like a will-o'-the-wisp. The more we pursue them, the farther will they fly."

"To me political power is not an end but one of the means of enabling people to better their conditions in every department of life. Political power means capacity to regulate national life through national representatives. If national life becomes so perfect as to become self-regulated, no representation becomes necessary.

There is then a state of enlightened anarchy. In such a state every one is his own ruler. He rules himself in such a manner that he is never a hindrance to his neighbour. In the ideal State, therefore, there is no political power because there is no State. But the ideal is never fully realized in life. Hence the classic statement of Thoreau that government is best which governs the least."

"I value individual freedom but you must not forget that man is essentially a social being. He has risen to his present status by learning to adjust his individualism to the requirements of social progress. Unrestricted individualism is the law of the beast of the jungle. We have learnt to strike the mean between individual freedom and social restraint. Willing submission to social restraint for the sake of the well-being of the whole society enriches both the individual and the society of which one is a member."

"The golden rule of conduct is mutual toleration, seeing that we will never all think alike and we shall see Truth in fragment and from different angles of vision. Conscience is not the same thing for all. Whilst, therefore, it is a good guide for individual conduct, imposition of that conduct upon all will be an insufferable interference with everybody's freedom of conscience."

"Differences of opinion should never mean hostility. If they did, my wife and I should be sworn enemies of one another. I do not know two persons in the world who had no difference of opinion, and as I am a follower of the Gita, I have always attempted to regard those who differ from me with the same affection as I have for my nearest and dearest."



Gandhi at 45, shortly before leaving South Africa. Photo reproduced from *The UNESCO Courier*, October 1969.

"We must be content to die, if we cannot live as free men and women."

"Even the most despotic government cannot stand except for the consent of the governed, which consent is often forcibly procured by the despot. Immediately the subject ceases to fear the despotic force, his power is gone."

"The true democrat is he who, with purely non-violent means, defends his liberty and, therefore, his country's and ultimately that of the whole of mankind."

"I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any. I would have our young men and women with literary tastes to learn as much of English and other world-languages as they like, and then expect them to give the benefits of their learning to India and to the world."

"I am not sure that it is not better for the children to have much of the preliminary instruction imparted to them vocally. To impose on children of tender age a knowledge of the alphabet and the ability to read before they can gain general knowledge is to deprive them, whilst they are fresh, of the power of assimilating instruction by word of mouth."

"I would develop in the child his hands, his brain and his soul. The hands have almost atrophied. The soul has been altogether ignored."

"A wise parent allows the children to make mistakes. It is good for them once in a while to burn their fingers."

"To call woman the weaker sex is a libel; it is man's injustice to woman. If by strength is meant brute strength then indeed, is woman less brute than man. If by strength is meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably man's superior. Has she not greater

intuition, is she not more self-sacrificing, has she not greater powers of endurance, has she not greater courage? Without her man could not be. If non-violence is the law of our being, the future is with woman... Who can make a more effective appeal to the heart than woman?"

"I believe in the proper education of women. But I do believe that women will not make her contribution to the world by mimicking or running a race with men. She can run the race, but she will not rise to the great heights she is capable of by mimicking man. She has to be the complement of man."

"I am not at all concerned with appearing to be consistent. In my pursuit after Truth I have discarded many ideas and learnt many new things. Old as I am in age, I have no feeling that I have ceased to grow inwardly or that my growth will stop with the dissolution of the flesh. What I am concerned with is my readiness to obey the call of Truth, my God, from moment to moment. Music means rhythm, order. Its effect is electrical. It immediately soothes. Unfortunately like our shastras, music has been the prerogative of the few. It has never been nationalized in the modern sense. If I had any influence with volunteer boy scouts and Seva Samiti organizations, I would make compulsory a proper singing in company of national songs. And to that end I should have great musicians attending every congress or conference and teaching mass music."

"I love music and all the other arts, but I do not attach such value to them as is generally done. I cannot, for example, recognize the value of those activities which require technical knowledge for their understanding... When I gaze at the starsown heaven, and the infinite beauty it affords my eyes, that means to me more than all human art can give. That does not mean that I ignore the value of those works generally called artistic; but personally, in comparison with the infinite beauty of Nature, I feel their unreality too intensely... Life is greater than all art. I would even go further and declare that the man whose life comes nearest to perfection is the greatest artist; for what is art without the sure foundation and framework of a noble life?"



August 15, 1947 marked both the liberation of India and its partition into two separate nations: the Indian Union and Pakistan. Although aged 78, Gandhi went barefoot from village to village in the regions ravaged by conflict between Hindu and Moslem. Photo reproduced from *The UNESCO Courier*, October 1969.

# 'NAI TALIM'

## THE GANDHI METHOD

### Of 'Education for Life'



BY  
**HUMAYUN  
KABIR,**  
Joint Educational  
Adviser to the Govern-  
ment of India  
and author of "Man  
and Rivers".

**R**EMOVAL of illiteracy is perhaps the most stupendous problem that faces India on the attainment of her independence. Her decision to become a secular democratic state adds to the urgency of providing for the adequate education of her teeming millions.

The importance as well as the difficulty of the task may be measured by the fact that almost 85 % of the Indian people are illiterate, and yet the future safety, welfare and progress of the State depend on the decisions which they may take. In its task of liquidating illiteracy, the National Government faces, on the one hand, the problem of the education of children of school-going age. This would train the citizens of the future.

Of even greater immediate urgency is the education of the adult illiterates. For them, mere literacy is not enough as they must exercise the rights of citizenship even while they are undergoing instruction in the letters.

For children of school-going age, the Government have adopted a programme of basic education. The aim is to provide free compulsory education for all children between the ages of 6 and 14. The magnitude of the problem can be realized when we remember that such children number about 45 millions. There are the problems of school buildings and of providing funds for the expenses of education. Besides, the lack of trained teachers makes it impossible to bring all these forty-five millions under immediate compulsory education.

#### Three 5-Year Plans

**T**HE Government have, therefore, framed three 5-year plans for achieving this end. The first 5-year plan aims at bringing about 50 % of the children between the ages of 6-11 under compulsion. At this stage, only the more populous villages will be taken in hand and compulsion will be extended by age groups from year to year. Thus, in the first year, all children of six plus in villages with a population of 1,500 or more will be brought under compulsory education. The next year compulsion will be extended to children of seven plus and so on. The second 5-year plan will extend compulsion in the same manner in the scattered and less populous villages. The third 5-year plan will extend compulsion to all children between the ages of 11-14.

For adult illiterates the government programme aims at providing instruction of a somewhat different type. Experience has shown that adults are not attracted by a merely literary training. Instruction for the adults is, therefore, conceived as Social Education. Such education will, in addition to the introduction of literacy, aim at the production of an educated mind among the adult illiterates.

As befits citizens of a democratic State, the instruction will seek to inculcate in them a lively sense of the rights and duties of citizenship. There will also be instruction in the laws of personal and public health. The adult responds most quickly to an economic incentive. His economic interest will be roused by offering him information that may enable him to increase his earning capacity. Social Education also aims at training and refining his emotions through art, literature, music, dancing and other recreative activities. Most important of all, it will emphasize the principle of human brotherhood and seek to impress on the adult the necessity of toleration as essential to democracy and peace.

**T**HE programme of social education will, in the first instance, be confined to people between the ages of 15 and 45. Special emphasis will be placed on the education of women and grown-up girls. Educated mothers are the surest guarantee to the education of the next generation. The target is the achievement of 50 per cent literacy in this age-group within the next five years.

In order to prevent a relapse into illiteracy, the interest of adult literates will be maintained through clubs, discussion-groups, summer schools and similar agencies. The aim will be to make the village school not only a place of instruction for children but the centre of community life. On certain days in the week the school would be reserved exclusively for girls and women.

#### Emphasis on Activity

**T**HE essential feature of both basic education for children and social education for adults is the emphasis on activity.

It was Gandhiji who first tried to apply on a large scale this principle of teaching through activity. He went further and held that the activity must be social in significance. This is the essence of craft. He said that craft must be used in the education even of the child. Education based on a craft would not only help to develop his faculties but give him a consciousness of performing a social function from the very beginning of his life.

In addition, learning through a craft would help in making education accessible to all. Our present economic backwardness cannot be denied. We cannot afford an expensive system of education, however desirable it may otherwise be. Basic education would help to solve the problem of finance, as it is at least partly self-supporting. The very small child may not produce objects that are useful, but the product of the older children would have some social use. Even if they have no market outside, they can be used by the school itself.

#### A Danger To Be Avoided

**T**HERE is, no doubt, a danger that such a system may turn the school into a factory for exploiting child labour. This, however, would be an abuse of basic education and there is no system in the world which cannot be abused. Whether for the child or the adult, the activity is a means to education. Education is, therefore, the end and the craft the means, but as Gandhiji would say, the means and the ends are distinct but not separate. Provided it is remembered that it is a school training citizens of the future and not a factory turning out goods for current consumption, there is nothing wrong in insisting that the products even of children must be good. Insistence on quality is, in fact, a part of education itself. If a thing is to be done at all, it ought to be done well.



In the New Indian Education great stress is put on handicraft training—inspired by Gandhiji (shown above with Pandit Nehru).

**T**O write about the Indian literatures of to-day is an undertaking in scope and form, comparable to the literatures of all Europe. One can give an impression only, a silhouette at best. Shrimati Sophia Wadia, the founder-editor of the Indian P.E.N., has written: "A renaissance has been taking place in modern India under the impact of the literatures of the West." It is that aspect which I wish briefly to touch upon.

There are at least ten important languages in India, all active and vital. Among these must be included English, which is the language of the intelligentsia and a unifying force par excellence. Its importance can be gauged by the fact that there are a thousand English periodicals in Bengal alone and as many others in South India. It is significant that the Hindi and Urdu works of the great novelist Premchand, for instance, are very rarely known to readers in other parts of India except through their English translations.

Rabindranath Tagore is known throughout India largely through his English renderings of his own works; in fact, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for more apt—of his own Bengali poems, *Gitanjali*. Iqbal, the great poet of the Panjab, is only known to readers outside his province due to Herbert Nicholson's translation of his monumental poem: *The Secrets of Self*.

#### Poetry

**I**N what has come to be styled Indian Literature, several writers have made a remarkable, if not all-time great, contribution to literature. R.C. Dutta produced in brilliant hexameters *The Ramayana and the Mahabharata*, and introduced for almost the first time into our world. Toru Dutt, whom Edmund Gosse called "the fragile exotic blossom of song", produced superb poetry before she died at twenty. And in the realm of poetry one cannot omit to mention Sarojini Naidu's *Sceptred Flute*, which has won world-wide acclaim, the mystic and lyrical poetry of the sage Sri Aurobindo, and Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali*. High praise must also be given to Bharati Sarabhai's *The Well of the People* and to Chattopadhyaya.

#### The Novel

**I**N the novel special attention must be given to Mulk Raj Anand, (whose *Coolie*, written directly in English, has been translated into thirteen languages), Humayun Kabir's *Men and Rivers*, R.K. Narayan's *The English Teacher*, Bhabhani Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers*, Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, in the short story by R.K. Narayan, in art criticism by Ananda Coomaraswamy's *The Dance of Shiva*, in autobiography by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and in miscellaneous and philosophical writing by K.S. Srinivasa Iyengar, Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi and Professor Radhakrishnan.

By and by...

Secular sculpture temples. Above. Letter" (8-11th

**W**HEN Tagore returned with just what he had peror. That long some trouble an ficult to breath here. Yet he ha pects to another a scientist—the la made a short spe magic of his p "feel" the presen beautifully made ro white hair he look stepped out of Ind was at once a hope I look back on

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...had just begun. light of the past age but had not quite gone to get some idea of partly by suggestion and personal experience. The things in it which showed decay, the weakness and might make one feel ashamed by modern standards. Yet things were discernible in which like the rays of the amidst the shades of even devoted to the side of da Tagore's early life was a wonderful spirit of Upanishad and also in the hotbed of advanced radical thought in Bengal. He thus passed e the fever of fervid nationalis when many educated Indians ing themselves on the exclus the English language. While still a young boy, Ta to Europe to study literature, perhaps a turning point in h ment. Henceforth he began to press, perhaps unconsciously, masterly assimilation of the which his analysis

# Portrait of a Man

by Satyajit Ray



Cover of *The UNESCO Courier* dedicated to Rabindranath Tagore, in December 1961.

On August 7, 1941, in the city of Calcutta, a man died. His mortal remains perished, but he left behind him a heritage which no fire could consume.

It was a heritage of words and music and poetry, of ideas and ideals, and it has the power to move us today and in the days to come.

We, who owe him so much, salute his memory.

Founded in the year 1690 by an Englishman named Job Charnock, the city of Calcutta, one hundred years ago, was a thriving metropolis. As the capital of India Calcutta was the seat of government.

In the northern part of this sprawling city, in the area known as Jorasanko in Chitpore, was the family residence of the Tagores. The Tagores had an impressive lineage. It dated back to the first group of learned Brahmins that came from Kanauj and settled in Bengal in the 8th century. One thousand years later, Panchanan, a descendant, came to the new city of Calcutta and found a lucrative position with a British shipping company. His grandson Nilmoni added considerably to the family fortune and built the house at Jorasanko in 1789.

The peak was reached, however, with Nilmoni's grandson, Dwarkanath, one of the most brilliant and colourful figures of the 19th century. Dwarkanath Tagore combined cultured sophistication with largeness of heart and a rare degree of business acumen. Coal, sugar, indigo, export, banking, newspapers, there was no end to his enterprise – and he succeeded in all. If his earnings were fabulous, so was his spending.

Although a Hindu and a Vaishnab, Dwarkanath defied the ban of Brahmin orthodoxy and twice went to England. There he had an audience with Queen Victoria, discussions with Gladstone, and dinner with men like Dickens, Thackeray and Max Muller.

Before his death in England, Dwarkanath had written a letter to his eldest son Debendranath reproving him for neglecting the family's business affairs. For some years past, young Debendranath had been developing tendencies which might well have distressed his father.

It began in a burning 'ghat'. The last rites were being administered to Debendranath's grandmother. Not far away, on the river bank, sat Debendranath. Like many a rich man's son, he had been leading a wayward life. But tonight, he was overcome by a strange feeling. Worldly possessions seemed to lose their meaning for him.

This led to a period of profound disquiet, followed by a ceaseless quest for the meaning of existence in the great source books of the East and West. He read the materialist philosophers of modern Europe – Locke, Hume, Bentham and others – whose ideas were so much in vogue among the students of the time. Then he learnt Sanskrit and read the Mahabharata. But peace of mind would not come until one day he chanced upon a torn page of a Sanskrit book. There was a 'sloka' in it, which said: "God is supreme and all-pervading. Be content with what He gives. Do not covet another's wealth."

This happened to be a page of the Ishopanishad, edited by Raja Rammohun Roy. Rammohun had been a close friend of Dwarkanath's. As a boy, Debendranath had a deep and silent admiration for the man. But the greatness of Raja's vision and the magnitude and nobility of the tasks he had set before himself, were beyond the boy's comprehension. The Raja lived in times when India's spiritual heritage was being submerged in ritual and superstition.

## **Growing up in a family of scholars and artists**

Rammohun advocated Western education for Indians because he wanted the new ideas of the West to spread in the country. But he also wanted us to respect what was old and true in our own heritage. His own study of the Upanishads had led him to the monotheistic bases of Hinduism, which he sought to spread through writings and lecturers. His work was left unfinished by his death in England. And now Debendranath, inspired by the two lines of Sanskrit text, went on to prove to be his true spiritual son and heir. Debendranath suffered social ostracism for preaching the monotheistic faith that he called Brahmoism, but to his followers – and there were many – he was Maharshi, the Great Sage. When Rabindranath was born, the Maharshi was 45 years old. His wife Saradmoni was 33. Rabindranath was

**Satyajit Ray** (1921 - 1992)

was one of India's leading film directors.

In 1961 he made a documentary film on Rabindranath Tagore on the occasion of the poet's birth centennial.

# INDIAN LITERATURES And the Impact of the West

By **BALD ON DHINGRA**  
Author of several works of poetry, essays, plays and a forthcoming novel, "Out of Time".

essayist, thinker, artist, musician, dramatist and critic, excelling in every genre. His astonishing genius—because so all-embracing—has not as yet been fully evaluated. Both Iqbal and Tagore realized that culture could not survive without being re-oriented and re-valuated; that it was essential to have it replenished and invigorated by external influences; that, in fact, it was necessary to be a universalist. Tagore was the genius who, while remaining completely Indian, was a true world citizen.

Social conflict is the motif of the modern Indian literatures and their every aspect is discussed, treated and emphasized. A considerable amount of attention is being paid to the translation of works



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from foreign writers and titans like Shaw, Kafka, Rolland and Gide are always in vogue. Short stories, especially French, American, Russian and English, are specially in demand, as are also travel diaries and sketches and modern poetry and literary criticism. The thirst in short is almost insatiable.

## The Modern Theatre

His has been the state of affairs during the last few years. Plays have been written and produced but these are mostly adaptations, translations or social farces, sometimes satires or simply social or political propaganda. So much attention has been given to the facile form of the radio feature that the creative capacity of most playwrights crushed. In the garden of poetry it is different; peasant poetry has been written and lyrics have been sung and fine compositions made by Bachhan and Josh and Hafeez. In the realm of poetry, at any rate, the inspiration has not been the exquisite poetry has general tendency is to

is emancipating itself from shackles of foreign to be measured by

the extent to which it enriches civilization. Civilization may have its national features or geographical profiles but it must transcend all geographical boundaries. Literature is an expression of the mind and its main effect to ennoble it.

There must and will be a "rehabilitation of the past" and, to use the words of Amanda Coomaraswamy, "a process of creative introspection preparatory to renewed activity... In India, as in Europe, the vestiges of ancient civilization must be re-nounced: we are called from the past and must make our home in the future. But to understand, and to endorse with passionate conviction, and to love what we have left behind is the only possible foundation for intellectual and spiritual power. If the time has hardly yet come for the creation of new values... let us remember that time and suffering are essential to all creation."



(1) If one were to enumerate some of the big names in the contemporary Indian literatures, in the various languages other than English, one must mention Bankim Chandra and Sarat Chandra and Tarashankar Chandra and Prem Chand, Jaiendra Kumar from Bengal; Iqbal, Josh, Akbar, Ismet Chughtai, Faiz from Urdu; K.M. Munshi, M.K. Gandhi from Gujarati; Bhai Viv Singh, Mahan Singh from Punjabi; Masti Venkatesa Iyengar from Kannada; Vallathol from Malayalam. Quite a number of these writers have happily been translated into English and may, therefore, reach a wider public.

# Towards Indian SCIENTIFIC OF MODEL

By **S.**  
Registrar, Indian Association for I

INDIA'S outstanding contribution to abstract philosophical and religious thinking often tends to obscure her equally important contribution to positive sciences. In fact, the study of science in India is as old as her civilization which is contemporaneous with savants who meditated and experimented on the banks of the Ganges and the Indus not only enriched life morally and intellectually, but also made living discoveries in mathematics and astronomy, chemistry and metallurgy, medicine and botany. These have left their permanent mark in world science. Cross-fertilization of ideas among men of science from different lands, as an essential condition of progress and advancement, has been a characteristic feature of Indian Science, as of other fields of knowledge, over the centuries. India has given to others as much as she has received from them. Thus Arab mathematics was considerably influenced and enriched by India's progress in this science, and learned Indian mathemati-

# RABINDRANATH TAGORE

## Sentinel of the East

WHEN I saw Rabindranath Tagore for the last time he was a venerable figure bowed down with age and honours. He had just returned from a tour of Persia where he had been a guest of the Emperor. That long flight had caused him some trouble and he found it very difficult to breathe in a crowded atmosphere. Yet he had come to pay his respects to another great compatriot of his, a scientist—the late Sir P.C. Roy. Tagore made a short speech which had all the magic of his personality. One could "feel" the presence of greatness. In his beautifully made robe and with his silken-white hair he looked as if he had just stepped out of India's glorious past. He was at once a hope for the future.

I look back on that day with a sense of pride because for once in my life I was not disappointed in the presence of greatness.

### The Failing Light

RABINDRANATH Tagore was born on the 6th of May in 1861—a critical time in the political and literary history of modern India.

"I was born when the modern age in Bengal had just begun," he wrote. "The light of the past age was then failing but had not quite gone out. I was able to get some idea of it from behind, partly by suggestion and partly from personal experience. There were many things in it which showed signs of senile decay, the weakness and laxness of which might make one feel ashamed, if judged by modern standards. Yet certain other things were discernible in those days, which like the rays of the setting sun amidst the shades of evening cannot be debited to the side of darkness."

Tagore's early life was spent in the wonderful spirit of Upanishadic learning, and also in the hotbed of the most advanced radical thought then prevalent in Bengal. He thus passed early through the fever of fervid nationalism at a time when many educated Indians were priding themselves on the exclusive use of the English language.

While still a young boy, Tagore went to Europe to study literature. This was perhaps a turning point in his development. Henceforth he began to give expression, perhaps unconsciously, to the mastery assimilation of the two cultures which his analytical as well as his highly creative brain was capable of doing.

### Santiniketan — Abode of Peace

IN 1901, Rabindranath established an educational centre called Santiniketan (Abode of peace) at a small place named Bolpur, some 93 miles from Calcutta. There he adopted the ancient ideal of forest hermitage to modern conditions. Twenty years later he converted it into a world university called Visva Bharati, so that it became not only a centre of Indian culture but of world culture. Tagore's life's work had begun.

With a deep faith in the cultural federation of different races and peoples of the world, he devoted himself, in his writings and teachings, to the cause of unity and friendly co-operation with the West.

"Humanity is torn by suffering and suspicion," he wrote, "by a disharmony which has wrought havoc in the very depths of our life on earth. It is for us, of the Brotherhood of Letters, to rescue humanity from this misery of unnatural relationship... To whatever land we may belong, this must be our common mission on this plane of united effort, to achieve goodwill between man and man, establish a secure foundation of fellowship which will save humanity from suicidal war..."

Tagore saw his people in India and in Asia achieving this goodwill and establishing a solid foundation of fellowship not by attempting to wipe out their differences—which he believed neither possible nor desirable—but by accepting them: "unity not in spite of the differences but through them," he wrote.

"Let all human races retain their own individual personalities and yet come together," Tagore said elsewhere, "not into a uniformity that is dead, but into a unity that is living."

Tagore was called the Sentinel of the East and the Poet Laureate of Asia. His writings have been translated into almost all the major languages of the world.

When his book of poems *Gitanjali* (Song Offerings) was published in 1913, Europe and the rest of the Western world were enchanted. W.B. Yeats records how, intensely he was moved by the mystic qualities of the poems. Recognition came in the form of the Nobel Prize for literature—the first time an Asiatic had thus been honoured.

In one of the poems of *Gitanjali*, Tagore prayed that his country might awake

to that heaven of freedom, not of man as a citizen of a narrow nationalism but of man as a mind, as a thinker "where the mind is without fear... where knowledge is free... where words come out from the depths of truth."

Throughout his long and intensely active career, Tagore wrote over three thousand songs and poems. His short stories are gems of prose composition. In these he depicted the lives of common people with sympathetic insight, revealing their problems and portraying their courage under suffering. His plays and novels give a masterly analysis of the historical and social forces which gave shape to India's literature.

### Dominated Literary Scene

TAGORE'S influence on the writers of Bengal as well as on the rest of India, has been overwhelming. He dominated the literary scene of his native Bengal for such a long time that, with the notable exception of the novelist Sarat Chatterjee, no new school of literature grew up in Bengal for nearly sixty years.

A veritable Tagore cult developed in Bengal where young writers and artists even copied the poet's handwriting and spoke in the language of Rabindranath's poems.

When, at the age of sixty, Tagore took to painting, it created a sensation not only in India but in the salons of Paris where his tableaux were on view. His manifold genius is too intricate for detailed description in this short article. He absorbed Islamic and European cultures and wrote extensively in English—a language he enriched by his deep philosophical essays and translations of his original works in Bengali.

Rabindranath is perhaps the only Asiatic poet whose genius was recognized all over the world during his own life-time. Honours were heaped on him by learned societies and humble institutions alike. Mass adulation haunted the poet everywhere he went, in the cause of India's literature. For his Hibbert Lecture in 1931, he chose "Religion of Man"

as his subject. Here was a synthesis of all that was best in the philosophies of the East and the West. Here was a ray of hope and faith that transcended the time and space of our civilization.

Rabindranath Tagore died in 1941 when the world was again engulfed in a conflict against which he had preached and practised for so long. He lives in the heart of every man and woman and child in India because he believed that his mission as a poet was "to attract the voice that was as yet inaudible in the air; to inspire faith in the dream that is unfulfilled and to bring the earliest tidings of the unborn flower to a sceptic world."



Rabindranath Tagore  
"Poet Laureate of Asia"

the fourteenth child. The eldest was Dwijendranath – poet, philosopher and mathematician. The second son, Satyendranath, was a Sanskrit scholar who translated the Gita and Meghdoot into Bengali verse, went to England and returned as the first Indian member of the Indian Civil Service. The fifth son, Jyotirindranath, was a born musician, translated Molière and Sanskrit dramas into Bengali, and wrote and staged some of the most popular Bengali plays of his time. Among the daughters was Swarnakumari, the first woman novelist and the first woman to edit a literary journal in India. Indeed it was a household which hummed with activity. At the age of seven, Rabi was sent to school. He went to four schools and hated them all. But to say that he lacked education would be wrong, for his third brother, Hemendranath, saw to his studies at home, and it was all done by the clock. Rabi was 13 when his first book of verse, 'Kabikahini', came out. When Rabi was 16, Dwijendranath brought out a literary magazine called 'Bharati', and Rabi found an admirable platform for his literary activities. His essays included pieces on European poets like Dante and Petrarch whose acquaintance Rabi had already made in the library of his elder brother Satyendranath. Satyendranath's wife, Gnanadanandini, who had been staying in England with her two children, was a remarkable woman, who had been persuaded by her husband to come out of orthodox seclusion. Tabi set out for England in the summer of 1879 and joined Gnanadanandini at Brighton. If the plan was to provide the boy with a proper education, it came to nought. For Rabi returned a year later without completing his course of studies at London University.

While in England, Rabi had become acquainted with Western music. Some of the tunes he had learned found their way into the enchanting opera 'Valmiki-Prativa'. There were other tunes, however, which had their origin in classical Indian ragas, used for the first time in an operatic context.

### **Watching life through the window**

'Valmiki-Prativa' was performed in the Tagore residence with Rabindranath himself in the role of the bandit-turned-poet. The rest of the cast, too, was composed of members of the Tagore family, all gifted with varying degrees of talent. Among those who saw and praised this performance was the greatest literary figure of the time, Bankim Chandra Chatterji. A year later, when Rabindranath's Sandhya-Sangeet was published, Bankim Chandra personally congratulated the poet and acknowledged his pre-eminence among the rising writers of the day. At the age of 22, Rabindranath married Bhabatarini Devi; the old fashioned name was later changed to Mrinalini. Two months before the wedding Rabindranath had received a letter from his father in which he was asked to prepare himself to look after the family estates. After a period of initial training in the Estates' Offices in Calcutta, Rabindranath found himself in the very heart of rural Bengal, in the area of the river Padma. With a worldly wisdom unusual in a poet, but characteristic of the Tagores, Rabindranath in later life set out in a practical way to improve the lot of the poor peasants of his estates and his varied work in this field is on record. But his own gain from this intimate contact with the fundamental aspects of life and nature, and the influence of this contact on his own life and work are beyond measure. Living mostly in his boat and watching the life through the window, a whole new world of sights and sounds and feelings opened up before him. It was a world in which the moods of people and the moods of nature were inextricably

interwoven. The people found room in a succession of great short stories, and nature, in an outpouring of exquisite songs and poems. Dominant was the mood of the rains, exultant and terrible. In 1901, Rabindranath was 40 years old. His already enormous output of poems and plays had been gathered in one big volume. It comprised 21 books and included Sonar Tari, his first masterpiece. The same year, 1901, marked an event of a somewhat different nature. In 1862, one year after Rabindranath was born, the Maharshi had acquired some property in Bolpur, in the district of Birbhum in West Bengal. The property was made over to a board of trustees, and the deed specified that the place was to be used for meditation on the Supreme Formless Being. According to the Maharshi's wishes, a seat of prayer and a temple of worship had been built, and close to the temple, a residence which was called Santiniketan – the Abode of Peace. Rabindranath had been worrying about the education of his children, and he decided to start an experimental educational institution in Santiniketan. It was to be a school, but not like the schools that had been the nightmare of his own childhood. It was to be like the forest hermitages of classical India. But to bring it into being was not an easy task. For one thing, it cost money and Rabindranath had to sell, among other things, the copyright of his books. His wife added her bit by selling her wedding ornaments. Three months after the school was opened, she was taken ill. Two months later, she died. For Rabindranath it was the beginning of a series of personal tragedies. Nine months after his wife's death, his second daughter Renuka passed away. The hardest blow of all came four years later. The youngest son Sami, who took after his father in many ways, fell a victim to cholera when he was only 12. It was in the midst of these bereavements that Rabindranath participated in one of the greatest political upheavals in the history of India. In December 1903 was published the decision of Governor-General Lord Curzon to split up Bengal into two provinces. The idea was to create a separate province with a Moslem majority, which would induce a rift between the two main religious groups and thus avert the possible growth of a united front against the Government. But in proposing the Partition, Curzon merely fanned the flame of patriotism that had been smouldering in the minds of certain visionaries all through the period of the renaissance in Bengal. These men now came to the fore and led the millions to rise in a protest.

### **Poetic politics**

The series of stirring patriotic songs which Rabindranath composed for the occasion were sung in processions in the streets of Calcutta with the poet himself in the lead. On 27 October, 1905, the Partition became an accomplished fact. In a form of protest that only a poet could conceive, Rabindranath turned the Black Day into a mass festival of Rakhibandhan – the tying of the band of friendship. But the Swadeshi movement was fated to grow and assume a character which was not possible to foresee in its early stages. While admitting the bravery and patriotism of those who killed or were killed in a reckless bid for freedom, Rabindranath could not condone terrorism. He stated his credo in clear terms. The path of violence was not for India. Good could come only out of constructive work carried out in a spirit of tolerance. He had himself followed up his retirement from the po-





**KINDRED SPIRITS:** In 1901 Tagore met the great French writer and thinker Romain Rolland for the first time. Despite the barriers of language the two men reached such a degree of sympathetic understanding that Tagore wrote to one of his friends: "Of all the men I confronted in the Occident it was Romain Rolland that struck me as the nearest to my heart and the most akin to my spirit." In 1926, when Tagore was again travelling in Europe he met and talked with Rolland in the latter's garden at Villeneuve in Switzerland where the photo below was taken. Above, Tagore with the famous German theologian and educator, Paul Geheeb, in 1932. Paul Geheeb, who died last year aged 90, founded the Ottenwald School Germany, as well as the Ecole d'Humanité at Göttern, in Switzerland. Paul Geheeb's ideas have inspired educators in many other countries.

Photos: (L) Rabindra-Sankar, (R) Shree



Page drawn from *The UNESCO Courier* dedicated to Rabindranath Tagore, in December 1961.

litical scene by undertaking the work of rural welfare in his estates. And there were other activities: he was teaching at school, editing journals, and engaging himself in almost every conceivable form of literary activity. That his own countrymen now regarded him as their leading man of letters was proved by his 50th birthday celebrations in Calcutta. Sponsored by the Bengal Academy of Letters and attended by thousands, it was a unique literary manifestation in India. But to the outside world, Rabindranath was still an unknown name. The object of Rabindranath's visit to England in 1912 was to study the educational methods of the West and also to acquaint the West with his work at Santiniketan. He happened to carry with him on this occasion a notebook containing his own English translations of some of his poems, mainly from *Gitanjali*. He showed these translations to the English painter, William Rothenstein, who had met the poet on an earlier visit to India. Rothenstein was so impressed that he sent a copy of the translation to the great Irish poet, William Butler

Yeats. Introducing the poems to a gathering of English writers and intellectuals, Yeats said: "I know of no man in my time who has done anything in the English language to equal these lyrics. Even as I read them in these literal English translations, they are exquisite in style and thought." *Gitanjali* was published in England in the same year. There has rarely been another instance of a poet gaining world fame in like manner. The Nobel Prize came in 1913 and knighthood in 1915, while war was raging in Europe. Touring the United States and Japan in 1916, Rabindranath made eloquent appeals for peace. He felt that world peace could only be achieved through intellectual co-operation between nations. He said, "The call has come to every individual in the present age to prepare himself for the dawn of a new era, when man shall discover his soul in the spiritual unity of all human beings."

Pursuing this noble idea of international co-operation, Rabindranath gave the school at Santiniketan a new status and a new name. 'Yatra Visvam Bharati Ekanirham'

– Where the world makes home in a single nest – this was the motto of Visvam Bharati, the World University, which was inaugurated in December 1918, with the aged philosopher Brijendranath Seal presiding. Dominating the Indian political scene at this time was Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. As a barrister in South Africa, Gandhi had fought for the rights of the Indians living in that country. As a protest against the Rowlatt Act, Gandhi launched a movement of passive resistance. But the masses misinterpreted the movement and, following a rumour of Gandhi's arrest, violence broke out in many parts of the country. As a result of this the Government started taking repressive measures out of all proportion to the magnitude of the violence.

In the Punjab, martial law was declared. In charge of the troops at Amritsar was Brigadier General Dyer. On the first day of the month of Vaisakh, a crowd gathered in Jallianwallabagh, as it had done every other year. It was a peaceful crowd. But Dyer was taking no chances. Machine guns rattled.

The news of the Amritsar incident was suppressed by the Government, but details of it filtered through to other parts of the country and even to the Abode of Peace.

Rabindranath rushed to Calcutta. But the Defence of India Act was still in force and no leaders would support him in a plea for a meeting of protest.

### ***No nation can be proud of isolating its life & culture***

At four o'clock on the morning of May 30, Rabindranath finished writing a letter. It was addressed to the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford, and it was published in the newspapers. Condemning the Government for the killing at Jallianwallabagh, Rabindranath concluded by saying: "And I for my part wish to stand, shorn of all special distinctions, by the side of my countrymen who for their so-called insignificance are liable to suffer degradation not fit for human beings. And these are the reasons which have painfully compelled me to ask your Excellency to relieve me of my title of knighthood."

The next ten years of Rabindranath's life were filled with ceaseless activity. The urge to travel, and the necessity to collect funds for his university, took him to all parts of the world and the West as much as the East, welcomed him with open arms.

Wherever he went, he spread the message of peace and stressed the importance of intellectual co-operation between nations. He said: "We ought to know that isolation of life and culture is not a thing of which any nation can be proud. In the human world, giving is exchanging, it is not one-sided."

His great humanist ideas found an echo in the best minds of Europe, and some became his close friends.

In the meantime, the institution at Santiniketan had come a long way from its modest beginnings. Its scope for studies had greatly increased. There was Kalabhawan for the study of painting, under masters like Nandalal Bose, who was himself a pupil of Abanindranath, a nephew of the poet. The Sangeet Bhawan, which neglected no brand of Indian music, had also grown under Dinendranath, another of the poet's nephews. Special provisions had been made for conducting oriental studies, and scholars came from abroad and stayed to lecture for study and research. Such men were Moriz Winternitz from Austria, Sylvain Levi from France, Victor Lesny from Austria, and Sten Konow from Norway.

But there were some Europeans who did even more than that. Charles Freer Andrews, a missionary who was present at

Yeats' reading at Gitanjali, and William Winstanely Pearson, who had also met the poet in England, came to the Ashram in its early days – drawn by the poet's personality – and stayed on until their death, working with a selfless devotion to the poet and his cause that few Indians could equal. Leonard Elmhirt, another Englishman who was drawn by the poet's personality, came over to Santiniketan and took charge of the Santiniketan at Surul, two miles away.

The poet's last European tour began with a visit to Oxford, where he delivered the series of Hibbert lectures which were later published as 'The Religion of Man'.

It was also on this last tour that Rabindranath went to Soviet Russia for the first time. On the eve of his departure from Moscow he told his hosts: "You have recognized the truth that in extirpating all special evils one has to go to the root, and the only way to it is through education." In Russia as well as in other places that he visited on this tour, Rabindranath held exhibitions and had found a new outlet for his creative urge.

In 1931, the leading citizens of Calcutta united in an appeal to observe the poet's 70th birthday. It was celebrated in a manner that was truly worthy of the occasion. The Golden Book of Tagore was a testimony to the love and reverence that the intellectuals of the world bore for the poet. Its sponsors consisted of three Europeans and two Indians. There was Romain Rolland from France, Albert Einstein from Germany, and the poet Kostas Palamas from Greece. One of the two Indians was the scientist Jagadish Chandra Bose, the other was Mahatma Gandhi.

The last years of the poet's life were spent largely in his beloved Santiniketan. He had a choice of small houses built for him, for he never liked to stay in the same house, or even in the same room for long. It was in a way symbolic of the refusal to get into a rut which had marked his whole life. In his writings he was now producing some of his most mature, original and striking works, and these included text books and nonsense rhymes for children, not an unusual occupation for someone who had loved and understood children all his life and had done so much to mould them for a better future. His health was failing, but calls of duty, which he was ever ready to answer, gave him little rest.

On May 7, 1941, Rabindranath was 80 years old. Three months later, he was to leave the Ashram, never to return. He would be taken to his ancestral house in Calcutta, fatally ill.

Rabindranath attended his 80th birthday celebrations in Santiniketan in spite of his failing health. For the occasion, he had composed a message – his last message to the world. It was called 'Crisis in Civilization'. It concerned itself with the state of the so-called modern civilization, a civilization that was being shaken to its very roots by barbaric wars of aggression.

In the course of the message, Rabindranath said: "I had at one time believed that the springs of civilization could issue out of the heart of Europe. But today, when I am about to leave the world, that faith had deserted me. I look around and see the crumbling ruins of a proud civilization strewn like a vast heap of futility. And yet, I shall not commit the previous sin of losing faith in Man. I shall wait for the day when the holocaust will end and the air will be rendered clean with the spirit of service and sacrifice. Perhaps that dawn will come from this horizon, from the East, where the sun rises. On that day will unvanquished man retrench his path of conquest, surmounting all barriers, to win back his lost human heritage."

(The UNESCO Courier, 1961-12)

# Makers of Modern India

by Sarvepalli Gopal



Mahatma Gandhi and Julian Huxley, Director-General of UNESCO, 1947.



Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of independent India, René Maheu, Director-General of UNESCO, and Indira Gandhi, member of the Executive board. UNESCO, 21 September 1962.

**M**AHATMA Gandhi was the foremost leader of the Indian independence movement, and one of his great qualities was to secure and retain the devotion of persons of differing temperaments, but all of very great distinction. Of these, three leading figures were Jawaharlal Nehru, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad.

Educated in Britain, Nehru was drawn to Gandhi because he felt that, while others talked, Gandhi was primarily a man of action who was making a dent in British rule. Nehru accepted Gandhi's method of non-violence, first as a useful weapon against the British and then, after the atom bomb of 1945, as a means without alternative. He saw the validity of Marx's analysis of historical change but did not believe that such change can only be brought about by force. The class war could not be denied, but it could be resolved by persuasion. In the freedom movement, Nehru realized that, while Gandhi had brought the peasants into the political campaign, to retain their interest and support, the Indian National Congress should have an economic programme. In this sense he is a pioneer of modern, twentieth-century nationalism.

Once Gandhi had brought other classes into the independence movement, it became Nehru's task to hold the various classes together by taking account of the basic economic needs of the vast majority of the Indian people. So Nehru promised that, when freedom had been won, the free government of India would give priority to economic development and the promotion of social justice. Even before the departure of the British, Nehru made the Indian people conscious of the importance of planning.

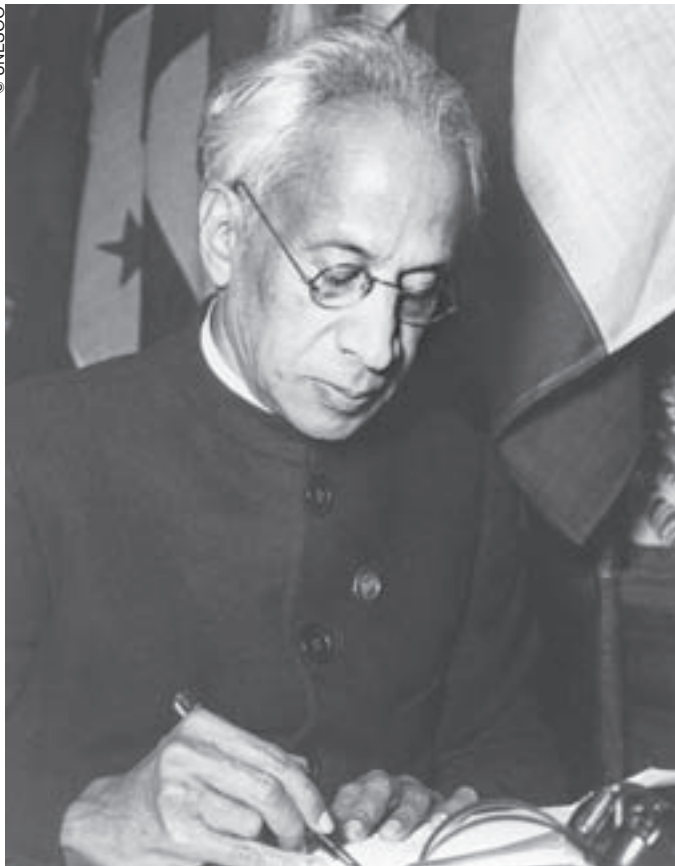
Nehru's other great contribution to the independence move-

ment was that he gave it an international perspective. He saw that fascism, militarism and imperialism were partners and against them were ranged popular and national movements all over the world. So the independence movement in India was part of a universal struggle and its allies were the peoples fighting for freedom and dignity in Europe, Asia and Africa.

Nehru's policies as India's first prime minister, from 1947 till his death in 1964, continued to be influenced by these ideals. An emphasis on civil liberties and a search for a socialist pattern of society inspired all his efforts within India; while abroad, he followed an active policy of support for anti-colonialism and anti-racism. He was particularly committed to Africa, which he regarded as India's neighbour. He supported the national movements in Kenya, Algeria, Ghana and Nigeria and never compromised in his resistance to apartheid. Above all, he was a supporter of the United Nations and its agencies, sent Indian troops as part of United Nations contingents to Gaza, Suez and the Congo and worked to promote total disarmament.

The contribution of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan to the independence movement was of a different order. Imperialism damaged the identity of the Indian people by assuming that Western civilization was superior. In reply Radhakrishnan turned to

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Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975) was a scholar and philosopher of international repute, noted for his work on Hinduism.

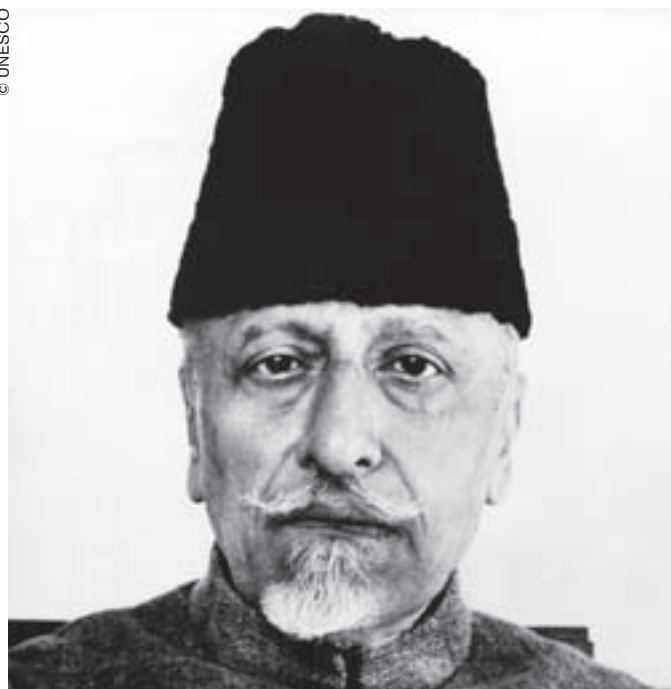
the sources and, in his writings on Indian philosophy, showed that the thought of his people was second to none in logic and rationality. This enabled them to hold up their heads. But Radhakrishnan did more. He argued that philosophy was related to life and, while interpreting Indian thinkers at their best, also called on Indians to discard what was outmoded and to rid themselves of obscurantism and superstition. Their long and rich tradition had been arrested and required innovation and further evolution. Truth should not be allowed to be smothered by the dead past. The speculative and scientific thought of the West should be incorporated into the Indian heritage.

Moreover, by expounding Indian thought in terms that related to the Western tradition, Radhakrishnan made Indian culture a part of world civilization. He, like Nehru, accepted a nationalism that was a brick in the structure of internationalism and his philosophical efforts were intended to build understanding between East and West. A member before the Second World War of the International Committee for Intellectual Cooperation, he was active in UNESCO from its foundation in 1945. He was a member of UNESCO's Executive Board, served as its chairman, was elected president of the General Conference in 1952, and was associated with the opening of UNESCO's Paris Headquarters in the Place de Fontenoy, in 1958. To him UNESCO was, as he described it, "the priesthood of the spirit".

Radhakrishnan's main activity, after India became free, was to help in the reconciliation of mankind on the basis of the common ground among all the religions of the world. He believed that a global community was emerging and that humanity should be educated to recognize its purpose and destiny. Appointed by Nehru as India's ambassador to the Soviet Union, Radhakrishnan stood nearly thirty years ago for negotiations and peaceful settlements between the two sides in the Cold War. In 1952 he came back to India and, for the next fifteen

years in Delhi, first as Vice-President for ten years and then for five years as President, he gave the lead in improving the quality of life and promoting character. Even while holding these high offices and carrying out his duty to his own people, Radhakrishnan continued to travel round the world, advocating the emergence of a new civilization based on the unity of mankind and common truths of the spirit and animated by a religion not founded on dogma but on the deepening of the individual's awareness and compassion for all fellow beings.

If Radhakrishnan was by birth a Hindu, Abul Kalam Azad was born in Mecca of pious Muslim parents; but they both had a strong sense of religion based on rationalism and common values of all humanity transcending creeds and denominations. Fluent in Arabic and Persian and a scholar in Islamic studies, Azad gave a broad and liberal interpretation of the Qur'an. To him religion was a guide to proper action and his scholarship led him into public life. From 1912 his primary objective was to draw the Muslims in India into the struggle for freedom.



Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (1888-1958), the architect of India's post-independence education policy.

A steadfast follower of Gandhi, he was elected a number of times President of the Indian National Congress and suffered long terms of internment and imprisonment. From 1920, political differences between Hindu and Muslim organizations increased; but the Congress insisted that nationalism had no connection with religion and the presence of Maulana Azad in the ranks of the nationalist leadership was the highest testimony of this. Azad's pride in being an Indian was strengthened by his commitment to what he termed the Islamic spirit, and he never accepted that a good Muslim could not be a good Indian. From 1947 till his death in 1958 he served as India's first minister for education and was a key figure in the formulation of national policies in all fields. With his belief that true religion brings all peoples together, Azad also took much interest in the promotion of international understanding and was the president of the General Conference of UNESCO at its session in Delhi in 1956.

(The UNESCO Courier, 1989 - 2)

# CULTURE





Shore Temple at Mahabalipuram in 1963. © UNESCO/C. Hills

# 5000 Years of Indian Culture

by Vishwanath S. Naravane

The development of Indian culture can be compared to the progress of a river from its Himalayan home, through forests and wastelands, orchards and farms, villages and cities. The river assimilates the waters of many tributaries, its environment changes, yet it remains the same. Indian culture shows a similar combination of unity and diversity, continuity and change. In the course of her long history, India has witnessed many changes, made many adjustments, and assimilated elements from many sources, without breaking the continuity.

India is a land of varied landscapes and climates, of many races, religions, languages and cultures. But they all have an unmistakably Indian flavour. The source of this unity is elusive. It can be felt, but it defies analysis. In his famous book, *Discovery of India*, Jawaharlal Nehru gave a sensitive and fascinating account of his search for the unity at the root of India's amazing diversity.

The Indus Valley civilization (3000-1800 BC) shows anticipations of ideas and art forms later regarded as typically Indian. This is clear from the artefacts yielded during excavations at Harappa and Mohenjodaro. A statue of a man in meditation suggests the practise of Yoga. The smooth surfaces of a male torso in stone suggests, by its absence

of muscular tension, the classical Indian concept of inward energy. A deity depicted on a clay seal is very similar to some later images of Shiva. And a little copper dancing-girl wears bangles of a kind that can be purchased today at a wayside bazaar in India. Recent research has shown that the influence of this culture extended to distant regions of northern and western India, and that the Indus Valley people had close contacts with the Dravidian civilization, which flourished in southern India long before the coming of the Aryans.

Some time between 2000 and 1600 BC, a branch of the vast Aryan family, usually referred to as Indo-Aryans, migrated to India. They brought with them the Sanskrit language, and a religion based on sacrificial ritual, honouring deities symbolizing elemental forces of Nature, such as Indra, god of rain and thunder, Agni (Fire) and Varuna, lord of the seas, rivers and seasons. Hymns addressed to these and other

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deities were collected in the four Vedas. The oldest of the Vedas is the *Rigveda* (1500-1200 BC) in which there is a quest for the Supreme Reality underlying all multiplicity. This trend was strengthened in the dialogues of the Upanishads (900-600 BC). Vedic poetry is marked by lofty ideas, literary beauty and a movement from external ritual to inward experience.

Two religions outside the Vedic tradition emerged in the sixth century BC. The Buddha's personality, and his emphasis on love, compassion and harmony, profoundly influenced Indian thought and culture, though Buddhism as an organized religion struck deeper roots outside India. Jainism, founded by Mahavira, stressed truth and non-violence, and made significant contributions to Indian art and philosophy.

In 326 BC, Alexander of Macedon crossed the Indus and won a decisive battle. Although he soon turned back, his invasion influenced Indian culture by initiating contacts with the Greco-Roman world. Six years later, Chandragupta Maurya tried to unite the scattered kingdoms and republics of India in a centralized empire, with the capital at Pataliputra (modern Patna in Bihar). His grandson, Ashoka (who reigned from 273-237 BC), recoiling from the horrors of war, became an ardent Buddhist. The message of compassion and gentleness was inscribed on rocks and highly polished stone columns. The capitals surmounting the columns are fine pieces of sculpture.

Kings of the Shunga dynasty (185-149 BC) were orthodox Hindus, but there was a strong Buddhist revival under Kanishka, the Kushan king who ruled in north-western India (78-101 AD). The Gandhara style of Buddhist sculpture, strongly influenced by Greco-Roman art, developed under the Kushans. Another centre of Buddhist art was Mathura (south of Delhi).

Pataliputra again became the centre of political and cultural activity during the Gupta Empire (319-540 AD), which has been described as the golden age of ancient Indian culture. Some of the Gupta kings, such as Chandragupta and Skandagupta, were poets and musicians. Kalidasa, greatest among Sanskrit poets and dramatists, lived during the reign of Chandragupta. The Buddha images of Sarnath, and the frescoes painted in the caves of Ajanta in western India, are among the artistic masterpieces of this age. The decline of the Gupta Empire was followed by political fragmenta-



A cymbal player in the Sun Chariot Pagoda (Temple of Konârak in Orissa).



Sanchi stupa built by the Maurya Emperor Ashoka.

tion. King Harsha of Kannauj tried to stem this process, but, after his death in 648 AD, independent kingdoms arose in Kashmir, Bengal, Orissa and many other regions of southern as well as northern India.

Culturally, this was a very rich period. The Cholas, Pallavas and Rashtrakutas of south India built the superb temples at Tanjore, Mamallapuram and Ellora. The Sun Temple of Konârak in Orissa and the Shiva Temple at Khajuraho in Central India were built in the eleventh century. In all these temples, sculpture is an integral part of the architecture. In literature, Sanskrit was gradually being replaced by regional languages such as Bengali, Marathi, Hindi and Punjabi. In the south, Tamil, Telugu and Kannada had developed their literary traditions. The Vedanta philosophies of Shankara (eighth century) and Ramanuja

(twelfth century) exerted a deep influence. There was, however, a conservative trend in social and religious life. The caste system, originally based on differences of aptitude, became rigid and oppressive.

The establishment of Muslim rule at the end of the twelfth century was a turning point in India's cultural history. An initial period of conflict was inevitable because of the radical differences between Hinduism and Islam. But a process of accommodation soon started. Sufi mysticism, philosophically close to Vedanta, was one of the meeting points. Many Muslim kings, at Delhi and in regional kingdoms, were patrons of Indian literature and music, and participated in Hindu festivals. After the foundation of the Mughal Empire (1526 AD) the trend towards integration was strengthened. Under the wise and tolerant rule of Akbar (1556-1605) the foundation of a national culture was firmly laid. The Hindu and Muslim traditions, while retaining their distinct

identities, influenced each other deeply.

Islamic architecture in India was at first austere and simple. But the builders soon started adopting decorative elements, including the lotus motif, from Hindu temples. Conversely, many temples built in medieval India have Islamic features, such as the dome, the arch and screens carved of stone and marble. Indian architecture reached its apex during the reign of Shah Jahan (1627-1658), who built such masterpieces as the Pearl Mosque at Agra and the Taj Mahal, 'the dream in marble'.

In painting, too, there was a blend of the two traditions.



Group of monolithic temples at Mamallapuram, Tamil Nadu. They were hewn out of the rock in the 7th century A.D.

Inspired by Bihzad and other great Persian artists, painters at the Mughal court created a new style of miniature painting. Combining the technique and subtlety of this style with the religious and aesthetic spirit of India, painters of the Rajput School made their own distinctive contribution.

One of the greatest geniuses of medieval India was Amir Khusrau: poet, musician, and linguist. He invented several instruments played in classical Indian music. His poetical experiments led to the emergence of Urdu, one of the major Indian languages. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were exceptionally rich in devotional poetry in regional languages. Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, Tulsidas, whose Hindi version of the Ramayana epic is recited and read by millions even today, Kabir, whose poetry transcended all sectarian differences – these and other saint-poets preached a universal religion based on tolerance and love.

The Mughal Empire declined rapidly during the first quarter of the eighteenth century. Meanwhile, Europeans were making inroads into India: the Portuguese, the Dutch, the French, and finally the British who emerged victorious. By the end of the eighteenth century, British authority was firmly established. The introduction of English education and the work of Christian missionaries had a deep impact on the cultural and religious life of India. Calcutta, the new capital, became the centre of Western thought, followed by Bombay and Madras. Some educated Indians, in their excessive zeal for European culture, turned away from their own heritage. But a reform movement, founded by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, ushered in a spiritual and cultural renaissance. The leaders

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Finished in 1572 and attributed to Persian architects, Humayun's Tomb is now one of the best-preserved Mughal monuments in Delhi.

of this movement, known as the Brahma Samaj, stressed the deeper truths of Hindu and Muslim scriptures, while accepting progressive elements of Western thought. Another source of inspiration was Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886), who regarded different religions as paths leading to the same goal, and his famous disciple, Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), who is remembered as India's first spiritual and cultural ambassador to Europe and America.

Though politically subjugated, Indian culture retained its dynamism. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, novelists and dramatists took up political, historical and social themes. Ghalib, the great Urdu poet, and Bankim Chatterji, the Bengali novelist, made rich contributions to Indian literature. Outstanding musicians, many of whom were Muslims, kept alive the tradition of classical Indian music. The *kathak* school of dance was developed at Lucknow and Jaipur. Later, there was a renaissance in Indian painting, initiated by Abanindranath Tagore and other artists of the Bengal School. Plays based on mythological as well as modern subjects were staged at Calcutta and Bombay.

Meanwhile, under the leadership of the Indian National Congress (founded in 1885) the movement for independence was gaining strength. The sense of patriotism thus aroused was reflected in the literature of the age. When Mahatma Gandhi returned to India, after his heroic struggle against racism in South Africa, a new chapter was opened in India's life.

The Mahatma touched every aspect of Indian life, though



his main concern was with social and political issues. Some of the greatest writers of that period – Bharati in Tamil, Premchand in Hindi, Sharat Chatterji in Bengali – expressed Gandhian ideals in their poems and novels.

Indian culture in the twentieth century was dominated by the towering genius of Rabindranath Tagore, one of the greatest poet-philosophers in world history. Tagore left the stamp of his personality and work on every field of creativity: poetry, music, drama, novel and short story, even painting. He was the first non-Western writer to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. He founded the international university, Vishwa-Bharati, and anticipated many modern con-

cepts in education. Tagore influenced an entire generation of Indian writers and artists. Gandhi and Tagore are rightly regarded as the makers of modern India.

On 15 August 1947, India became an independent nation. Thus, in Jawaharlal Nehru's words, India had "kept her tryst with destiny" after a century of struggle. The partition of the country on the basis of religion, the bloodshed that followed, and then the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, were painful shocks. But the trauma was soon overcome and India began building her future as a sovereign country taking her rightful place in the community of nations.

Since independence, India has made significant progress

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Golden Temple and Guru Nanak tomb, Sikh inspired architecture (Amritsar).

© UNESCO/P.A. Pitter



Young Bengali girl, student of a dancing school in Calcutta, in 1955.

in many areas of culture. In almost all the fourteen major languages of India (fifteen including English), creative literature of the highest order has been produced. Satyajit Ray is recognized as one of the greatest film directors in the world. In classical music, Ravi Shankar and Ali Akbar Khan; in painting Jamini Ray and M.F. Hussain; in classical dance, Balasarasvati – these are only a few among the outstanding artists who have enriched Indian culture in recent decades.

Selectivity, assimilation and adjustment have characterized Indian culture throughout its long history. It has confronted and overcome many periods of crisis and uncertainty. Today there are new challenges, demanding new adjustments. Ours is the age of science and technology. How to preserve whatever is of enduring worth in the spiritual and aesthetic tradition that has stood the test of fifty centuries, and how to reinterpret that tradition in the contemporary context: that is the question which the thinkers, artists and writers of India have to deal with. Their ability to handle this task in a balanced and imaginative manner will determine the future course of Indian culture.

(The UNESCO Courier, 1989-2)



A scene from *The Light of Asia* (1925), with Human Rai and Seeta Devi.

# Contemporary Indian Films for International Understanding

by Kwaja Ahmad Abbas

**C**omparatively speaking, India has had practically no opportunity of exporting her culture through the medium of the cinema. The few Indian films that have ever crossed the seas have been seen by very limited audiences, and it is still doubtful whether they will ever be able to compete successfully with American and European products in the foreign market.

But there is no reason why an attempt should not be made to secure at least a specialized and select audience abroad for the right type of Indian films. Some of our Ambassadors have already taken steps to secure good Indian films for exhibition in their Embassies. Film societies, cultural organizations and educational institutions in all countries would surely welcome opportunities of seeing, from time to time, a representative selection of Indian films.

But it is important that foreign audiences should learn to look at Indian films as a mirror of Indian life, and should not expect that universality of interest, which the standardized product from Hollywood is able to provide. The foreigner is sometimes apt to complain that Indian films are inordinately long, though none of them, so far, has beaten the record of *Gone With The Wind*.

It is true, however, that the tempo of story development in an average Indian film is slower than in its Hollywood counterpart. So, to a foreigner, it seems longer.

This criticism applies not only to film-making but to a whole way of life. The Indian films are slow because the tempo of Indian life is slow. The Indian films will acquire the nervous tension and mounting

**Kwaja Ahmad Abbas (1914 – 1987),**  
Indian filmmaker and producer,  
was the sponsor of the Indian Peoples' Theatre Movement.

tempo of a Hollywood thriller when the impact of industrialism has created the same psychological atmosphere in India as in England and America.

The preponderance of songs in an Indian film has been its most exasperating feature for foreigners and even for westernized Indians. The commercial (and, therefore, primary) reason is that the cinema in India has developed into an omnibus entertainment for millions of uprooted peasants and small town folk who have lost their rich traditions of folk song and folk dance and found nothing to substitute it in the cities and the big towns.

Again, through religious musical expressions like *kirtan*, *bhajan* and *qawwali*, the song is woven into the fabric of Indian life more closely and intimately than in any other country.

What kind of Indian films should be shown abroad? There can be as many answers as the different varieties of films produced by us. Some would favour mythological and *puranic* films as they represent the 'spiritual' heritage of India; others would favour the historical films about our emperors and empresses to show to the world 'the Glory that was India'. No doubt their colourful pageantry would appeal to the Western audiences as they approximate more closely to the average Westerner's notions of the 'exotic' East.

The modern-minded ultra-realists would ban the export of all such films and insist that only films on contemporary themes should be sent abroad. But, again, there would be a divergence of views as to whether it is advisable to send out some of our films that expose our social evils, as that might create an unfavourable impression about India.

If the task were left to me, I would select the following ten films for international screening. I wouldn't say they are the Ten Best Indian Films, though obviously some of them would come in that category; but, taken together, they provide a more or less complete cross-section of India – and the Indian cinema. Here, then, is my list:

1. **Seeta** (East Indian Films). This, in my opinion, is the most dignified, the most beautiful and the most meaningful mythological film so far produced in India. It has none of the tinselly gaudiness that characterizes some of the more elaborate and expensive films on the same theme.

2. **Yidyapati** (New Theatres). Regarded by many as Devaki Bose's greatest and last masterpiece, this film should be included because it handles a typically Indian emotional-mystic theme in an artistic manner, and also represents a distinct era in Indian history and a (somewhat idealized) picture of old feudal society.

3. **Pukar** (Minerva). Though technically better films have been produced on Moghal themes, this remains the most impressive and significant of them all. Through this story of Jehangir's sense of justice, the world will get a glimpse of all that was best in the Moghal era.

4. **Tukaram** (Prabhat). Dozens of devotional pictures about every conceivable saint in India have been made, but in utter simplicity, fidelity of detail and humanistic approach, Tukaram remains unbeaten. One need not believe in miracles or even in religion to believe in a human being like Tukaram; the proletarian saint who preached a good life by his good actions.

5. **Devdas** (New Theatres). Here is the classic story of emo-



Pramathesh Barua and Jamuna Barua in *Devdas*, 1935, a film by Barua. The script was written by Sarat Chatterjee.

tional frustration, written by the inimitable Sarat Chatterjee, and filmed with a youthful artistic flair by Barua.

6. **President** (New Theatres). A modern melodrama in Hollywood style, the 'father and founder' of the boy-meets-girl films in India, and director/screenwriter Nitin Bose's abiding contribution to Indian film.

7. **Unexpected** (Prabhat). Directed by Shantaram in the days when he believed in utter realism, and the first daring and progressive picture on the theme of forced marriages.

8. **Bari Didi** (New Theatres). The most beautifully poignant story or a widow's frustrated emotions, handled with rare artistry and dignified restraint.

9. **Dharti Ke Lal or Children of the Earth** (People's Theatre). The first non-commercial, realistic feature-documentary on the grim tragedy of the Bengali Famine.

10. **Doctor Kotnis** (Rajkamal). Shantaram's filmic tribute to the young Indian doctor who died a martyr's death in China, while serving humanity, along with the Congress Medical Mission. The right note on which to conclude this series of films representing India.

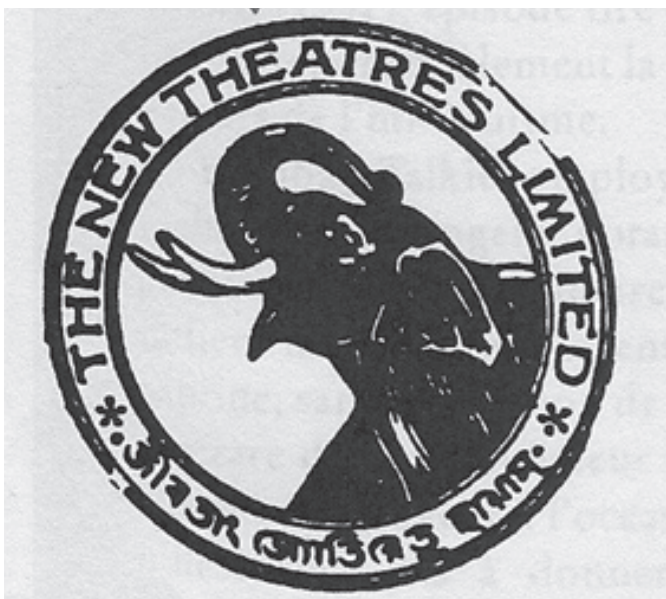
(The UNESCO Courier, Supplement; II, 1949-4)



DVD cover of *Devdas*, by Sanjay Leela Bhansali (2002).

# The First Indian Studios

by Romain Maitra



The logo of New Theatres Limited.

The Indian film industry was born and took root in and around Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, major port cities where there was a strong backdrop of intellectual and theatre activities. From the 1920's on, enterprising film-makers in these regions made films in a variety of genres such as mythology, history, folklore and fantasy, whose popularity cut across social barriers. These films were products of the studio system. The major studios had distinct identities of their own. Three of them in particular left a mark on Indian cinema in the 1930s.

**New Theatres Limited**, with its famous banner of a trumpeting elephant, was the vision of Birendra Nath Sircar, a civil engineering graduate of London University, who gathered a group of talented men around him and raised Indian cinema from the status of a novel form of entertainment to that of an art. New Theatres was a nursery for a number of directors and actors who later became household names.

As one cinema historian has written, "Sircar wanted not a production company, studio and cinema halls, but a system,

## Romain Maitra

is an Indian journalist and critic specializing in dance and the fine arts. He also writes scripts for documentary films.

a pervasive, self-supporting, efficiently managed, supremely equipped network of men and women and machines which would sell the celluloid dream like it had never been sold before in India, in markets determined by the caprice of public preference." The artistes, who worked as salaried staff and not on contract, had to be at the studios whether or not they were working on a film; when not acting, an actor might be given riding or fencing lessons or assigned temporary technical duties.

New Theatres' first big success, *Chandidas*, was based on the life of a Hindu saint. With *Devdas*, adapted from a famous Bengali novel, it captured the huge all-India market. Most Indian films had hitherto been vehicles for song-and-dance sequences, but *Devdas* was a serious treatment of a powerful dramatic situation. A fire in the studios in 1940 and later a sharp financial decline brought about the demise of New Theatres in 1955. The impact of communalism in the 1940s and the advent of the star system also helped to seal its fate.



The emblem of Prabhat Studio.



The logo of Bombay Talkies Ltd.

The second important studio, **Bombay Talkies**, was founded in 1934 by Human Rai and became the true precursor of the Indian commercial cinema. Its films captivated audiences with a blend of political and social comment, glamour, melodrama and melodious soundtracks. *Achhut Kanya* (1936) is the tragic tale of an Untouchable girl in love with a Brahmin youth, who ends by giving up her life on the altar of caste barriers and religious bigotry. Films such as *Savitri* (1937), a mythological tale from the *Mahabharata*, effectively captured Hindu values and sentiments.

Foreign technicians, mainly German and British, were employed at the Talkies, and a lot of modern equipment was used. A staff of more than 400 Indians ate together in the company canteen, irrespective of the castes to which they belonged. Well-known actors would sweep the floors if need be. Famous authors conducted seminars for the staff, who were assigned a variety of duties to broaden their knowledge of the film medium.

**Prabhat Studio** was launched by a group of men who had learned their trade as junior apprentices in a film company in Kolhapur. One member of the team had done odd jobs at the Bombay docks before becoming the

art director. Another had worked as a mechanic, accountant, electrician and scene painter before becoming the sound recordist. The most important director of Prabhat's early films, V. Shantaran, started out as a sign-painter and doorman in a makeshift cinema. These barely educated men possessed indomitable will, energy and organizing ability. In 1933 they moved to a fine location on the outskirts of Pune, 100 miles south of Bombay, covering a wide expanse ranging from hilly tracks to marshland. The facilities at this great film production complex, which had no highbrow pretensions, ranged from a huge studio and art factories to accommodations for the staff and actors.

The veteran actress, Durga Khote, recalled later, "At Prabhat we reported for work at 5:30 in the morning, and we knew that shooting would be definitely over by 4:30 in the afternoon. There was no departure from this routine as shooting was done in sunlight, and no artificial lights or arc lights were used. We were called for work at 5:30 because it took two full hours for make-up with the hard grease of the old days. By 8 o'clock we were ready for takes, and by tea-time we used to pack up, as no more shooting was possible with the fading sunlight."

Prabhat Studio made many good films, including *Amrit Manthan* ('Churning of Nectar'), produced by V. Shantaram after his return from a study tour of German studios. *Amrit Manthan* was a milestone in film technique and evoked a wide-ranging humanitarian appeal on the issue of animal sacrifice. Prabhat's peak period lasted barely ten years since it could not cover a wider market due to its early regional language films in Marathi.

In addition to these three studio units, an equally strong complex of studios arose in the mid-1930s in Madras, South India. Films in the South Indian languages enjoyed autonomy from the all-embracing Hindi film market. Modern Theatres near Madras, founded by T. R. Sundaram in 1936, had a staff of 250 and made an average of three films per year.



(The UNESCO Courier, 1995-7/8)

# Women Painters of Northern India

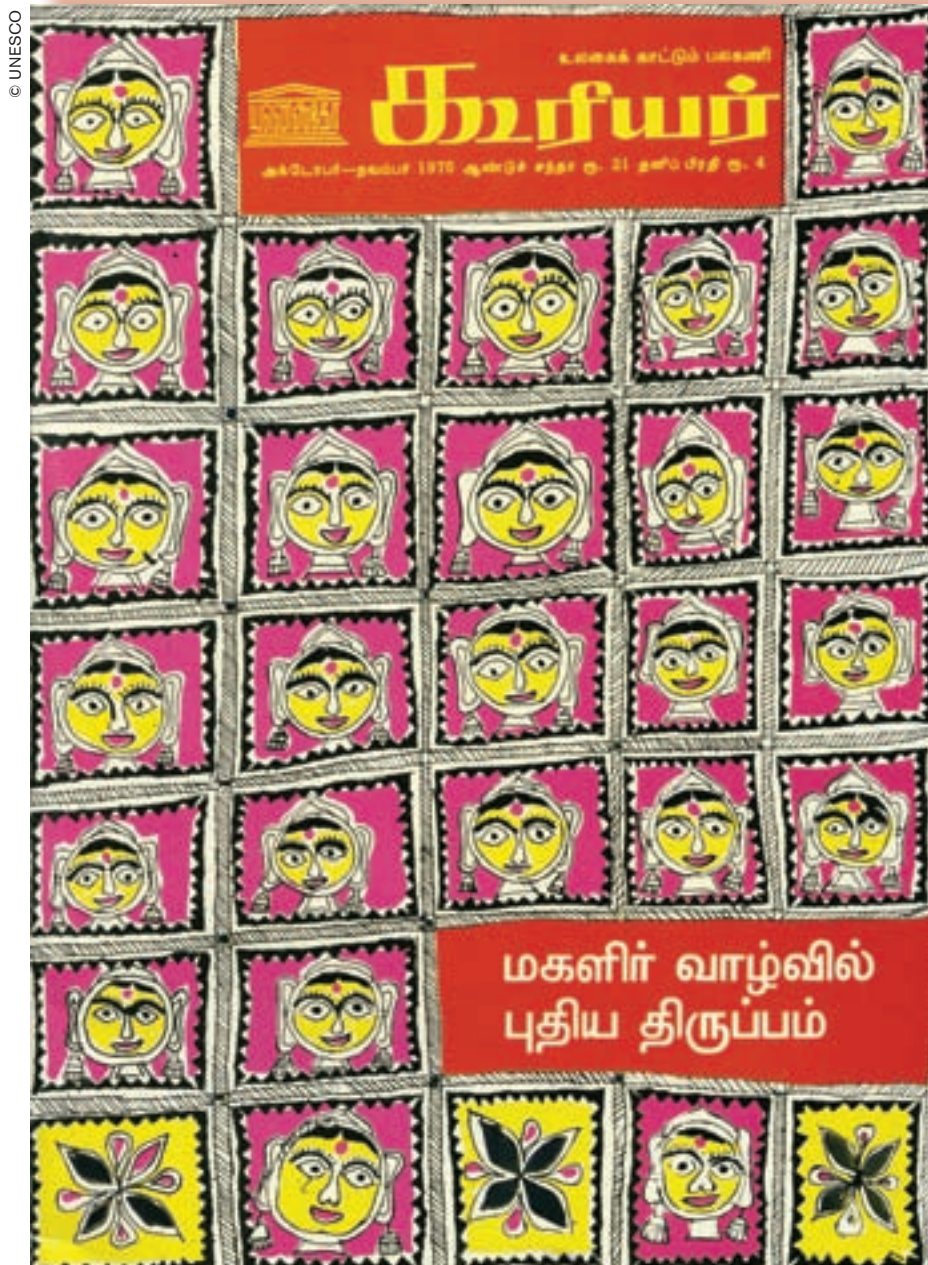
The paintings reproduced on the following colour pages have been produced by village women of Mithila, a province in Bihar State, in northeast India. The women create these masterpieces in their spare time from the daily routine of cooking, caring for children and working in the fields.

Mithila's women conjure up vivid colours, by skilful mixing of minerals and vegetables: blue from the leaves of the indigo plant, yellow from orpiment (a natural mineral form of arsenic), red from logwood or sandalwood. Mixtures of these colours give them green and orange hues. Their paintings, full of grace and elegance, portray scenes from the lives of the gods – Krishna with his flute, Shiva with his wives, some gentle, some fearsome to behold, as well as episodes from the Hindu epic, the Ramayana, depicting exploits of men and animals who are none other than gods in disguise. Delicately executed with brushes improvised from bamboo splinters to which wads of wild cotton are attached, the paintings are executed on the occasion of various ceremonies and celebrations. They adorn the

walls of marriage chambers, embellish the wrapping paper for ritual gifts, and also decorate the letters, known as 'kohabars' in which Mithila girls traditionally ask for a husband's hand. Using rice-water and dung, Mithila women trace out remarkable images on courtyard floors, to mark the altars, or 'Aripanas', where household rituals are performed.

In these many ways the women of Mithila apply their creative talents to various aspects of everyday life, while adding colour and lustre to festivals or prayer. Long unknown outside their province, their exquisite work is today much sought after by art collectors and museum curators, and, recognizing their talents, the government of Bihar now provides these women with paper for their work.

Their art has now been revealed to the Western world through collections brought back from Mithila – a small province which 1500 years ago was one of India's first kingdoms – by a French writer and teacher, Yves Véquaud. Exhibitions have been held in Paris at the Musée de l'Homme (in 1973), and at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs (early in 1975). They have shown how Mithila's ancient traditional art, created entirely by the skill and talents of women artists, has been preserved and enriched.



Cover of the Tamil edition of *The UNESCO Courier*, August-September 1975, where this article was first published.



Shahjahanabad's Red Fort (Old Delhi), a World Heritage site since 2007.

# Shah Jahan's Heaven and Hell: the Red Fort in Delhi

by Appasamy Murugaiyan

If there be a paradise on earth, it is here, it is here, reads the inscription at the entrance of Qala-a-Mubarak'a'. The couplet by the Persian poet Amir Khusrau reveals the intention of Shah Jahan's architects. They designed a citadel to match the Koran's description of paradise, not unlike Ispahan in Iran.

Shah Jahan is known as the man who so loved his favourite wife, Mumtaz Mahal, "light of the palace", that after she died in 1631, he put 20,000 builders to work on the famous Taj Mahal in Agra; the mausoleum in her memory was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1983. He was also a mighty emperor who brought the greatest glory to the Mughal empire, founded in the 16th century by Babur, "The Leopard", descendant of the fierce warlord Tamerlane – to whom we owe another fabulous World Heritage site, the 14th century Samarkand, now in Uzbekistan.

Shah Jahan will undoubtedly be remembered as the dynasty's greatest art lover and builder. His legacy, the Qala-a-Mubarak'a', known as the Red Fort, was a citadel at the heart of the capital, serving as both imperial residence and government headquarters.

## ***The new red capital***

When he decided to move the capital from Agra to Delhi in 1638, the emperor gave orders to build his "paradise on earth" on the banks of the river Yamuna, just like the Taj Mahal. Today it is called Old Delhi, but then it bore the name of its founder: Shahjahanabad.

Begun in 1639 and completed probably in 1648, the Red Fort accommodated some 3000 people. It is the first Mughal palace fort designed according to an octagonal grid pattern, which later became an architectural characteristic of the dynasty. Made primarily in brick, clad with sandstone or red marble, it represents a harmonious fusion of Persian, Timurid and Indian elements, yet it is based on Islamic prototypes. The unique style, also distinguished by its complex geometric compositions, is named after the emperor: Shahjahi.

**Appasamy Murugaiyan** is professor of comparative and historical linguistics at the École Pratique des Hautes Études and researcher at the Centre national de la recherche scientifique, in Paris. He is the author of 'The Great Indian Temple of Tanjavur' (*The UNESCO Courier* 1995 - 2) and 'The Indian Dilemma' (*The UNESCO Courier* 2008 - 1).



The Red Fort's walls are more than two kilometres long.

Connected in the north to Salimgarh, an earlier fort built by Isma Shah Sur in 1546, the walls of the Red Fort stretch out for more than two kilometres. Their height varies from 16 metres on the river to 36 metres on the town side. Two entrances allowed access to the citadel: the Delhi and Lahori gates. The first was used by soldiers and servants of the court. The second, facing the town of Lahore and giving onto the Chatta Chowk (palace market) was reserved for visitors and the emperor himself. A wide north-south road ran alongside the market. It set the border between the military camp to the west and the palace in the east.

When the powerful and inconsolable Shah Jahan arrived

**“They have inlaid stone flowers  
in marble, which surpass reality  
in colour, if not in fragrance.”**

Abu Talib Kalim, Shah Jahan's court poet

i-Behisht, the stream of paradise.

To relax, Shah Jahan would retreat to one of the hammams, where hot and cold water flowed through pipes and the walls' floral motifs created the impression of a garden. And at the southern end of the alignment was the ultimate paradise: the zenanas, or women's quarters, consisting of

one-storey pavilions also linked with channels and pools. His wives and mistresses lived in the Rang Mahal pavilion (palace of colours), with ceilings adorned with gold and silver motifs reflecting the water and white marble of the magnificent lotus pool, a favourite ingredient of Mughal architecture.

### **Symbol of power**

Shah Jahan lived less than 20 years in earthly paradise and ten years in hell, in the very same place. When he fell ill in 1657, he was deposed and imprisoned in the fort until his death in 1666, by his own son Aurangzeb.

Thanks to the latter we have the Moti J Masjid, the Pearl Mosque, which he built for his own use in 1659, to the west of his father's hammams. The white marble mosque's prayer room floor is inlaid with the outline of a prayer carpet in black marble. To the north of the mosque is laid out the splendid Hayat-Baksh Bagh, the life-giving garden, its sections also separated by water.

But little remains of the heavenly gardens. Since its construction, the fort has undergone much modification, the British in particular considerably changing its structure. In 1857, when the British crown took command of the Raj, it made the fort the British Indian Army's headquarters. As a result, pavilions were torn down and colonial style military buildings replaced them, while Mughal gardens were transformed into English ones.

In 1947, after India declared its independence, the Indian army took over the Red Fort and turned it into the symbol of the British colonial power's defeat. The proof: the first Independence Day celebrations took place there, on 15 August 1947. And since then, every year, the Prime Minister gives his Independence Day speech on this historically significant site.



The Red Fort's walls hide unexpected treasures.

(The UNESCO Courier, 2007 - 6)





'The tree of life', a collective work made by children, UNESCO, 1979.

# A Matter of Choice

by Amartya Sen

There are two ways of looking at development in the contemporary world. One, deeply influenced by growth economics and the values that underlie it, regards development as essentially a rapid and sustained expansion of gross national (or domestic) product per head, perhaps qualified by some requirement that the fruits of this expansion reach all sections of the community. I shall call this 'the opulence view of development.' In this approach, values and culture have no foundational place.

A second, contrasting view sees development as a process that enhances the freedom of those involved to pursue whatever objectives they value. In this, which I shall call 'the effective freedom view of development', the importance of economic opulence is left to the values of the people involved, and is thus culturally conditioned.

In line with this view of development, the expansion of human capability may be described as the central feature of development. The concept of a person's 'capability' can be traced back to Aristotle, for whom the life of a person could be seen as a sequence of things the person does, or states of being he or she achieves, and which constitute a collection of 'functionings'. 'Capability' refers to the alternative combinations of functionings from which a person can choose. Thus, the notion of capability is essentially one of freedom – the range of options a person has in deciding what kind of life to lead. Poverty, in this view, lies not merely in the impoverished state in which a person may actually live, but also in the lack of real opportunity – imposed by social constraints as well as personal circumstances – to choose other types of living. Even low incomes, meagre possessions, and other aspects

of what are standardly seen as economic poverty are relevant ultimately because of their role in curtailing capabilities (that is, in severely restricting people's opportunities to lead valuable and valued lives).

The application of this broader view of development thus involves specific hypotheses about the values people have reason to cherish. Economists who have studied this problem have been particularly attentive to indicators of quality of life such as longevity, good health, adequate nutrition, basic education, absence of gender-based inequality, and basic political and social freedoms.

This approach, which is based on people's values, differs from the radical *a priori* judgement implicit in the 'opulence' view of development. If, given the choice, people would rather have longer and more disease-free lives with more autonomy, than a higher level of GNP per head, then the 'effective freedom' view of development can be applied to their case, but not the 'opulence' view of development.

In the opulence view of development, the focus is uncompromisingly on the growth of incomes. However, while classical economic theorists from Adam Smith to John Stuart Mill did indeed write a great deal on the growth of real income per head, they saw income as one of several different means to important ends, and they discussed extensively the nature of these ends – very different as they are from income.

Smith, Mill and other classical authors were deeply concerned with the idea that we value many things other than income and wealth, which relate to real opportunities to lead the kinds of life we would value living. Their writings reveal great interest in the foundational importance of our ability to do the things we value, and have reason to value. They commented fairly extensively on the connection between these matters, on the one hand, and income, wealth, and other economic circumstances, on the other, and they had much to say on public policies that support and promote the more basic ends on which we may choose to concentrate.

## Evaluating economic growth

In the opulence view of development, the role of culture is purely *instrumental*, helping in particular to promote rapid economic growth. The question thus arises as to whether economic growth can be valued for its own sake, thus leading to the treasuring of those things (including culture) that promote growth? Or is economic growth itself an instrument, with less claim to a foundational role than cultural aspects of human life may have? It is hard to think that people have good reason to value goods and services irrespective of what they do to our freedom to live in a way we would value. It is also difficult to accept that culture can have a purely instrumental role. Surely, what we have reason to value must be itself a matter of culture, and in this sense we cannot reduce culture to a subsidiary position as a mere promoter of economic growth. How can we make our reasoned valuing completely valueless?

It is thus important to acknowledge the far-reaching instrumental functions of culture in development but also recognize that culture cannot be reduced to these functions. Culture also plays, for example, an intrinsic role in evaluating the pro-

**Amartya Sen**, born in 1933, is a distinguished Indian economist and philosopher who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Economics, in 1998. Famous for his writings on development and globalization, he is Professor of Economics and Philosophy and Lamont University Professor at Harvard University (U.S.A.).



"Education is important not just for the help that it might give to economic growth but because it is an essential part of cultural development."  
Vietnamese schoolchildren enjoy a break from classwork.



"In a view of development deeply influenced by growth economics, values and culture have no foundational place".  
A child working in a hill tribe village above Chang Mai, (Thailand).

cess of economic development, as well as in making room for less immediate objectives such as sustaining the environment and preserving the diversity of species.

Some cultural parameters can help, and others will hinder, the fulfilment of these objectives, and we have grounds for valuing those cultural attitudes and features that foster this fulfilment. But, when we turn to the more basic question, namely, why concentrate on these objectives, culture must appear not as a servant of ends, but as the social basis of those ends themselves. We cannot begin to understand the so-called 'culture dimension of development' without taking note of *each* of these two roles of culture.

### **A foundational role**

Since the language of 'sustaining' has become common in the literature of development, it is not surprising that the phrase 'culturally sustainable development' has made its appearance. Is this the right direction to take, in moving away from a purely instrumental view of culture in development?

There are two major drawbacks in using language of this kind. First, it ignores the *constitutive* role of culture. If culture

is only to do the 'sustaining', we still have to ask what is to be sustained? Focusing on 'culturally sustainable development' is to alienate culture from its foundational role in judging development, and to treat it just as a *means* of sustaining 'development' – no matter how that is defined. This is, in other words, an ornamental debasement of culture to the status of a glorified instrument in sustaining 'development', defined independently.

The second problem comes from a different direction. Culture admits of dynamism, evolution and refinement. Culture in every country in the world has changed over the centuries. The rhetoric of 'sustaining' – as opposed to having freedom to grow and develop – frames the cultural debate in prematurely conservationist terms. There is a dis-analogy with the environment, here. When it comes to the natural environment, we don't try to improve the best that nature gave us; we try to 'conserve' what we have got, and perhaps return to what we had earlier. But culture is the foundation of our creativity and progress. Sustaining is too feeble a role for it to play in development. Once we shift our attention from the purely instrumental view of culture and accept its constructive and creative role, we have to see development in terms that include cultural development as well.

### **The three roles of culture**

Culture comes into development in three quite distinct – though interrelated – ways.

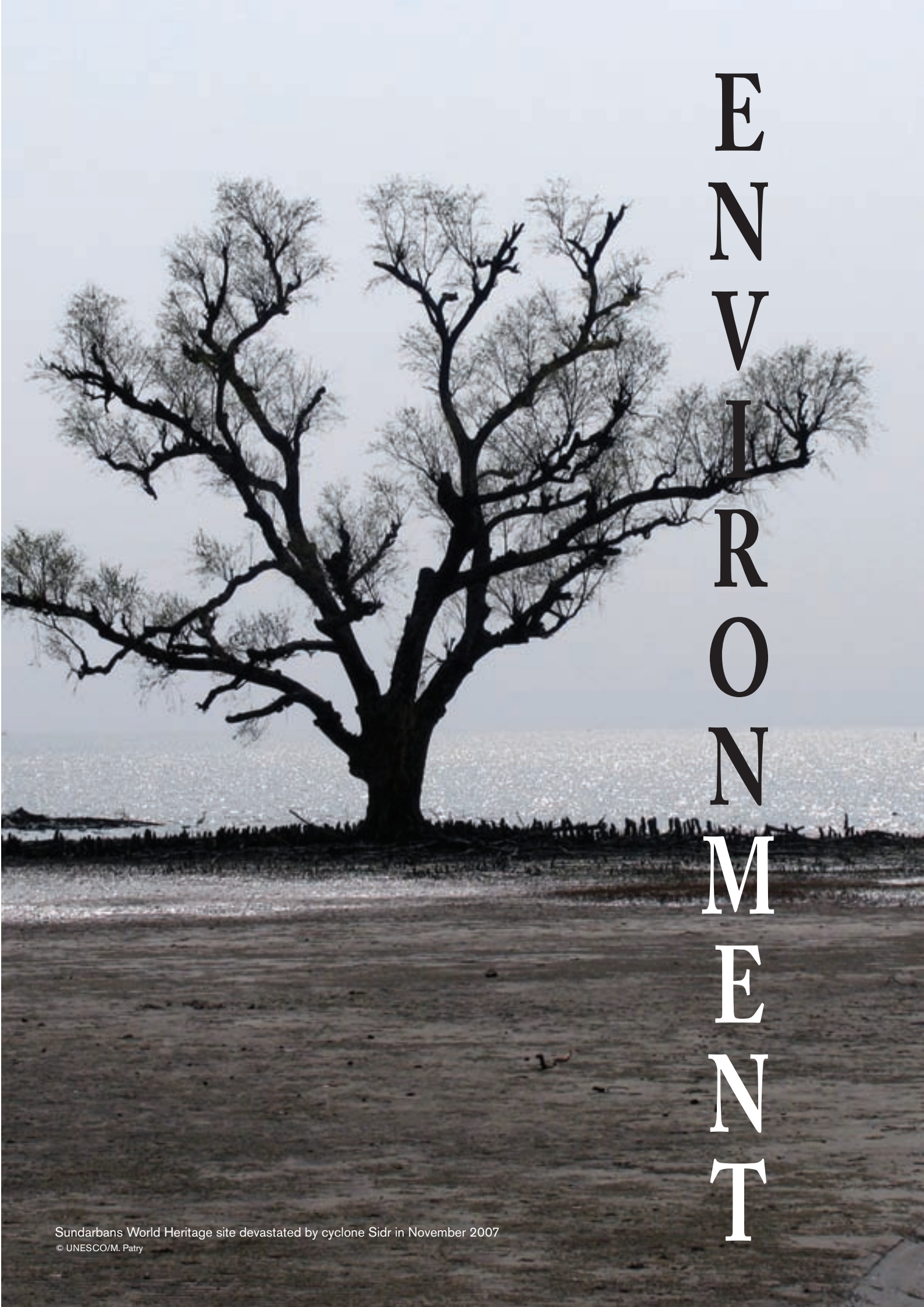
**Constitutive role:** Development in the broadest sense includes cultural development. Cultural development is a basic and inseparable component of development in general. If people are deprived of the opportunity to understand and cultivate their creativity, then that, in itself, is a hindrance to development (not just because it may hurt economic growth, or some other externally specified objective). Basic education is thus important, not just for the help that it might give to economic growth, but because it is an essential part of cultural development.

**Evaluative role:** What we value may, ultimately, be influenced by culture. There is no externally sanctified importance to economic growth or any other such objective, and the things that we intrinsically value reflect the impact of our culture. Even if the same things are valued in many different societies (if, for example, longer and happier lives without ill-health are sought in many quite different societies), this does not make them independent of values or cultures, but only indicates the congruence of valuational reasons in distinct societies.

**Instrumental role:** No matter what objectives we value, their pursuit is, to some extent, influenced by the nature of our cultures and ethics. While there is more to culture than this, we must not ignore the fact that cultural parameters do *inter alia* have strong instrumental roles. This applies not merely to the promotion of economic growth, but also to the achievement of other objectives such as raising the quality of life.

Central to culture is freedom, and in particular, the freedom to decide what we have reason to value, and what lives we have reason to seek. The instrumental, the evaluative and the constructive roles of culture all relate, ultimately, to this freedom.

(The UNESCO Courier, 1996 - 9)



# ENVIRONMENT

Sundarbans World Heritage site devastated by cyclone Sidr in November 2007  
© UNESCO/M. Patry



Hindi edition of this article in *The UNESCO Courier*, March 1992.

# Vandana Shiva

## talks to Judithe Bizot

**You are a physicist who abandoned your country's nuclear energy programme to devote yourself to nature and to halting its destruction.**

**How did you reach your present position?**

Ever since I was a child, love and knowledge of nature have given me my deepest satisfaction. I was very lucky to have been born the daughter of a forester in India and to have grown up in the Himalayan forest. Then I studied physics. The real bases of nature, as defined in the reductionist scheme of things, are understood through physics, the foundation of all the sciences. I had the opportunity to study biology and chemistry too, but real, profound understanding of nature was supposed to be reached through physics. Then I went into nuclear physics, where I experienced massive disappointments. It was only when I was doing my master's degree that I realized how unthink-

ing nuclear scientist were about the question of radiation hazards. We were taught how to create chain reactions in nuclear material and we knew all about energy transformations, and so on, but nothing about the interaction of radiation with living systems. I learned about radiation impacts from my sister, who is a doctor. When I was working in a nuclear reactor in India she kept saying: "Promise me you're never going to go back there!" "But why?" I'd say and she would reply, "but you could have babies with mutations. You don't know what's going to happen to you."

When I was groping my way and exploring these issues, senior physicists would say, "You don't need to know these things." Again, this was an ex-

clusion and a violation of my search for knowledge. If science means to know, then I had no scientific training. So I went to Canada and enrolled on a Foundations of Physics programme, where some of the basic questions about science that were troubling me were being asked.

I knew that if I continued studying the foundations of quantum theory I should be marginal to my situation and I decided that I must do something to relate myself to the Indian context. I shifted to science and technology policy issues. In the meantime, the Chipko movement had been created and because this had happened where I was from, I kept going back and doing volunteer work and writing for them. Before I knew where I was, ecology had become my primary concern.

**What is the Chipko movement? In your book *Staying Alive* you talk of the forest, for instance, not as a product for the market but as 'prakriti' – a life-giving force. You talk of the importance of women in the struggle against the massive consumption of natural resources.**

I responded to the destruction of the forest first because I was a child of the Himalayan forests. They were my identity and my sense of being. The erosion of the forests hit me very hard. Just before I left for Canada, I wanted to go back and visit a favourite spot of mine, a place where the British had built lovely rest houses from which the foresters managed the forests. There was one I particularly loved, near a stream in the beautiful oak forest. I went back there, and the oak forest had become a mere sprinkling of trees, and the stream was no longer gushing with water. When I talked to the people in the area I found that the stream had disappeared because they had cut the oak forest down to plant apple orchards, an enterprise which had never really been successful. (Apple trees need very fertile soil and virgin forest is usually cut down for this purpose.)

As for my involvement with Chipko, a movement of Himalayan women dedicated to the protection of the environment, I first got to know a leading fig-

**Vandana Shiva** is an Indian physicist and feminist militant, who works with many community action groups fighting against environmental destruction. In this interview she examines the links between the ecological crisis, the marginalization of women and the dominant model of economic development.

ure in the movement, named Sundarlal Batinguna, who was a great inspiration to people like myself. But at a second and more lasting level, my involvement was with the ordinary women who form the bedrock of Chipko. It was their perceptions and their beliefs that were the really rich foundations of my knowledge of ecology. They offered me a new sensibility about relationships. Ordinary people don't theorize. They have visions and beliefs. The germ of an idea or insight that I have developed has always been a phrase or an action from a person committed to act in a concrete situation. All my theory-building has come out of this nature-centred and women-centred action. The special relationships women have with the environment are due to this. In my book *Staying Alive* I attempted to explain why my insights came from women who were considered ignorant and marginal, who were not given a platform of any kind by society.

Why is it that women sense destruction faster and are more persevering in the struggles against destruction? Why do they carry on, when everyone else is cynical and hopeless? The reason is that women have a distinctive perception of what life is, a sense of what is really vital, which colours their view of what is at stake in the world.

**Can women lead the way in the new concern for the environment?**

I think women are taking the lead today. The important thing is that their leadership should be taken seriously. For us in India, Chipko marked the reawakening of an ecological consciousness, in a movement stretching from the villages of central India to the western Ghats. This new ecological consciousness is as old as our civilization, but what is new is its re-emergence as a political force in response to destruction, a force like Chipko in which ordinary women define the issues.

It doesn't take much effort to say, 'let's bring women in'. The crucial issue is let's not push women out. Because of its very specific nature, the relationship between women and the environment differs from one place to another. The movements that have led me towards my own commitments and decisions originate in the most marginal sectors of our society, in the so-called backward communities and specifically among the women of those communities.

If societies have succeeded in reproducing themselves for centuries, they

are examples of sustainability. Today, unfortunately, these are the societies that are labelled backward, whereas the societies that give up too quickly traditional ways of doing things are called progressive. That definition, of course, is biased. It is in countries like India that you find groups of women who are embedded both in nature and in sustainable cultures. Perennial civilizations, not ones that burst into growth and collapse, have something very special to offer. They enshrine the capacity to regenerate, the capacity to heal, the capacity to give and take, to build and create.

But I believe that women in the North are also intimately linked to the environment. Even in the most advanced societies, women have been left to care for children, homes and health. A wonderful study was carried out in Helsinki which showed that, whatever yardstick you take – time, energy, work – women are running Finnish society and the Finnish economy. It's wrong to say that women are unproductive, that they don't work. It is often said that women who stay at home do not work, but in fact they work harder than anyone else.

Nature for me comprises the life-giving forces, the life-support systems, the ecological systems that make life possible. These things are violated in the cities and in the country through nuclear hazards, toxic wastes, contaminated water

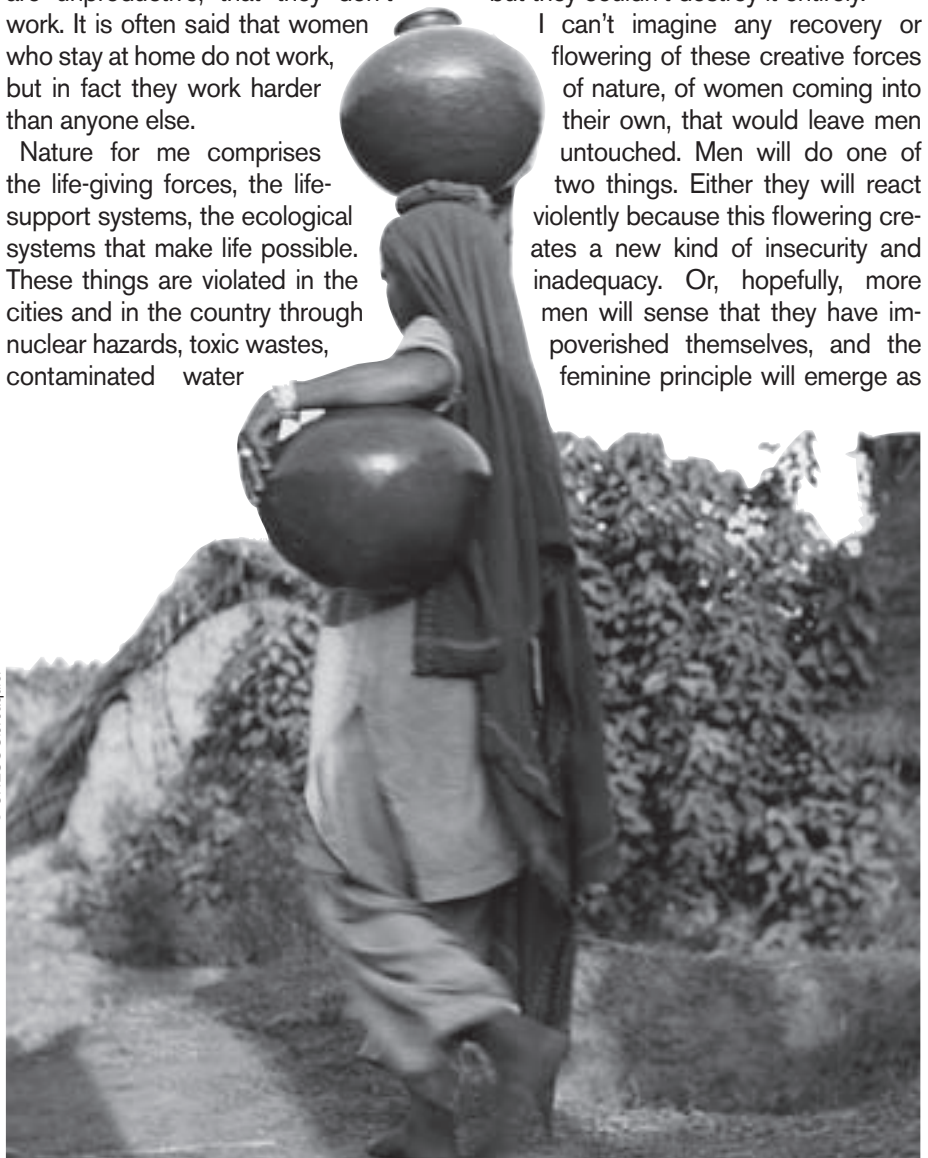
and polluted air. We need those life-giving sources of pure air, pure water, pure food, no matter where we are.

**Are we not in the process of amputating something from ourselves by rapidly diminishing our powers of regeneration?**

The term 'feminine principle' is basically just an English translation of *prakiti*, a force in nature and life which exists all round us, in women and in men. To me, the rise of modern patriarchy tended to kill the feminine principle in all its fullness, and in particular to annihilate it totally in man. In a sense, the rise of the masculine mode of knowledge, production and governance was a way of crushing something essential to society as a whole – to males and females. Fortunately, however, whereas the patriarchs considered that they were ruling over passive creatures (women and nature), they could never fully take that life away. They could distort and stifle it but they couldn't destroy it entirely.

I can't imagine any recovery or flowering of these creative forces of nature, of women coming into their own, that would leave men untouched. Men will do one of two things. Either they will react violently because this flowering creates a new kind of insecurity and inadequacy. Or, hopefully, more men will sense that they have impoverished themselves, and the feminine principle will emerge as

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A woman carrying water (1962).

a creative force which values nurture above domination, sustaining above destruction, rooted and experienced concrete knowledge above abstract, irrelevant knowledge. Surely these values are important enough for men to recognize and support them.

**Are you saying that male-dominated knowledge should be thrown out?**

Every society except contemporary industrial society has had criteria as to what it should say 'no' to. Industrial society is the only one which believes that if you have the power to do something you must do it. Indian philosophy is built on the concept that 'yes, you might have the power, but it is important that you use your discrimination in the exercise of that power'. A society should be able to make choices and judgements about means, to have values as ends.

I feel that plurality of choice creates an opportunity to decide what is needed and desirable, and what is not, and what is good and what is not. If that kind of opportunity is honestly and scientifically made available to society, with the idea of maintaining quality of life, with participation by people, then it will undoubtedly be taken. It should also be recognized that scientists are as fallible as anyone else and that science and its institutions are more often that not prostituted to economic interests, since the structure of power is so closely married to the structure of knowledge. Many technologies are used to serve the economic interests of the powerful, not choices based on ecology and ethics. Women have already made their choices on these issues.

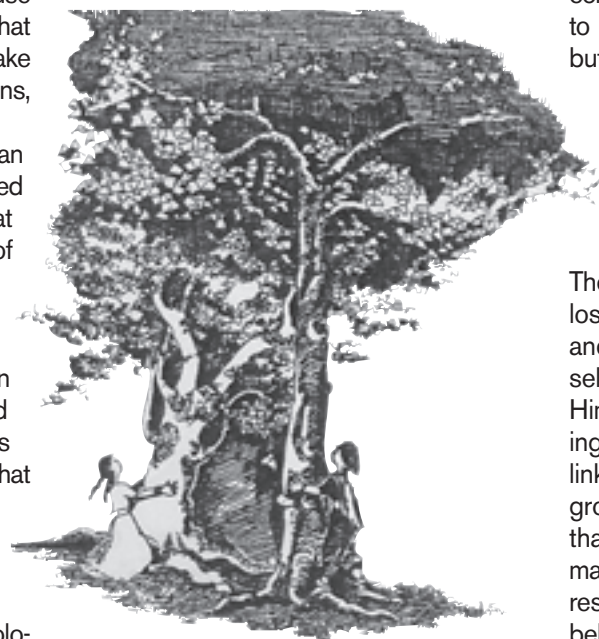
**Does the exploration of other planets have a place in a world-view that is concerned with improving the quality of life, joy, sharing and meeting basic needs?**

It's all right to explore. What is wrong is to justify the exploration of outer space in terms of solving the problems of this planet. I believe it is immoral to use people and their needs as the reasons for outer-space programmes, which should be seen as what they are: the indulgence of a group of very privileged people and countries. Everyone has a right to explore, but to use that right as an imperative into which everyone must fit is another matter. It's hiding the other agendas which go along with space programmes, which

are not simply pursued for their own sake but for military and other ends.

**What is your attitude to global, planetary, management and the question of local versus global ecologies?**

So-called 'primitive' peoples have always had a planetary cosmology, and for them the planet has existed in every action that they have taken. The most isolated communities have had a view not just of this planet but of how it relates to others and of how balance must be maintained. The planetary has always existed in the local. Any attempt to disenfranchise local communities of their planetary consciousness is unethical.



*These oak trees save and worship them, because their roots store water, their leaves have milk and fodder, the breeze blows cool over the beautiful rhododendron flower.*

A song of the Chipko movement

**In what specific ways do local communities understand or use planetary knowledge?**

Traditional systems of agriculture in every society have been based on the relationships between planets, which have provided the basis for deciding which is the right time to sow and which crops should be grown together. For example, many peasants possess a kind of scientific knowledge which enables them to recognize certain types of insect behaviour which indicate impending floods, so that they move out in time. But all this is a thing of the past because pesticides have killed these living indicators. We create systems which seem more reliable than traditional systems but are actually more vulnerable.

I see two ways in which industrial soci-

ety has been impoverished. Ethically, it is the only society which cannot distinguish between good and bad, which does not provide a chance to say no, which has no restraining criteria, values or limits to action. Secondly, it seems to lack any realization that its systems are increasingly based on highly vulnerable forms of organization. There is no comprehension of how these systems break down when most needed. If my relationship to nature provides me with knowledge and a feeling for what's happening to the world and what changes are coming, it helps me guide and protect my animals, myself and others. I have certain indicators available to me without risk of breakdown by which I can act in informed ways. Satellites, computer networks and so on are made to replace what is considered reliable, but they are actually more vulnerable.

**What influence can women have? How can they make a difference? How can they improve their lives and their environment?**

The first thing is that they should not lose faith in the knowledge they have and that they should trust in themselves. I also believe that when those Himalayan streams were disappearing women knew that deforestation is linked to desertification and stood their ground, even though the foresters said that forests have no link with watershed management. Women's instruments of resistance are standing their ground, believing in their knowledge, having faith in their values, not losing confidence, not feeling inferior. The dominating system imposes its choice on people by transforming every multiple choice into a tragic last possible one. Things are not black or white. I think that in our time it is very important to be able to turn around and say, no matter how powerless one is, well things could be different, could they not? I don't think that merely increasing the number of choices necessarily enriches people's lives. The criteria of choice are what really count. Merely to increase the number of choices is to adopt a supermarket mentality of consumer choice. It is essential to know when a choice is not a real choice, and that is impossible unless people have a sense of discrimination within them. Relating to nature, being embedded in it, provides the ethnical framework for choice between different scientific and technological options.

(The UNESCO Courier, 1992 - 3)

# A Barrage of Protest

by Peter Coles and Lyla Bavadam

Vadaj is a desolate place about 40 km from the historic city of Baroda in India's Gujarat state. During the summer months the baked earth cracks in the heat. When the monsoon comes, villagers perch on the furniture like chickens to avoid the rising waters. After the floods have subsided, the waterlogged clay soil is impenetrable, trapping cattle and people alike. For the past four years, the tin shacks of Vadaj have been home for dozens of families forced to leave their ancestral village to make way for the giant reservoir of the controversial Sardar Sarovar dam on the Narmada river.

These 'oustees' could even count themselves lucky. According to a report by Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), a pressure group fighting the Narmada project, when the Bargi dam was finished in 1990, over 1000 km upstream in Madhya Pradesh, the 114,000 people from 162 villages in the path of the floodwaters were simply jettisoned with nowhere to go. The government, says NBA, offered no resettlement land and only minimal cash compensation. Many of these villagers, says the report, now have menial jobs in the slums of Jabalpur, the main city in the region.

The plight of the Vadaj oustees could be shared by over 300,000 others as construction moves slowly ahead on the 30 large dams, 150 medium and 3000 smaller dams in a vast project that will transform the Narmada into a staircase of reservoirs and turbines. For the past 15 years, the backlash of opposition from NBA, a coalition of local people's movements opposed to the different dams, has been challenging the view of development that these dams promote. NBA argues that the beneficiaries of the project will be city dwellers, not the rural communities forced to leave their homes in the flooded valley.

Over 80 per cent of India's rural households have no electricity – and little hope of ever being connected to the electricity grid – according to Arundhati Roy, the acclaimed Indian author who has recently championed NBA's struggle. She says the increased food that the dams' irrigation canals may produce will be destined for export, doing little to feed the nation's poor. In 1995, she says, some 30 million tons



A San Francisco mural dedicated to the protest against the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) in the Narmada valley.

of unsold grain were stockpiled in state granaries, while 350 million Indians still live below the poverty line. What is more, most of the people affected by the Narmada project, says NBA, are tribal communities, fishing villages and Dalits (the so-called 'oppressed' lower stratum of the Hindu caste system), who already benefit least from India's prosperity.

The notion of dam building as a prime technology solution to development is not new. Back in the 1940s, just after Independence, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru saw dams as 'the Temples of Modern India'. The Narmada Valley Development Project was to be a showcase for this vision. Although this particular project stayed on the drawing board for over 30 years, mostly because of disputes over water rights between the three states – Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat – through which the Narmada flows, India went on to build some 3600 dams.

Coupled to the Green Revolution of the 1960s, these dams provided massive irrigation systems that have underpinned a fourfold increase in food production. And similar prospects

**Peter Coles** is a British journalist specializing in scientific and environmental issues.

**Lyla Bavadam** is a Bombay correspondent of the Indian bi-monthly *Frontline*.

are being heralded for the Narmada dams. According to official figures, the Sardar Sarovar dam, the last and largest of the dams before the river reaches the Arabian Sea, will provide water for 20-30 million people all year round, especially in the arid areas of Kutch, Saurashtra and the state of Rajasthan. At the same time, the 138.6 metre multi-purpose dam is scheduled to produce 1450 MW of hydroelectric power, while its reservoir should smooth out the yearly seesaw of floods and droughts, protecting some 400,000 people. NBA contests just about all the official statistics on the future benefits of the project. It also questions the very principle of the dams from the point of view of development. Led by Medha Patkar, a sociologist originally from Bombay, NBA argues that the benefits will never justify the irreversible loss of forest, fisheries, farmland, culture and livelihood for the hundreds of thousands of displaced people. Some 30 million people depend directly or indirectly on the 1312 km long river and its valley, with its fertile farmland, historic temples and pilgrimage routes.

#### World Bank withdrawal

In 1986, a year after the World Bank lent \$450 million to construct Sardar Sarovar, NBA commissioned a series of impact assessment studies that, it claims, exposed crucial flaws in the official cost-benefit analyses for the entire project. But at the heart of NBA's campaign is the apparent lack of resettlement provision for oustees. With mounting international support, NBA was able to force a review of the Narmada project. In 1991 the World Bank commissioned an independent inquiry, whose report essentially endorsed the NBA claims, saying that there had been "no proper appraisal" of the project's impact. Two years later, in an unprecedented about-turn, the World Bank withdrew from the scheme.

In 1994, India's Supreme Court upheld a case presented by NBA, freezing all construction on the Narmada dams until the state governments carried out adequate impact assessments. NBA insists that there must be no displacement if there are no realistic plans for resettlement. With the exception of Sardar Sarovar, none of the dam projects had any resettlement plans, says the organization. NBA is adamant that it is not opposed to the development that the dams promise. It is also looking for a compromise solution, calling for the final height of the dams to be reduced. The lower the final height, the fewer people will be forced to move to

make way for the reservoirs and the less land will be lost. Although it now seems unlikely that NBA's actions will stop the dams, the organization has brought the issue of resettlement to the fore. In 1998 the Madhya Pradesh government set up a task force to look at resettlement possibilities. It found that not only was there no land in Madhya Pradesh to house oustees, but that the land promised by Gujarat either did not exist, or was of too poor quality. Madhya Pradesh has now called for a new evaluation. The state of Gujarat, however, has dug in its heels. Not only did it refuse to allow the independent World Commission on Dams, set up by the World Bank, to visit the Sardar Sarovar site, it also challenged the Supreme Court's earlier ruling. In February 1999, after a four-year moratorium, the Supreme Court reversed its earlier decision, allowing construction to begin again at Sardar Sarovar, adding a further 5 metres to the 80 metres already built.

#### Rally in the valley

NBA has now reinforced its struggle, organizing a series of passive sit-ins and hunger strikes. At the end of July last year Arundhati Roy organized a 'Rally in the Valley', marching with 400 other public figures and supporters from village to village in the affected area. An estimated 10,000 oustees joined the rally in the fertile Nimad region of Madhya Pradesh, where the local farmers will lose their land if construction goes ahead. And when the monsoon rains began in August 1999, Medha Patkar and other NBA members took up positions in the village of Domkhedi, refusing to move as the flood waters rose up to their shoulders. Police in boats finally removed them. At the end of last year, Arundhati Roy published a closely documented essay entitled 'The Greater Common Good' in Outlook magazine, criticizing the Narmada Valley

project both in principle and in its application.

As the mud flies between NBA and supporters of the project, the withdrawal of the World Bank could have unpredictable effects in the longer term. With most international aid programmes now unwilling to be associated with the dams, the developers are looking for private sector funding. This could be much harder to influence than an institution such as the World Bank, which has a 'worthy' image to protect.

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Indian women and child at work, taking water from a fountain.





Tiger cubs in Mysore.

# Project Tiger

by Rahul Singh

A tiger in its natural habitat is one of Nature's most marvelous and unforgettable sights. Around three metres long and weighing about 230 kilos, the adult animal with its beautifully coloured coat of golden-orange and black stripes is swift, ferocious and powerful, yet languid and graceful in its movements. It is an unmatched hunting machine. No other animal arouses such fear, excitement and awe; no other animal is surrounded with such an air of mystery.

The tiger, which is afraid of no wild creature, has one mortal enemy – man, who can not only destroy this magnificent animal with guns, poison and traps but can also destroy its surroundings with axe and chain-saw.

Half a century ago, there were at least 60,000 tigers in Asia. In Indonesia, the last known tiger was killed just before the Second World War and the Caspian tiger followed it into oblivion three decades later. (Attempts are now being made to re-introduce the tiger to these areas.)

India has become the tiger's last major haunt in Asia, but here too the species has been devastated on a monumental scale. At the turn of the century there were 40,000 tigers in India. By 1972 there were just 2000 left. For the maharajahs of India, with their lavish privy purses, tiger shooting was a status symbol. One maharajah proudly claimed to have shot 1150 tigers during his lifetime. Bags of 500 were quite commonplace.

But even the abolition of the princely order did not improve matters. Poachers moved in for the valuable tiger skins, which two decades ago were worth \$4000 each. Meanwhile, India's population explosion from 450 million at independence in 1947 to over 800 million today meant that people moved inexorably into the tiger's habitat.

Forests, particularly in the Terai region bordering India and Nepal, were cut down to provide land for foodcrops. Its cover and that of its prey destroyed, the tiger disappeared from many parts of India where it had earlier flourished in large numbers. In other areas tigers retreated further and further into such forests as were left, often killing domestic cattle in their desperate hunger. By the time alarm bells started to ring in the late 1960s, the tiger was on the verge of extinction in India.

The 1969 world congress of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), held in New Delhi, signalled an important turning point. The IUCN put the tiger on its list of endangered species and called for a ban on tiger hunting worldwide, to which India quickly reacted by forbidding tiger-shoots. On 1 April 1973, an ambitious 'Project Tiger' was officially launched by the Indian Government in Corbett National Park (Uttar Pradesh), named after the legendary British hunter-turned-conservationist, Jim Corbett. Eight tiger reserves were initially created as part of Project Tiger, to which the World Wildlife Fund donated \$1 million.

According to Bittu Sehgal, the founder-editor of India's leading wildlife magazine, *Sanctuary*, the idea behind Project Tiger is basically very simple. "Each reserve is demarcated into a core zone and a buffer zone. In the core, no human activity other than forest protection is allowed; here Nature is allowed to administer itself. In the buffer, human activity is

In 1989, **Rahul Singh** was editor-in-chief of *The Sunday Observer*, India's largest Sunday newspaper, published in Bombay and Delhi.

minimized, restricted to the exploitation of 'minor' forest produce such as grass, fruit, seeds, honey and fallen wood. The logic is that the core area, left to its own devices, will quickly become super-productive and that this productivity will spill over to the buffer zone."

The results of the new strategy were extremely encouraging. Slowly but surely, the tiger started to make a comeback in India. At Corbett Park, there were only 44 tigers left sixteen years ago; today there are nearly 100. At Ranthambhor, a forest once owned by the Maharajah of Jaipur and protected mainly for tiger hunting, the number of tigers remaining at the start of Project Tiger has increased from fourteen to forty.

Thanks to Project Tiger, the tiger has even made a remarkable recovery in the Sundarbans, the 10,000-square-kilometre mangrove forest in India, where the Ganges, the Brahmaputra and the Meghna flow into the Bay of Bengal. Here, in one of the world's largest tracts of mangroves, an area where the ecosystem was seriously threatened, more and more woodcutters, fishermen and honey-gatherers were being attacked by tigers, who, in the process of evolution, have become excellent swimmers and whose diet now includes fish.

In 1973 Project Tiger was launched over an area of 2500 square kilometres of the Sundarbans. At first, the authorities tried to exclude people entirely from the core reserve, but this proved impractical, and fishermen and honey-gatherers con-

tinued to go there despite the risks. So, in 1981, a new strategy was devised. Electrified human dummies were placed at selected points in order to condition the tigers to fear man. When the tigers attacked the dummies, they received a shock, powerful enough to cause them pain.

The ploy seems to have worked. Since then, the number of people killed by the tigers has dropped considerably. At the same time, since the inner core has been protected, honey collection and fish harvesting have increased by 300 per cent in fifteen years.

As Sehgal says, Project Tiger is concerned not only with saving the tiger, but with ecology, the environment, and "saving mankind itself". Today, the number of tigers in India has risen to 4000 and, in the process, other creatures that were on the verge of extinction in India, such as the elephant, the stag, the one-horned rhino and the wild buffalo, have been given a new lease of life.

Above all, the Indian public is now far more aware of how man's future on this planet is closely linked with Nature. Deforestation has certainly threatened the tiger, but it has also been a cause of the floods that recently ravaged much of north and eastern India. The connection would not have been made 20 years ago, but it is being made now. That is a step in the right direction.

*(The UNESCO Courier, 1989 - 2)*

# Tigers and Men

by Shiraz Sidhva, Indian journalist

**A** green canopy of lush tall forests covers the Nokrek Biosphere Reserve in the North eastern Indian state of Meghalaya. The highest peak in the Garo Hills, at an altitude of 1418 metres above sea level, Nokrek features undisturbed natural ecosystems and stunning mountain landscapes. The area is home to wildlife,

including elephants, tigers, leopards, hollock gibbons and rare orchids, many of which have yet to be documented. Nokrek also houses a gene sanctuary to preserve rare varieties of citrus plants, including the Indian wild orange (*Citrus indica*), which could serve as a gene pool for commercially produced citrus.

Off the beaten path, Nokrek gained international recognition in May 2009. Along with two other Indian biosphere reserves – Pachmarhi in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh, and Similipal, in the eastern state of Orissa – Nokrek is among the 22 new sites recently added by UNESCO to its World Network of Biosphere Reserves. Their inclusion raises the number of Indian sites on the World List to seven, from a total of 15 Biosphere Reserves across the subcontinent.

The new status is expected to have a huge impact on the conservation and monitoring of these reserves to find the right balance between economic and human development.

The challenge for all three Indian Biosphere Reserves is to achieve a balance between human activity and environmental protection. This is precisely the main challenge of UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme. "Apart from being a huge accolade for the area," said Vinod K. Nautiyal, principal chief conservator of forests, Meghalaya, "the inclusion of Nokrek on the World Network list will help local officials dis-



© Anirban Datta-Roy (India)

Nokrek, highest point in the Garo Hills, is distinguished by its stunning mountain landscapes.

cover how people living in the area can improve their quality of life and enhance the superb natural environment.”

The state forest chief points out that guidance from international experts would greatly benefit Nokrek. He hopes the new designation will contribute to the research and documentation of landscapes, ecosystems, species and genetic variations, besides complementing conservation and sustainable development strategies already in place.

The Botanical Survey of India has revealed that 10% of plants in Nokrek are rare or endangered. Scientists fear that increasing human intervention around the area designated as the gene sanctuary is affecting the habitat's natural balance. Large-scale deforestation and shifting cultivation have led to soil erosion, and the selective cultivation of commercially profitable citrus varieties in areas close to the reserve also threatens genetic diversity.

Spanning an area of 47.48 square kilometres, Nokrek's core zone is an important source of many perennial rivers and streams, including the Simsang, Ganol, Bugi, Dareng and Rongdik rivers. One of the biggest tourist attractions in the area is the Siju Cave, located on a cliff overhanging the right bank of the Simsang River. Locally known as Dobakhol or the cave of bats, it is the third-longest cave in India, and consists of innumerable internal chambers and labyrinths which have yet to be fully explored.

### **Pachmarhi, botanical and religious sanctuary**

Located in the heart of India, the Pachmarhi Biosphere Reserve encompasses three wildlife parks – Bori, Satpura, and Pachmarhi. It also includes the Satpura Tiger Reserve at its core, and the picturesque hill-station of Pachmarhi, established by the British as a regional army headquarters.

With cascading waterfalls, ravines and gorges sculpted into the red sandstone earth, and dense evergreen sal and teak forests interspersed with wild bamboo groves, Pachmarhi is a veritable paradise for botanists and geologists. Pachmarhi is also an archaeological treasure house, with rock paintings in cave shelters, some of which are estimated to be 10,000 years old. Pachmarhi also has cultural and religious significance for Hindu pilgrims who throng here in large numbers every year to celebrate two important Hindu festivals, Maha Shivratri (in March) and Nagpanchmi (in July-August).

Pachmarhi boasts seven distinct forest

types, including tropical, moist and dry as well as sub-tropical hill forests. A monsoon climate, with three distinct seasons, ensures a rich and luxurious vegetation. Perennial streams and dark shady gorges encourage the growth of moisture-loving species such as ferns, orchids and rare herbs. As many as 71 species of ferns and fern allies, and 1190 species of angiosperms (flowering plants) have been documented.



© Dr. H.S. Debnath  
Nepenthes khasiana L., a plant endemic to Meghalaya, found in the Nokrek Biosphere Reserve.

Pachmarhi's dense forest vegetation provides an ideal habitat for wild animals, including panthers, wild boar, barking deer, rhesus macaques and crocodiles, besides tigers. The area is home to over 50 species of mammal, 254 species of birds, 30 species of reptiles, and 50 species of butterflies.

The reserve, with a total area of 4926 square kilometres, comprises 511 villages, with agriculture as the main source of income. Poaching, deforestation and man-animal conflicts remain the reserve's greatest problems.

“The international recognition that we have gained by being added to the World Network will provide tremendous financial support, needed for the improvement of infrastructure,” Nayan Singh Dungriyal, Field Director of the Pachmarhi Biosphere Reserve said. “This will allow us to discover new approaches to conservation and sustainable development.”

### **The tigers of Similipal**

The Similipal Biosphere Reserve, once a royal hunting ground of the Maharaja of Mayurbhanj, comprises the Similipal Sanctuary, and the adjoining Nato and

Satkoshia Reserve Forests, covering a total area of 5500 square kilometres. Sustained protection measures and management initiatives under the Indian government's 'Project Tiger' programme have resurrected the dwindling population of tigers in the Similipal Tiger Reserve, which accounts for nearly half the tiger population in Orissa state, on India's east coast.

Named after the silk cotton trees that bloom here, Similipal is a living laboratory for environmental scientists. Its ecosystems include lush forests, grasslands and wetlands, which are inhabited by elephants, panthers, four-horned antelopes, giant squirrels and mugger crocodiles, besides being the abode of tigers, including the rare black and melanistic tigers. It houses 94 species of orchids and over 3000 species of other plants.

The tribal inhabitants, who account for 73 per cent of the total population of about 450,000, depend on agriculture, hunting and collection of forest products for their livelihoods, but need additional sources of income. With 75 tribal villages located inside the tiger reserve, and the human population and livestock living in close proximity with wildlife, it is little wonder that forest officials are constantly challenged by man-animal conflicts.

“Our biggest challenge is to protect the traditional rights of the forest dwellers, while conserving wildlife,” said R. Nagaraja Reddy, Orissa's Chief Conservator of Forests and Director of the Similipal Biosphere Reserve. “The inclusion of Similipal in the World Network will lead to meaningful exchanges of information, experience and personnel. It will also considerably help the research of ecosystems, as well as monitoring and training work.”

Besides providing advice, Reddy hopes the new designation will “bring funding from UNESCO through seed funds which could initiate local efforts, help broker local projects, and establish durable financial mechanisms.”

For Belinda Wright, Executive Director of the Wildlife Protection Society of India, “The benefits for the sites of joining the World Network are largely political. With world recognition, the state governments of Orissa and Madhya Pradesh will focus more attention on the protection and management of these two tiger reserves, and this in turn should help improve their conditions.”

*(The UNESCO Courier, 2008 - 6)*

# Turn off the Lights Please!

© UN Photo/Devra Berkowitz



Rajendra Pachauri.

## Rajendra Pachauri talks to Jasmina Šopova

***The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which you chair, has been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Could this be seen as a sign of change in the world's attitude towards global warming?***

Indeed, the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to the IPCC and Mr. Al Gore is an important statement on what the Norwegian Nobel Committee sees as a danger to peace arising out of unmitigated climate change. Since the Nobel Peace Prize and the significance attached to it get a great deal of attention and coverage worldwide, hopefully people's attitude towards this issue will be affected as a result.

© Thameiz Nogueira Magalhães (Brazil)



Drawing by Thameiz Nogueira Magalhães (Brazil), one of the laureates of the contest organized by the International Year of Planet Earth (2008).

***What are the impacts of climate change on peace?***

The impacts of climate change on peace can be numerous: first, the availability of water is decreasing, water resources are under high stress in several parts of the world. Second, extreme events such as heat waves, floods, droughts and extreme precipitation, coastal flooding as a result of sea level rise, can lead to population movements on a sizeable scale. The migration of large numbers of people can have an impact on peace, since the locations where such people move to may find this to be an unacceptable imposition. Finally, the impacts of climate change on agriculture could also lead to large scale malnutrition, hunger and deprivation, which could end in conflict

within communities and further movement of large numbers away from areas where food is scarce.

***In your Nobel lecture, you highlight that scholars do not pay enough attention to the inequities arising from these changes, although they are part of the most significant aspects of the impacts of climate change. Could you develop this idea?***

Scholars have not paid adequate attention to the equity implications of climate change because thus far research has largely focused on the physical science aspects of climate change, the vulnerability aspects as well as on the options for mitigation. Now, however, there is growing awareness about equity as an ethical issue related to climate change.

***You head The Energy and Resource Institute which developed a germ that breaks down petrol. Can you explain how it works and what the results are?***

We have a major biotechnology programme in The Energy and Resources Institute, and some of our work has re-

sulted in the development of microbes that consume petroleum products. This technology is being used now quite extensively for cleaning up oil spills and oil sludge deposits. Once the oil has been completely eaten up, the microbes perish without any environmental effects.

***You subscribe to the philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, which means the whole universe is one family. What is the role of Indian traditional culture in your work?***

It is difficult for me to identify what role Indian tradition and culture play in my work, but having been brought up in this country and holding Indian tradition in great respect, I suppose everything I do is influenced by my upbringing and beliefs.

***You believe that each one of us can do something for a better and safer world. What advice would you give our readers?***

Each one of us can do a great deal to make this world better and safer. First, we must develop a belief in the need for protecting the environment. We must also realize the danger of treating Mother Nature with disrespect and of damaging the earth's ecosystems and natural resources. We could then find ways to minimize our footprint on the earth's natural resources and ecosystems. This would involve simple things like switching off lights when we leave the room, using efficient energy consuming devices, using energy efficient transport such as public transport, promoting the use of renewable forms of energy... We can bring about a lifestyle change in which we reduce reusing and recycling products that we have become accustomed to. Technology will also bring about change towards lowering the intensity of natural resource use, which in turn should be supported by policies. But lifestyle changes are important too.

(The UNESCO Courier, 2008 - 3)

Climate change endangers peace, declares **Rajendra Pachauri**, Chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and 2007 Nobel Peace Prize, in this interview published in "Planet Hot-Spot", an issue of the UNESCO Courier devoted to the International Year of Planet Earth (2008).

# SOCIETY



Crowd around the Sun Temple at Konârak, Indian World Heritage site.  
© UNESCO/Y. Layma

Page drawn from *The UNESCO Courier* in Urdu, March 1984.

# Scenes from everyday life

by Sundara Ramaswamy

Tamil people today have a way of life that carries them back and forth over twenty centuries. When a young Tamil with a doctorate in atomic science from a famous American university advertises for a bride in the matrimonial columns of a Madras English-language daily, he mentions his caste and sub-caste and asks a suitable girl with the height and waistline he desires to write to him immediately – enclosing a horoscope. And since computers are now used for casting horoscopes there need be no delay.

On the day of *Ayudha Pooja*, the annual festival at which craftsmen honour the tools of their trade, surgeons who perform open-heart surgery will put a *kumkumam* mark on their minute, high-precision equipment.

Village, town, city: each has its own pace and style of life. Morning begins much earlier in the cities and villages than in the small towns. In the villages this is a natural and in the cities an enforced inconvenience.

In the cities a generation may still survive which remembers the sound – that wonderful sound – of milk squirting into empty metal pots from the teats of cows and buffaloes. The milk sound, the sound of cow bells, the sound of hoofs, the

rattle of horns, the rustle of straw, the clatter of milk cans on the ground – the only sound like these in the cities today is that of bicycle bells. In the city milk is left on the doorstep in plastic sachets, and the customer does not even see the face of the girl who delivers it. Alas, the alarm has been set too late for that. Beside the milk is the morning newspaper, and soon the odour of coffee and news will be in the air. While reading his newspaper and drinking his coffee, the prudent householder will remember to turn on the tap and fill his pots and pans with water. The water supply may continue to flow all day... but then again it may not.

In the city as in the village, the first thing the housewife should do when she has taken her morning bath is to draw the traditional *kolam* sign in front of her door. I still remember forty years later how my grandmother once accusingly pointed out to her daughter-in-law that, although it was already noon, she had still not drawn the *kolam*. (In fact the sun had only just risen). In those days the *kolam* was drawn with rice flour; today it is traced with white lime powder. Over the years it has become accepted that a housewife can draw the *kolam* after merely washing her face, provided that she has applied the *kumkumam* and arranged her hair above her forehead.

Methods of cooking have changed. There has been a real revolution in the kitchen. Yesterday gas stoves, electric grinders, pressure-cookers, hot-plates and refrigerators were possessions of the rich; today middle-class people aspire to have them. Working housewives are discovering time-saving strat-

**Sundara Ramaswamy** (1931-2005)  
was a renowned Tamil writer and influential essayist.

egies in the kitchen. The menfolk and the children will have to learn to do their bit in the morning hustle and bustle.

From eight o'clock in the morning onwards the sparrows start to fly away from every home. First the little sparrows, then the big sparrows. Then the house suddenly subsides into a great calm. Now, if anybody rings the doorbell, the door will usually be kept firmly shut. Even if it is opened, it will only be to a width of four fingers, and an elderly face, frightened by the sound of its own non-committal reply, will close the door upon itself.

Crowded buses and trains. Even if a seat is vacant, tradition still requires that a woman should not sit beside a man, nor man beside a woman. While boarding, however, men and women inevitably jostle one another in the crush. They are bound to bump into one another while standing or moving down to aisle. But for the time being they have decided not to sit side by side. Some humorous conductors crack jokes and make the passengers laugh, helping to dispel the nervousness that has been rising into the mind like poison ever since daybreak.

The evenings are starting to belong to the television, which the middle class has welcomed with open arms. For all practical purposes the television is simply the cinema that has entered the home; films that have already been seen at the cinema get a second showing in the drawing room. Groups of children from neighbouring families are sitting on the floor in front of the set. They know what is going to happen next on the screen, and shout out the emotion-packed dialogue being breathlessly delivered by hero or heroine, delighted to beat the actors to the end of each sentence. Not that television has depleted the cinema audiences; even for midday shows long queues can be seen waiting outside the cinemas in the scorching sun.

Women attend the free meetings held by religious preach-

ers. When these erudite religious scholars intersperse epic stories with examples of behaviour drawn from everyday life, from the cinema, and from politics in order to show how the ancient virtues have fallen into neglect, the people in the audience can find tearful consolation in relating the trials and tribulations of their own lives to the general decline in values.

The men, and more so the women, also flock to the plays put on by the *Sabha*, local cultural associations. They rock with laughter at the crackling jokes, secretly weep with the heroine when she bewails the sorrows besetting her, and share her joy when her problems disappear like mist driven away by the sunshine. Then they return home, glad to have found an outlet for their mental tensions.

For those who do not want to go out or who cannot afford to do so, there are the weekly and monthly magazines to be read. These magazines contain adventure stories, love stories with a social or historical background told with bubbling enthusiasm and ending with a strong insistence on the moral virtues, titbits of information, revelations about politicians and film stars, as well as light poetry and essays. Tamils who do not feel some mental bond with these magazines or who do not glance at them at least once a day are few are far between.

Sunday is a wonderful day. Sunday mornings are for routine jobs and the afternoons for more spiritual satisfaction. Piles of clothes must be mended, washed, ironed and put away. The bank must be visited (banks are open on Sundays in residential areas). Certain skills must be brought into play to obtain from ration-shops slightly higher quantities of scarce grains, low-fat vegetable oils (sought-after not because of their low cholesterol but because of their low price), sugar and/or kerosene. Grain must be pounded and ground. Then, after ap-



An everyday scene in the Damodar Valley (1962).

plying oil to the head, it is time for a leisurely bath with careful rinsing of the hair, followed by a siesta to squeeze out the last drop of body fatigue. In the afternoon, a film or a trip to the beach or to a friend's house. And so on and so forth... When Sunday dawns there are so many plans and projects nagging at the mind. If you listen to the voice of physical fatigue that says "Not today, not today", and you stay in bed, then the family is done for. Even if you get up briskly and chase after time's fleeting chariot and rush through your chores, time's chariot somehow manages to keep ahead and when it disappears into darkness not even a quarter of the work is done. Every

theatre companies have become very common. Electricity has brought lighting. It has also brought the blare of loud-speakers. Simple make-up accessories and new kinds of dresses are finding a place in village life. The villagers are obsessed by films and politics, even though their lives are not dependent on them. In the little shops, at the hairdresser's, and under the trees, people gather and discuss the cinema and politics. The two fields are not unrelated. Yesterday's film personalities are today active in politics. Today's cinema people may go into politics at any moment.

It would be wrong to say that the old life-style in the vil-

© UNESCO/B. Singh



An amused wife watching her husband prepare a meal (Kalakankar).

Sunday it is like this. You think back and remember the careless mistakes you have made, the things you have forgotten to do. Next Sunday you must try even harder.

The gap between cities and villages has narrowed. Efficient and steady improving road transport is helping to bring people together. The expanding city suburbs are reaching out to the villages.

The village revolves around agriculture. It is very early in the morning when the men and women of the village set out to work in the fields or gardens. There is no time to prepare breakfast, nor any modern time-saving kitchen equipment. If there are any left-overs from the previous night's food the villagers swallow a mouthful before they leave. It is becoming a custom to drink a cup of tea on the way to work. In the villages few parents devote much time or trouble to getting their children off to school; the children must fend for themselves.

Changing fashions are also reaching the villages. Touring

lages has completely disappeared. Time once went by at snail's pace; now it has started to walk; but it does not yet run. Leisurely conversation can still be heard on the *thinnai*, the verandahs of the houses. In rivers and ponds women take their time to bathe. Women still carry pots of drinking water on their hips. The harmony that once existed everywhere between men and other living creatures continues to exist in the villages. There are cows, buffaloes, chickens and dogs. The grinding mills still turn in the homes, the pestle still rotates in the mortar. Healthy women still pound paddy with heavy pounding rods. Boiled paddy is spread outside in the street in front of the door.

The sun still rises over the village. Leave the house, walk across the fields, look to the far horizon and feel the mountain breeze like the soft touch of children.

(The UNESCO Courier, 1984 - 3)





Cremation at dawn on the shores of the Ganges, in Northern India. © Claude Gourlay, Pont-Aven

# India: Cycles of Birth and Rebirth

by A.S. Gnanasambandan

Once upon a time a snarling dog was standing outside an Indian temple. Another dog came up to him and asked why he was so angry. The first dog replied: "I was a priest in this temple in my previous birth. The trustee of the temple, a powerful man, goaded me into becoming his accomplice in the theft of the jewellery of the goddess of the temple, and as a result I am now born as a dog. I am waiting to see that fellow. As soon I see him, I shall pounce on him and tear out his throat. The second dog said: "Please don't do that. I was that trustee in my previous birth."

This story and others like it were often told by Indian sages to illustrate the belief, common to all schools of Indian philosophy, that life is a cycle of births and rebirths. After their death, human beings are reborn into this world in various forms; all of them have passed through several earlier births and will pass through several future births. What they think and do in this life will determine the form (human, animal, insect, etc.) in which

they will live their next life, as set forth in the doctrine of Karma (action) and rebirth. "Accordingly as one acts, accordingly as one behaves, so does one become in the next life," says the ancient treatise known as the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. "The doer of good becomes good, the doer of evil becomes evil. One becomes virtuous by virtuous action, bad by bad action."

What happens to the soul after death and before rebirth? Each school of Indian philosophy has its own answer to this question, although they all agree that there is a celestial world and that those who do right things and live a godly life go to it and enjoy its benefits while awaiting their return to the terrestrial world.

A leading Tamil writer and literary scholar,  
**A.S. Gnanasambandan** (1916-2002)  
penned over 30 books on literature and spiritualism.  
This article is an edited version of a longer study prepared for  
*The UNESCO Courier* by Professor Gnanasambandan.

Because there are differences in the amount and quality of good and evil that people do, the upper world is divided into seven regions or *lokas*; the underworld where evildoers go is also divided into regions. The doers of good go to one of the seven different upper worlds depending on the quality and quantity of the good they do. The lowest upper world, for example, is reached by those who do good and lead a pious life, performing the prescribed rituals to propitiate the gods, but do not control their senses and mind. To go to a higher upper world one must control one's sense and one's mind, and as far as possible one's inner mind also.

Only a human being can achieve emancipation (*moksha*) from the cycle of birth and death. This fate is reserved for the

amount of desire – even desire for emancipation – remains in his mind.

“Eradicate desire,” wrote the southern sage Tirumoolar.

“Eradicate it even if the desire is to attain the lotus feet of the Lord.

The more you desire the greater will be your suffering.”

Some believe that the life which goes out of the body has a form, the *sukshma sarira* or astral body, with which we accede to the upper world or lower world according to the good or bad that we have done in this one. Another belief is that a dying person's last thought gives an indication as to their next birth. This is why Indian philosophy stresses that you should go to bed with pure thoughts, repeating



A painting of the Wheel of Life, one of the most ancient Buddhist symbols. Grippled by the claws of Yama, the Lord of Death, the image depicts the six worlds of potential rebirth.

select few (*jnanis* or *yogis*) who are unaffected by worldly things or by the pairs of opposites (*dwandas*) such as suffering and happiness. According to the *Bhagavad Gita*: “The serene one absorbed in the *Atman* [eternal self] masters his will, He knows no disquiet in heat or in cold, In pain of pleasure, In honour, or dishonour.” Only someone who transcends the pairs of opposites attains the lotus feet of the Lord.

Even if a person's soul reaches the seventh upper world it is still not entitled to achieve emancipation if a very small

the name of the Lord. If you die in your sleep, the purity of your last thought will ennoble your soul through the next birth which will certainly be into a higher spiritual life.

How far have these philosophical tenets and beliefs been practised in society? Traditional Indian society was broadly divided into a minority of intellectuals and philosophers and a majority which fully accepted their teachings about the cycle of birth and death. Even today, illiterate villagers say that someone who harms another person will be born as a street dog in his next birth.

The doctrine of Karma and rebirth has long influenced people to do what would lead them to a good afterlife. It might be said that they were motivated by a foolish fear of the other world, which may or may not exist. But what about the postulates of modern science regarding the atom, electromagnetic force and energy, which cannot be perceived by our senses, but whose existence we accept because we can see the results of their actions?

There is however one big difference between the findings of modern science and the Indian “life chain” philosophy. The Darwinian theory of evolution postulates that life can only evolve upwards, whereas according to Indian philosophy, those who have reached a very high spiritual level can come

However, as the centuries went by, an intellectual hierarchy began to rule society and its members realized that they could use the doctrine of Karma and rebirth as a weapon to subjugate the majority and thereby perpetuate their power. The caste system came to be twisted into an inegalitarian hierarchy based on birth. The higher castes in the hierarchy were meant to serve them. Since the majority of the lower rank were deliberately left without education and intellectual pursuits they had to accept this inegalitarian structure based on birth, which determined what work they should do in this world.

So, for many centuries, the theory of a chain of birth and rebirth helped perpetuate the inequalities and injustices of



© Sasha Achilli, Milano

Untouchable woman and sacred cow (Pushkar).

down in the next birth to the lowest level if they commit an action in a fit of emotion or anger. There is no guarantee that people will always rise from one birth to the next. Their next birth is decided by their thoughts and actions in the previous one and by the Karma that they have already accumulated.

This deeply rooted faith in the life chain has shaped Indian society from time immemorial. As an explanation of why some are more talented and enjoy higher social status than others, and why some suffer while others enjoy good fortune in this life, it led people to accept what was inevitable and at the same time enjoy peace of mind. When people feel that they alone are the cause of the good and evil which befall them, they do not try to blame others for their situation. In the words of a Tamil poem written in the third century B.C.: “All places in the world are ours, all human beings are our kinsmen; good and bad which befall us are not inflicted by others.”

the caste system based on birth. Saint Tiruvalluvar’s dictum that all souls are born equal in this world could not exert much sway over the majority of people because they were denied the capacity to read it and understand it.

It is hard to know how far modern Indians believe in the doctrine of Karma and rebirth and how much they think about it. Modern Indian society is a competitive society in which the pursuit of wealth is accompanied by many pressures and evils. And yet the majority of people still have a wonderful way of keeping their peace of mind. Of someone who acquires wealth by wrongdoing they are inclined to say peacefully: “Let him earn, he is not going to carry anything he acquires now into his next birth. He has to go empty-handed.”

(The UNESCO Courier, 1998 – 3)



Tea cultivation is a vital industry in the region of Assam. In the 1970s small scale tea cultivators with farms smaller than one hectare began growing tea. Cultivation on small farms increased during the 1990s and today accounts for over 10% of the tea produced in Assam.

# Class, caste and power

by Ambalal Somabhai Patel

The basic cause of poverty in developing countries is usually considered to be the economic backwardness or stagnation of the rural areas where the vast majority of the population live. In India the main occupation of these rural people is agriculture, which contributes almost 40% to the net domestic product. Yet the income of agricultural workers is substantially below the national average, and is often almost at subsistence level.

There are a number of reasons for this, notably:

- the unviable size of land holdings (still decreasing as a result of the system of dividing property among many);
- lack of irrigation facilities, so that farmers are dependent on rainfall and the vagaries of nature;
- lack of sufficient financial resource to invest in seeds, manure or equipment, or to pay seasonal labour costs;
- lack of satisfactory administrative machinery, such as co-operatives, to organize the purchase and resale of agricultural produce;
- lack of transport facilities and a good road network to ensure rapid distribution of fresh vegetables and fruit;
- inadequate knowledge of farming, farm products and seasonal crops, through non-utilization of available facilities such as further education programmes.

The productivity of small farms is generally low, resulting in very poor returns on labour input and capital investment. The plight of small farmers and unskilled agricultural labourers is made worse by the fact that they are ill-equipped for alter-

native employment in related sectors which could provide a source of income during the slack season.

While economic stagnation results from external factors that can be altered by determined implementation of appropriate development policies and programmes, there are other social or sociological factors, which are deeply rooted in tradition and are woven into the fabric of Indian society. Big efforts by the education system and media are needed to overcome these obstacles, which arise from caste distinctions and religious beliefs. The rigid hierarchy of the caste system and the specific functions assigned to each caste since ancient times, underpinned by religious injunctions, provide little scope for upward mobility. Rural people are also more conservative and traditional in their outlook and believe so strongly in religious practises, social customs and superstitions that they resist attempts to change social behaviour and attitudes. The weight of past traditions, customs and values acts as a brake on economic development and the rapid elimination of poverty.

Another social mechanism, exploitation, is a natural consequence of the class, caste and power systems, and plays an important role in perpetuating economic, social and political inequalities. The rich exploit the poor in subtle ways, of which the latter may be unaware; employers exploit employees; engineers exploit contractors or builders; the upper classes or castes exploit the lower; school administrators exploit teachers; teachers exploit students (although sometimes the reverse is the case); doctors and lawyers exploit patients and clients; intellectuals exploit non-intellectuals and create problems of student unrest.

Among other factors which affect the economic well-being of a society are family composition and size, which influence not only the intellectual and personal characteristics of family members, but also affect the family's financial status and the benefits derived from it. Two families differing in size and age structure may derive very different benefits from an equal total income. On the other hand, two families of equal size may have unequal earning capacities because of differences in age, sex, intellectual and personality traits, social or job status, or the number of aged, infirm or young family members.

Since the poor are usually unemployed, unemployment is often regarded as a cause of poverty. It should rather be seen as a contributing factor, or as a consequence of other variables which may co-exist with poverty.

Demographic factors have been raised in discussions of poverty because the population parameter appears in the measurements of wealth in terms of per capita national income. One conclusion drawn from this is that, in order to reduce poverty, the numerator (national income) should increase, while the denominator (population size) should be reduced. At one time the population factor was relegated to the background – Karl Marx, for example, saw no link between demographic growth and poverty and held the capitalist system entirely responsible for the latter. In the 1950s and 1960s many developing countries experienced a population explosion as the result of a rapid decline in mortality rates unaccompanied by a corresponding fall in the birth rate. This again brought the population factor to the forefront. However, to imply that rapid population growth is the cause or even one of the main causes of the problem of poverty is clearly an oversimplification of the problem.

(*The UNESCO Courier*, 1987 - 1)

**Ambalal Somabhai Patel**, Indian specialist in experimental and social psychology, was, in 1987, director of the Psycho-Clinic and Psycho-Assessment Services, Baroda, Gujarat, India, and editor of the *Indian Journal of Psychology*, the official organ of the Indian Psychological Association.



A street sweeper. "Dalits, as they are now referred to, are forced to work in humiliating and degrading conditions".

# India's 'Hidden Apartheid'

by Gopal Guru, with Shiraz Sidhva

For centuries, the untouchables of Paliyad, a nondescript village in western India's Ahmedabad district, have known their place. Many of them are manual scavengers, cleaning the toilets of upper-caste villagers or toiling the land, sometimes for less than a handful of rice a day.

"We've known that we must stay away from them [upper-caste people] since the day we were born," says Rajesh, who is going on 19. "At the tea stalls, we have separate cups to drink from, chipped and caked with dirt, and we're expected to clean them ourselves. We have to walk for 15 minutes to carry water to our homes, because we're not allowed to use the taps in the village that the upper castes use. We're not allowed into temples, and when I attended school, my friends and I were forced to sit just outside the classroom [...] the upper caste children would not allow us even to touch the football they played with [...] we played with stones instead."

More than 160 million people, a sixth of India's population, continue to bear the burden of a 2000-year old caste system sanctioned by Hindu theology, which locks people into a rigid role by virtue of their birth.

## Codes to suit the upper class

Though the term 'untouchables' was abolished in 1950 under India's constitution, the 'oppressed people' or Dalits as they are now referred to, continue to be discriminated against. They are denied access to land, forced to work in humiliating and degrading conditions and are routinely abused by the police and upper-caste groups, which enjoy the state's protection.

Though India has sought to overcome the inequities of caste and discrimination through affirmative action – reserving quotas in education, government jobs and political bodies – these

policies have benefited only a few. The highest office in the land, that of the largely ceremonial President, is today held by a Dalit, K.R.Narayanan. But all the horrors of India's caste system persist at the grassroots; attempts to defy this rigid social order invariably result in violence or economic retaliation.

Perhaps the world's longest surviving social hierarchy, India's caste system entails a complex ordering of social groups on the basis of ritual purity. Attributed to the law-giver Manu, the system was spelt out over 2000 years ago in the *Dharma Shastra*, the cornerstone of the Hindu religion.

According to Manu, every individual is born into one of four principal *varnas*, or large categories, and must remain within that caste until death, although the particular ranking of that caste may vary among different regions in the country and over time. In order of precedence, the Brahmins are the priests and teachers, presiding over knowledge and education; the Kshatriyas are the rulers and soldiers; the Vaishyas, merchants and traders; and the Shudras, the peasants, labourers and artisans. The untouchables fall into a fifth category outside the *varna system*, and were often assigned tasks too 'ritually polluting' to merit inclusion within the traditional *varna system*.

Clearly, caste discrimination was an ideological construct that was deployed by the upper castes to create and maintain their monopoly over cultural capital (knowledge and education), social capital (status and patriarchal domination), political capital

**Gopal Guru** is a professor of social and political theory in the Center of Political Science at Jawaharlal Nehru University. In 2001, Shiraz Sidhva was a *UNESCO Courier* journalist.

(power), and material capital (wealth). The codes were often pernicious, and rules were bent to suit the upper castes. In northern India, for example, untouchables were forced to use drums to announce their arrival, and even their shadows were thought to be polluting. In the south, some Brahmins stipulated that the lower castes would have to maintain a distance of 65 feet (22 metres) from them in order not to contaminate their betters.

Yet this caste-based discrimination also had a pragmatic dimension. The untouchables, excluded from the education and books of the Brahmins, were nevertheless allowed to develop their own stores of knowledge, in agriculture or midwifery for example. But there was a catch – this knowledge was only allowed because it benefited the upper castes.

### **A case of racism?**

Caste is still frequently used as a cover for exploitative economic arrangements. Even today, most Dalits are not permitted to cross the invisible 'pollution' line that divides their part of the village from that occupied by the higher castes. And yet a Dalit woman, whose very shadow is polluting, is allowed to massage the body of the upper-caste woman she serves. Upper caste men, meanwhile, think nothing of raping Dalit women or consorting with lower-caste prostitutes, even though touching them by accident in the street is a sacrilege.

One of the main reasons why the caste system has survived is because the hierarchical notion of social good it perpetuates is legitimized by the lower castes themselves. They replicate this hierarchy by imitating the cultural values of the upper castes, imposing discrimination on castes even lower than their own. Sociologists claim there are more than 2000 castes and sub-castes within the five categories. These are called *jatis*, endogamous (inter-marrying) groups that are divided along occupational, sectarian, regional and linguistic lines. Even as outcasts, the Dalits divide themselves into further castes. This proliferation allows for discrimination both horizontally and vertically, thus making social relations all the more rigid and impermeable.

The plight of India's untouchables and the regular human rights abuses against them elicits short-lived public outrage, leaving the state under little pressure to engineer large-scale social change. This is why a coalition of Dalit groups and activists has lobbied hard for their plight to be on the agenda of the UN World Conference against Racism.

"Caste is India's hidden apartheid," says Martin Macwan, 41, convenor of the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights. He argues that like racism, caste discrimination is "based on descent."

Their demand has sparked off a national debate about the nature of caste discrimination and whether other countries should be allowed to interfere in what the Indian government considers "an internal matter."

The government has opposed the inclusion of caste on the UN conference's agenda on the grounds that caste and race are not synonymous. "Race and caste are distinct," insists Soli Sorabjee, India's attor-

ney general and a member of the UN Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination. India, a vigorous campaigner against apartheid, claims that it has done everything possible to grant equality to India's lowest castes. A fifth of the seats in parliament are reserved for members of the scheduled castes (the official term for Dalits), and some states are governed by powerful political parties based on alliances with the lower castes.

### **Campaigns to end the stigma**

Quotas and job allocations, however, have not brought equality, dignity, or even safety for India's 'broken people'. In villages, the social stigma remains too strong to obliterate by laws alone.

Official figures speak for themselves: recorded crimes and atrocities against the lowest castes averaged 26,000 a year between 1997 and 1999 (the latest figures available). Considering the police are often reluctant even to record claims against the upper castes, these figures expose just the tip of the iceberg.

About two-thirds of the Dalit population are illiterate, and about half are landless agricultural labourers. Only seven per cent have access to safe drinking water, electricity and toilets. And a majority of the estimated 40 million bonded labourers (who work as slaves to pay off debts), including 15 million children, are Dalits.

A national campaign to highlight abuses against Dalits was spearheaded by human rights groups in eight Indian states in 1998, and caste has been taken up as an issue internationally for the first time by organizations including Human Rights Watch. While some Dalits have resisted subjugation and discrimination by armed struggle, these are invariably quelled by more powerful upper-caste private militia like the Ranbir Sena in Bihar, which has been held responsible for a series of massacres of poor Dalit peasants and landless labourers.

Macwan agrees that including caste discrimination in the conference's final resolutions would be only a symbolic victory, changing nothing in reality. "The only solution is to change people's minds," he declares.

(The UNESCO Courier, 2001 - 8)



Transplanting rice in Tamil Nadu.

c) UN Photo/John Isaac



Children dressed in India's Flag colors.



# An Elusive Ideal

by Romila Thapar

The democratic ideal has never been fully translated into practice. Many so-called democratic societies in the past were hijacked and became oligarchies in which democratic rhetoric was used to preserve the fiction that the ruling group represented the majority. The Greek city states, for example, are often cited as the first democracies, but it is conveniently forgotten that, in them, slaves outnumbered free citizens and were neither represented nor had any rights. In the light of historical experience, how can democracy be adapted to the circumstances of the late twentieth century?

In modern times democracy has often been associated with the nation-state. But perhaps we should not overlook the experience of the smaller social and political units which in the past have been run on quasi-democratic lines.

Those who sought to endow the nation-state with an identity by associating it with the middle class or with a regional, linguistic, ethnic or even religious group, claimed to be doing so in the name of democracy. Sometimes, it has been argued, these communities were fictitious and their ostensible identity camouflaged hidden aspirations. By equating the group's identity with nationalism, national and democratic causes coalesced. But in these nation-states the functioning of democracy was limited by the nationalism with which they were linked. Now that the nation-state is increasingly being questioned, should we also question democracy – or certain kinds of democracy?

One question that might be asked is whether democracy presupposes secularism. In many parts of the world, reli-

gion is now being politically manipulated on an unprecedented scale. In saying this I am not objecting to people's right to practise their faith, but to the way in which various politicians and fundamentalists have distorted this right. If questioning the public function of religion necessarily leads to secularism, then this could encourage the promotion of another approach to democracy, particularly in societies where several religions exist side by side.

Democracy implies both representation and decisions based on the views of the majority. But what constitutes a majority? If it is simply a matter of the number of votes cast at elections, this opens the ways to vote-rigging or to the mobilization of mass support by ideologies that appear to espouse a variety of causes but in reality are no more than a mechanism for attracting and controlling large numbers of people. I am thinking here of the kind of reactionary populism based on race or religion that has time and again caused tensions and violence in many parts of the world, both North and South. In the interests of true democracy, it

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would be worth considering how such movements can be prevented from imposing their definition of majority rule, especially when religious communities are exploited politically as part of a supra-national hidden agenda.

The modern nation-state also faces the problem of accommodating minority cultures, which are increasingly aware that they cannot be excluded from the democratic majority. This problem is likely to become especially acute in the industrialized countries, where sharply differing groups have forcibly been brought together through past colonial connections and present economic needs, and where a numerical majority is sometimes reduced to the status of a political minority. In ex-colonies where such conflicts are also known, the divergent groups do, at least, normally share some common inheritance and history.

The best way to understand the correlation between culture and democracy is to examine the manner in which individuals or groups choose their identity and perceive the difference between themselves and others. In part, this is the result of early socialization. It can also spring from tension and conflicts, which sharpen people's perception of their identity. Why, incidentally, should the nation-state insist on a single identity? After all, individuals have multiple identities. The sterility of a single identity could be replaced by a multi-faceted one involving more complex social and cultural patterns. A multi-faceted democracy would also be more difficult to control politically.

Representational democracy often ends up with power far removed from the individual citizen. Now that cinema, television and advertising have all got into the act, would-be representatives of the people find themselves addressing audiences they cannot even see. True representativity must be based on some reference back to the electors, who must also retain the right to recall their representatives, if they so wish. These seemingly negative

rights can provide an essential corrective to the tendency of representatives to turn into power-brokers.

The collapse of some socialist economies has led the peoples in the countries concerned to a desperate hope that the free market will protect them against the revival of totalitarian regimes. But the experience of other countries shows that the market cannot do this. Unfortunately, the market can equally well lend itself to other kinds of dictatorial demand – from consumerism, the armaments industry, multi-national corporations and other interests. Such demands, which undermine equality of opportunity and social justice, can only be countered by an equitable economic system and a legal system that is accessible to all citizens and prevents the erosion of human rights and the annulling of human dignity.

However, any system can be thwarted, abused or rendered ineffective if those who control it cannot be challenged. Institutions which are expected to act as watchdogs often end up by becoming a party to the abuses they are supposed to prevent. The articulation of dissent and protest is imperative for democratic systems. Even in democratic societies, when children are taught their rights and duties, attention is rarely drawn to their right to disagree. Conformity is at a premium, and dissent is frowned upon or ignored. The submissive subject, rather than the autonomous individual, is regarded as the ideal citizen.

In pleading the case of the autonomous individual, I am not advocating an anarchic society. Autonomous individuals do not set out to destroy society; they are concerned with changing it in creative ways. They do not necessarily form part of the power structure themselves, but they comment on it and, if needs be, protest against specific actions taken by those in power. As long as it is accepted that there is room for moral authority as well as political and social authority in the running of society, such people will always have a place in the democratic process.

*(The UNESCO Courier, 1992 - 11)*



"Even in democratic societies, when children are taught their rights and duties, attention is rarely drawn to their right to disagree." Elections in a Chilean school.



# Ideology Clashing with History

Romila Thapar talks to Shiraz Sidhva

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"The best way to understand the correlation between culture and democracy is to examine the manner in which individuals or groups choose their identity and perceive the differences between themselves and others". One of the posters that was designed for UNESCO's 25th anniversary.

***You have strongly opposed the attempt to use history in support of an ideology of religious nationalism by the right-wing Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which was in power from 1998 to 2004. There was an attempt at the time to rewrite Indian textbooks. How does the rewriting of history to endorse recent political ideology affect human rights?***

Let me clarify here that my fight was against the BJP-led government and the Hindutva view of Indian history, and not against other governments in India. The Hindutva lobby that insisted on the changes in Indian textbooks endorses a Hindu right-wing ultra-nationalism – often described as Hindu fundamentalism – and is trying to propagate a revisionist history in classrooms and political discourse. The parent organization in India, known as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), has a distinctly religious fundamentalist political agenda. The RSS and its political arm, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), gained power defeating moderate secular Indians by exploiting Hindu nationalist sentiments. The RSS has been involved in several high-profile incidents of religiously motivated violence over the last twenty years.

The controversy on my work involved some textbooks I had written for middle schools, where I had talked about the lives of Aryans as we knew it from the Vedic texts. I had mentioned, for instance, that the early Indians ate beef – the references in the

Vedas are clear, and there is archaeological evidence for this. The Hindu right wing extolled the Aryans as the great model society for ancient India, and were opposed to any criticism of them. When they objected to this and other statements of mine, I provided evidence from the texts as proof. But they insisted that children should not be told that beef was eaten in early times. My reaction was that it was historically more correct to explain to school children why in early times beef was eaten, and why later a prohibition was introduced.

Though the attack on me was vicious, I was not the only historian attacked. There were about six of us, who had authored the earlier textbooks, and others who spoke up against the changes in school curriculum and textbooks by the (then) government, made without consulting educational bodies that would normally have been consulted. The government then described us as being anti-Hindu, and therefore anti-Indian, and therefore anti-patriotic, and therefore, traitors.

The deletion of passages from our books and the ban on any discussion of the deleted passages raised a number of issues of various kinds pertaining to the rights of individuals and the ethics of government institutions.

***There was also a virulent protest by some Indians living in the United States when the US Library of Congress appointed you as the first Kluge Chair in Countries and Cultures of the South in 2004. What became of these protests and were textbooks revised when the Congress government replaced the Bharatiya Janata Party in New Delhi?***

The Library of Congress rejected without any hesitation the demand from the Hindutva lobby, particularly Indians living in the United States, to reverse my appointment, therefore the demand was slowly silenced. The abuse online and through e-mails continued unabated.

When the Congress reclaimed power in 2004, it decided to do away with all the previous textbooks, written by us as far back as the 1960s and 70s, as well as those produced by the BJP government just prior to its fall. A new set of books was commissioned, which are now in use. They are different from the ones we wrote and reflect some of the new interests in history as a discipline, and do not push a Hindutva hard line.

The worrying thing is, what will happen if the Bharatiya Janata Party returns to power in the next election, which will be held within 12 months? Will they change the textbooks

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The restored Hindu temple of Somnath. (see page 58)

again? I worry for the school children who have to be examined in the subject and depend on textbooks.

Once we accept one religious group's agenda and beliefs to be taught in the public schools, it opens the door for every other group to do the same thing. As educators, we have to make a distinction between history on the one hand, which involves questioning existing knowledge about the past where necessary, and faith on the other hand, where even myths are acceptable. The two have to be kept separate. The first is the domain of the historian and the second that of the priest.

***On a wider international level, many human rights atrocities in recent years have sought to draw legitimacy from history, using the pretext of setting right the wrongs of the past. How can this be avoided?***

Political parties today draw heavily on ideology and also on history, because a lot of the current politics is determined by imagined identities – either imagined racial identities, or imagined religious identities, or whatever the identities may be, there is a construction of identities. They are projected back into the past, but in effect really arise out of concerns of the present. And these imagined identities that go into the making of political ideologies are very likely to grapple with history. The grappling also takes the form of creating the notion of what is believed to be a national culture, THE national culture. This is never questioned, because if you question it, you become a traitor to the nation. And it is usually a single, carefully selected strand from the broader culture which is drawn out and exaggerated,

and this facilitates the potential exclusion of some citizens on the basis of either religion or race or language or whatever identity is conveniently within reach. This is very harmful to issues of human rights, because it gives priority to certain groups and their cultures over others.

***But isn't it a dangerous notion, for those in power to believe they can set right the wrongs of the past?***

This is a commonly made claim. We have an example, in the Indian case, where a Hindu political faction led by BJP leaders destroyed the (16th century) Babri Masjid at Ayodhya (in Northern India) in 1992, and claimed that they were avenging Mahmud of Ghazni's attack on Somnath (a Hindu temple) and thereby setting right this wrong of the past.

First of all, did it have to take a thousand years before this act (of Ghazni) was avenged if indeed the idea was to avenge it? More important, how did it set right the wrongs of the past? What was the result of the destruction of the Babri Masjid? It made not the slightest difference to our reading of the past. What it did was that it resulted in a massacre of Muslims in (the Western Indian state of) Gujarat, and since then, a continued series of bomb explosions in the major cities of the country. So what is argued as setting right the wrongs of the past cannot be set right in this fashion. And in any case, it's a rather silly argument, because the past is that which has happened. It cannot be changed, and therefore, it's much more important to set right the wrongs of the present, rather than harping on what might have been the wrongs of the past.

## History and Memory

Seeking sanction from the past involves memory and history. Very often people think that history is in fact memory formalized, as it were, but that is not the case. History is very different, and therefore it is important to differentiate between memory and history.

Memory is primarily a personal thing, and if it's taken up by a group, it is reformulated as a collective memory. Collective memories, therefore, are not spontaneous. One person's memory can evoke the memory of others, and can create an echo in others as well. But the coming together of all this is something which is a deliberate act.



A mosaic made by Bulgarian children.  
Exhibition at UNESCO Headquarters, 1978.

History, by definition, is not personal – it has formal rules by which one arrives at a particular conclusion. It is the end-product of a clear-cut process which involves various stages – where the data is textual and one is using written records, the process is very very clear. It becomes a little more ambiguous in archaeology, for example, when one is dealing with artefacts, which have to be interpreted by an archaeologist. They say very little, and the archaeologist has to try to represent what the object signifies. In fact, this is also true of textual data, because the historian has to interpret the text and get more data out of it. The most difficult separation between memory and history comes in oral history, where the data is limited to memory, and the processing becomes much more difficult. The role of memory is very important in terms of remembering the human rights part of it. The emphasis is on the fact that there are certain rights which are fundamental, and those rights have to be reiterated for each generation. The memory that goes with events that have occurred concerning those rights, that is very important. But memory can also be abused, like when people talk about setting right the wrongs of the past. This is an appeal to a kind of memory which is very different from the memory that concerns human rights, and the results are very different.

**Romila Thapar**

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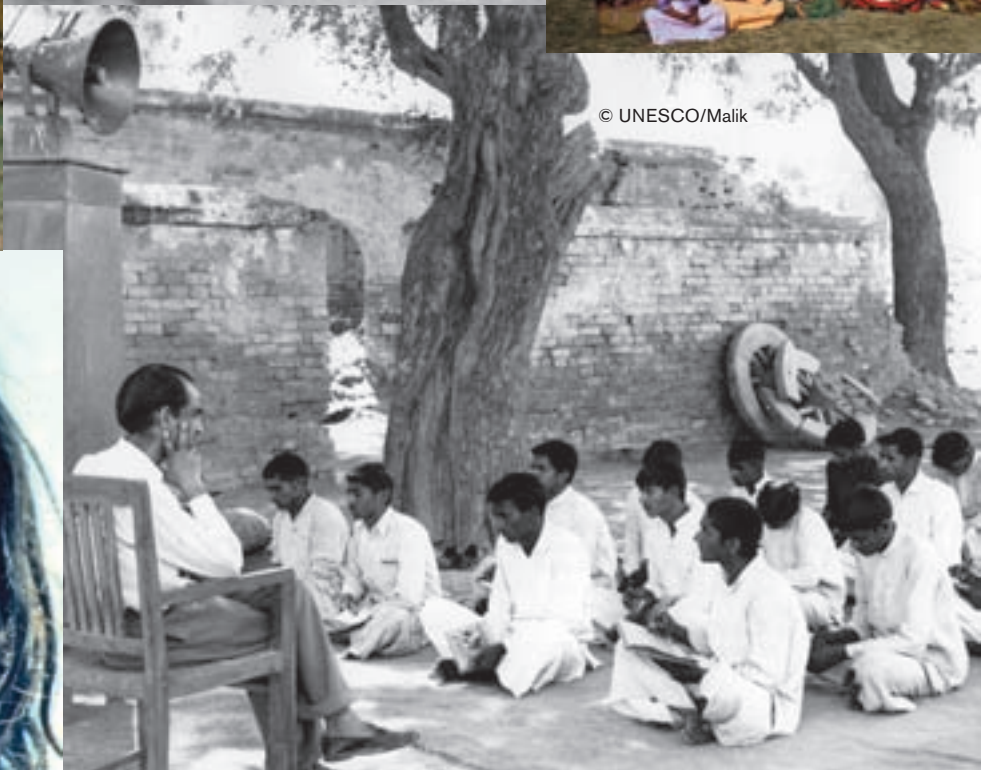
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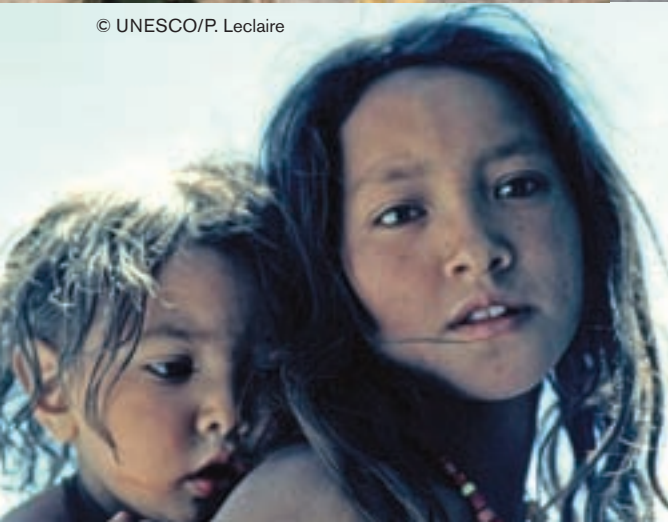
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