

*“ . . . The growth of civilization demands a corollary development of values and viewpoints that should interpret for man, whether he be situated in the West or East, as he lives out his quotidian of existence, the meaning of his efforts and his very breath. And since our interest is in the creation of one world we cannot further fragmentize this . . . we must address ourselves to the whole human race . . . .”*

## INDIA AND THE CRISIS OF OUR TIME \*

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IT HAS BEEN my pleasure to come to India, and to Delhi University, in particular, and I accept humbly this degree which you have conferred upon me. I affirm it as symbolic of this my visit to India.

No country could so much challenge the mind as India, its ancient civilization, its philosophy, its enlightened and cogitative participation in the world politics at the present time, its profound humanism which pervades the direction of its national progress and the multifarious activities of its national life — these aspects of the civilization of India provide a constant challenge to one's power of thought and interpretation.

I do not mean that India's mode and structure of life are something to be interpreted, analyzed, explained away and thus sufficiently comprehended by a foreigner. It is possible for one from another country to perhaps do this, too. For instance, one notes the extent and depth of the scholarship that has been devoted to the civilization, history, and culture of India by foreigners: Americans, Europeans, as well as Asians. But this is not what I mean. I intend, rather, to make reference to what Mahatma Gandhi calls “what India is trying to say to the world.”

Of course, the crisis of our contemporary world requires that every country search its own conscience and adopt such action as would lead to the condition we all desire. But in this endeavor we do not contend with, or think, of the requirements of the present alone and thus commit the fallacy typical of Western man, the tendency to consider the present as the only “reality.” It is most often said that the crises of our

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era are the consequences of the effort of an age to construct a civilization commensurate to contemporary values and needs, and to the realities and necessities that have been the logical results and effects of the Industrial Revolution.

If this is so, then we need to have some basic values upon which to build that civilization. We need to have a unity, a philosophy by the logic of which we could justify contemporary aspirations and determine our future activities.

Let me at once say that I have not come prepared with that philosophy or with that formula. So much of the confusion of our day derive from the tendency of individuals to engage our time in an outrageous and energetic messianism. As a Western philosopher, who is so much in the minority insofar as his political viewpoints are concerned, has declared: "The trouble with our times is that the intelligent is so full of doubts and the stupid is so full of certainties."

Rather than add to the troubles of our times, therefore, I shall simply confine myself to noting the contradictions of our age, and it is my wish to adumbrate these against the philosophical context of India; against the values and principles of a civilization that arose 3,000 to 6,000 years ago. I take sanction for doing this from some recent prophesies expressed by Arnold Toynbee to the effect that when—within the next fifty years—"the whole face of the planet will have been unified politically through the concentration of irresistible military powers in some single set of hands," then that time would have been the signal moment for a great spiritual rebirth. In this anticipated Renaissance, India might lead, for, said Professor Toynbee, the center of power would "ebb back from the shores of the Atlantic to the Middle East."

Now the most immediate—and perhaps the most obvious—aspect of our age is the great disequilibrium in the economic and material situations of our various societies. Here the West can not be taken as a single unitary bloc for which a generalized notion of actual prosperity may be posited, because economic discrepancies also exist between the various nations in the West.

But taking the world as an entire entity, it is possible to say that the great dislocation exists in the comparative relationship between the societies of the West and the societies of the Afro-Asian continent. This is easy to account. The results and effects of the Industrial Revolution were not immediately extended to our Afro-Asian societies. Colonialism and imperialism created a tremendous impact on the economic, political, and social structures of our societies, but it is also true that colonialism

did a lot to hinder the development of these societies through the adoption of a political policy that perpetuated in these societies an explosive rather than a productive or competitive economy.

The protection which the British government provided for British industry in the early years of the 19th century amounted to a death blow to the famous traditional Indian textile industry; British colonial power brought a flood of British products into India society, and railways built across India made it possible, in the words of A.R. Desai and P.K. Gopalakrishnan, for Britain "to deliver the goods."

In the same way, home industry in most parts of Burma also gradually gave way to the import of cotton prints from England; in my country, the Philippines, the new cultural orientation resulted in a greater demand for American goods. To mention these facts is not to indulge in politics, but merely to refer to obvious historical facts.

At any rate, what is significant here, is that the uniform colonial experience of our various societies in Asia accounts for what I have called the material disequilibrium of our world. The consequence of this discrepancy is that the humanism that these societies have come to affirm, the humanism that was traditional and native to their collective sensibilities, is now confronting the extraordinary magnitude of science and technological realities that have been evolved in the West and that are gradually producing an impact upon Asian experience.

Our societies are not prepared to cope with these realities. Science—and the technology that comes with it—imply not only a new milieu for our Eastern sensibilities and values, our creed and our philosophies, our habits of mind, our cultural suppositions and assumptions. It does not only provide a changed context for our lives but, more radically, it implies a new manner of response, a new structure of experience, and different modes of thought and points of view.

This new challenge to our perceptions calls for a reorientation of our conduct and morals, of the possibilities which we have formulated for ourselves and of the terms of our political and cultural life. At the same time, we are coming more and more to feel that the West has not adequately or sufficiently matched its science and advance in technology with an equally sufficient philosophy or with a humanism that is complex enough and various enough for the changed context of the life of man in contemporary society. The result is a fragmentation of experience—a deep moral and spiritual crisis which has come to pervade the tone and despair of Western literature; the terrible alienation of Self in our crowded societies.

This sense of fragmentation, too, has recently been the subject of an angry debate between C.P. Snow and Professor Leavis. A society capable of creating its own energy through atomic power, and no longer dependent on solar source as we have been formerly wont to depend; a human community and organization dependent on the wisdom of the people for its direction and guidance, requires, indeed, a firmer ethical and philosophical anchorage in the roadstead of a more pervasive and a more compassionate form of enlightenment.

It has been said that human nature is permanent, that it is immutable. But it is equally true that new forms of human organizations create a different impact on the human personality and suggest corresponding alterations in morality, ethics, and even in consciousness. Ortega y Gasset, in his influential book, *The Revolt of the Masses*, has identified the emergence of modern man—a definitely new image, according to the Spanish philosopher—with the advent of the Industrial Revolution.

If we concede this idea, then we must at once impress upon our consciousness that unlike the motor vehicles and the factory machines and jet transportation, man cannot be reduced into the component parts of a mechanical invention. Besides having a consciousness of the facts of his universe, he must come to terms with the extent of the meaning of his existence and of his own importance. As Dr. Radhakrishnan has cogently affirmed:

“A human being is not to be regarded as a mere lump of flesh and bone, controlled by conditioned reflexes and social pressures, not merely an economic being—though there are fundamental economic needs to be satisfied. We eat in order to live and we wish to live on planes other than economic also. In other words, we have to admit the reality of a spiritual dimension.”

Even learning too, we might add, must be humanized. For “mere intellectual knowledge is not sufficient for welding the people of the world into a single human community.”

We have experienced the colonial policies of the West and its politics, and we have found these—in the course of our experience—to be quite wanting in humane regard, in warmth and generosity, in any profound philosophical insight insofar as its interests are concerned. This is not to point to a definite bankruptcy of humanism in the West but merely to allude to the fact that its humanist tradition has not been equal to the crisis created by its scientific advance.

Western politics has been found very recently—and by Westerners themselves—to be in itself contradictory: the political affirmation of equality of the various constitutions of its nations have been found not to have

been adequately extended and sufficient unto all. It vacillates sometimes where questions of national self-determination and survival are concerned. Its impartiality is not always just on questions of civil rights, of equality before the law, of full opportunities. Freedom for all peoples, in more recent times, comes still as a surprise to its political and moral consciousness.

While, therefore, we can look up to the West for its science and its technology, its weapons and ballistics and endeavor to approximate its material progress within our own societies in our effort to help the cleavage between the advantages enjoyed by the human fact in Western societies and in ours, we are nevertheless always left bereft of a corresponding philosophy, a humanistic and moral outlook that we expect to evolve out of advances in science and technology.

To mention all these is not, again, to indulge in invidious comparisons in an attempt to make the West appear in a disadvantageous position. Our interest in noting these facts is no different from the concern of Thoreau when he criticized the commercialism of the society of his time and contrasted the harried and hurried civilization that it was then evolving with the promise and possibilities and order that the literature, the philosophy and the ethical precepts of the East offered.

Nor is it any different a concern from that of Rousseau's, the Father of the French Revolution, when he affirmed the image of man and indicated the shackling effects of society, traditions, and conventions: man is born free, he declared, but everywhere he is in chains. The shocking fact of man that he discovered in his own place and time required a necessary cry of moral outrage on his part. Our concern is no different.

What, therefore, do I mean by this insistence on a corresponding ethics or philosophy to the advances of our world in science and in medicine; in technology and weapons; in cars and refrigerators and electrical equipment? What I am trying to suggest is this: that the growth of civilization demands a corollary development of values and viewpoints that should interpret for man, whether he be situated in the West or East, as he lives out his quotidian of existence, the meaning of his efforts, of his very breath. And since our interest is in the creation of one world, we cannot further fragmentize this ideal by again dividing mankind between East and West, but we must address ourselves to the whole human race and make the deficiencies of our civilization a universal concern.

The history of mankind provides for us an evidence that each civilization that man affirms, each form of human organization that man establishes has always been attended by the resurgence of ideas and art.

The monarchies and the theocratic states, however we may disagree with the forms or their organizations and the human fact within their communities, needed a philosophy to sustain and justify them. The justifiers of the republican states, of democracy, are more familiar and relevant and cogent to us: John Locke, Voltaire, Thomas Paine, Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, Adam Smith, Karl Marx, etc. But up to now we are still living under the benefits and errors of their systems.

It hardly needs pointing out that John Locke's empiricism has been excessively modified in the realm of philosophical thought; that while Mill's idea of civil society and his perception of the bland and sly tyrannies that, inspite of their democratic commitments, could nevertheless be instituted within them is modern, he did not, however, warn us enough about the realities that were soon to be established and discovered in our midst; that while the ideas of Karl Marx are still being debated at the present time, there are several areas of human life about which he had been silent.

The growth of our civilization, therefore, points to a necessary philosophy; a necessary system of ideas, of values, and of ethical affirmations that could serve as the foundation of the culture and socio-economic structures that we shall have been able to attain. Since we are all concerned with the means of organizing the human community under the auspices of peace, greater freedom, fraternity and economic prosperity, it is perhaps also for us to inquire whether our contemporary schemes and intentions are paying attention to the intellectual and spiritual needs and values which that desired community would necessitate.

It is for this reason that I decided to express these thoughts in India. India is a secular state, yet it is a profoundly religious nation. It has been successful, therefore, in resolving a constant source of crisis in democratic states: the need for keeping social institutions secular and at the same time respecting the spiritual or doctrinal commitments of the people.

And then, there is the paradox of our age that while we all endeavor to shape a universal history and civilization, participated in by various nations with different creeds and ideologies, we are constantly threatened, nevertheless, by the possibility of fragmentation.

Indian political thought has always affirmed unity. In 1928, Gandhi declared: "After long study and experience I have come to the conclusions that (1) all religions are true, (2) all religions have some error in them, (3) all religions are almost as clear to me as my own Hinduism. My veneration for other religions is the same as for my own faith."

And wasn't it Tagore who affirmed that Truth expresses itself in unity?

In speaking of the crisis of our time, I have no ready answers. It is for this reason that I endeavored to utter these thoughts aloud here in India—a country which Hegel, whose philosophy is perhaps one of the most influential in our civilization, has called “an imaginative aspiration” “a fairy region” and “an enchanted world.” I have expressed myself here if only to address these concerns about our world; these puzzlements and private cogitations on the spirit of philosophy and ethics in this ancient civilization.

I am grateful to Delhi University for symbolically conferring on me the right to learn and to be instructed in the great school of Indian thought and precepts. In the spirit of this doctorate degree, I intend my remarks to be my first academic questions. With this symbolic conferment, I shall in the future feel free to ask, to consult, and to seek guidance from what Mahatma Gandhi has called “what India has to say to the world.”