

Revitalising India for the New Millennium

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When the Soviet Union disintegrated some years ago, Francis Fukuyama, a political scientist, interpreted this event as the “the end of History”¹. By this he meant that liberal democracy, with the United States as its flag-bearer, had ultimately triumphed over rival ideologies such as monarchy, fascism and now even communism. This was therefore the endpoint of mankind’s ideological evolution. But it seems to me that this is not the only way the emergence of the U.S. as the sole superpower may signify the end of history. It may also bring about the end of history in more tragic ways. One is that in trying to bring the whole world under its economic and political hegemony the U.S. may trigger a series of destructive conflicts leading to a major nuclear war which would annihilate human civilisation as we know it. Equally fearful would be consequences of economic domination of the U.S. in world affairs. If the mono-culture of Coca Cola, McDonalds, blue jeans and Barbie dolls sweeps over the whole world, it will severely suppress cultural and political pluralism and thus may choke up the springs of spiritual rejuvenation of humanity. Let us hope that neither of these scenarios is inevitable and that a third outcome is possible.

The United States is a superpower only in the external world since its wealth hides a spiritual poverty and a growing psychological and social unrest. We are living in the planetary age and no mere technological superpower can properly guide our world; it also needs the guidance of a spiritual superpower. India has the potential to be this spiritual superpower, but it will require great effort on its part to realise this potential. The question is whether the country and its leaders are willing to make this effort. I see two choices before India at the beginning of the new Millennium: either it can remain true to its genius and rise from its present state of despondency and self-flagellation to become a spiritual powerhouse, in Sri Aurobindo’s words “the guru of the nations”, or it can become a flourishing camp-follower of the West and cease to be India.

Sri Aurobindo’s words were, “India is the guru of the nations, the physician of the human soul in its profounder maladies; she is destined once more to new-mould the life of the world and restore the peace of the human spirit.” This he wrote in the *Bande Mataram* of March 5, 1908, nearly a century ago. At that time he added an important caveat to this proposition, a condition to be fulfilled. “But Swaraj”, he said, “is the necessary condition of her work and before she can do the work, she must fulfil the condition.”² Swaraj we have thus far gained only politically. The history of the last fifty years shows that we continue to be a colony of the West, intellectually and culturally. The Indian psyche has been so badly maimed by colonialism that we have lost confidence in our own deeper traditions and become demoralised. That is why the corruption, materialism and violence in our society today looks even more blatant than in the Western societies.

The greatest obstacle to our progress today is the negative self-image we have of our country and its civilisation. This image has arisen, in part, because of the history we were taught at school in our time and it is still being taught to our children today. We indeed have lost confidence in ourselves. Our intelligentsia is suffering from a defeatist mentality and we are convinced that our best strategy for survival is to hang on to the apron strings of the West, intellectually and culturally. This mindless imitation of the West seems to me nothing short of suicidal.

When we contemplate our future as a nation, the first question we should ask is: "What kind of nation have we been? What has our tradition been?" The received version of Indian history today is the one developed by Western, mainly British, historians during the colonial period. This has created an image of India and its civilisation which is antithetical to the West's image of itself. Western civilisation is seen as masculine, rational and scientific, while Indian civilisation is viewed as feminine, mystical, irrational and world-negating. Europe has seen India as a decadent nation where the original vitality of the Aryan migrants from the Indo-European tribes was sapped by the admixture of the native races.

As Ronald Inden has shown in his book *Imagining India*, the West's representation of India is based on its desires for world hegemony and its fantasies about its own rationality. India has been depicted as a civilisation of villages, castes, spiritual saints and divine kings, and as a land ruled by imagination rather than reason. All this has had the effect of depriving Indians of the capacity to order their own world. As a consequence, India has been dominated by the West or its surrogates, and even now, several decades after independence, it continues to be so dominated. This historical view has provided plenty of justification for colonising India and civilising it. But unfortunately the same negative view continues even today when history writing has become the prerogative of the Leftists in India. The present government has not helped much either. Although it has invested much political capital in the revision of textbooks, it has not seriously addressed the question of systematic reform. What we need is a proper objective process, and if that is not developed and put in place, there is no guarantee that the next government will not throw out the current textbooks.

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There have been different efforts aimed at the negation of the Indian civilisation. Let us look briefly at some of the most important ones.

1. First, it is said that India had no science, no tradition of rational discourse until it became the disciple of the West. From Macaulay to such reputed modern thinkers like Thomas Kuhn, the author of the well-known book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, the Western ignorance about science in India is matched only by its arrogance. Macaulay declared in his famous Minute of 1835 that a single shelf of a European library was worth the whole native literature of India. Thomas Kuhn has recently declared that only the civilisations descended from Hellenic Greece

- possessed more than the most rudimentary science.³ This is a travesty of known and proven facts. An increasing number of books and papers are now available showing that India originated much of the world's mathematics, astronomy, philosophy, linguistics and technology and was a leading nation in science until about 700 A.D. Recent research has shown that India's contribution to global science has been invaluable in such diverse fields as civil engineering, metal techniques, textiles, shipping and ship building, water harvesting systems, forest management, traditional medicine, mathematics, logic and linguistics. Modern science is undoubtedly the contribution of the West, but there was a time when Indian science was famous all over the world. Many Western scholars, ignoring all this evidence, continue to deny India's seminal role in the history of science.
2. Second, many have belittled Indian civilisation and held it in low esteem because of its poverty. The name of India, at least until recently, was synonymous with poverty, hunger and disease, somewhat akin to Somalia in the 1980s and Ethiopia in the 1990s. It is now increasingly recognised that the British left the country only after bleeding it white for over two centuries and ruining its trade and industry. What is not widely known is that this abject economic condition was the effect of deliberate British policies. India was impoverished first by plunder and tyranny and then by unfair trade practices and always by calculated economic exploitation. A British journalist recently writing in *The Guardian* has acknowledged this in these words: "We are rich because the Indians are poor.... For centuries we have permitted ourselves to ignore the extent to which our welfare is dependent on the denial of other people's."⁴

Another thing not widely known is how rich India was until a few centuries ago. In spite of more than six centuries of ruthless plunder by the Islamic invaders, India in the sixteenth century was still a paradise for most European countries, something like what modern America is to most Indians today. By every account of European visitors, India was extremely wealthy until the mid-1800's. Samuel Huntington of Harvard University writes that in 1750, India had 25% of the world's manufacturing output while Europe and America combined had less than 18%. But by 1900, after a hundred years of British rule, India's manufacturing output had collapsed to less than 2% whereas America and the West combined had 84% of the world's share. He writes: "The Industrial revolution of the West was done at the expense of de-industrialisation of the colonies." In a recent issue of the *Guardian*, George Monbiot, a British journalist, has corroborated this strongly in these words:

Britain's industrialisation was secured by destroying the manufacturing capacity of India. In 1699, the British government banned the import of woollen cloth from Ireland, and in 1700 the import of cotton cloth (or calico) from India. Both products were forbidden because they were superior to our own. As the industrial revolution was built on the textile industry, we could not have achieved our global economic dominance if we had let them in. Throughout the late 18th and 19th centuries, India was

forced to supply raw materials to Britain's manufacturers but forbidden to produce competing finished products.”⁵

This is also the finding of many scholars such as Rajiv Malhotra, as can be seen from this quotation from one of his recent papers: “The material wealth of India and its industries were legendary for millennia, and were the very reason for the obsessions of the Europeans, Arabs and Persians to go to India; they were not desperate to go there to save their souls.”⁶

3. Third, the British and others have tried to negate the Indian civilisation by dividing us among ourselves. British historians have given us a perverted view of Indian history. British administrators have pursued imperialist policies aimed at keeping the country divided. When I witness the proceedings of the Indian Parliament on the TV today and see every so often some political party or other rushing to the well of the house, shouting slogans and stalling the proceedings, I realise what great damage British administrators and historians have done to India. They have split the country into so many feuding groups and factions, each group is convinced that the other group is responsible for its woes. No wonder we are like so many distracted dogs rushing at each other's throat.

The theory of the Aryan invasion, which is a fiction still being taught in our schools, has sown seeds of division between the so-called north Indian Aryans and the south Indian Dravidians. Similar seeds of mutual suspicion have been sown between Hindus and Muslims, between Brahmins and non-Brahmins, between the forward classes and the backward classes, and between leading communities and castes in every state. The Aryan invasion theory has now been abandoned by almost all except by a section of Indian historians who hold on to it against all evidence from archaeology and from satellite photography. This fiction has served the purpose of driving a wedge between north Indians and south Indians and the price we have paid for this is already enormous.

The true reason for the degradation of our lower classes is not yet clearly understood even by Indians. Wherever human societies exist, exploitation of the weak and the disabled always takes place, and this has happened and is still happening in India as elsewhere in the world. The failure of communism in Soviet Russia demonstrated this once again to the whole world. But in our country we have put much of the blame for the economic woes of our backward classes on the upper classes. Agreed that these upper classes have been rapacious, but no more rapacious than upper classes elsewhere. Indian society need not remain permanently scarred and divided by this memory. Moreover, we owe much of the backwardness of our lower castes to the British rule. As we have already mentioned, during the nineteenth century the British fostered the growth of their trade and commerce at the cost of India. First, they ruined Indian industry by making certain kinds of industries illegal and by imposing heavy taxes on Indian exports. It is a very dismal story. When the manufacturing towns and centres were laid waste, their populations were driven to overcrowd the villages. Families which were at one time affluent were driven to desert the towns and had to take to agriculture. “The millions of ruined artisans and craftsmen, spinners, weavers, potters, tanners, smelters, smiths, alike

from the towns and from villages had no alternative save to crowd into agriculture.”⁷ What was an industrial-cum-agricultural economy became a purely agricultural economy. The deliberate policies of the British and not our own upper classes consisting of Brahmins, Zamindars and others are primarily responsible for the economic woes of our economically depressed castes and classes. The living conditions for these new poor classes were so bad that during the 82 years of British rule over 30 million people (more than 10 per cent of the total population of India) died of starvation, and yet during this period the export of wheat and rice from India to Great Britain increased by about 25 times! But the political game of blaming the upper castes for the decline of the lower classes is going on even today and continues to divide Indian society.

The rigid caste system of India is another thing for which our ancient culture is blamed. Nobody denies that the caste system as we know it today was an “unclean and diseased decrepitude of an old system”, however sound its original ethical and economic bases. It had become by the beginning of the twentieth century, in Sri Aurobindo’s words, “a name, a shell, a sham” and deserved to be dissolved. But again, here, the role of the British rulers in making the caste system such a despicable thing is not generally known. Dr. Meenakshi Jain, a reputed sociologist draws our attention to this in these words:

It is not generally known that the India of rigid social stratification and hierarchical ranking was largely a British creation. ...[The British] destroyed the flexibility that was so vital for the proper functioning of the system. The census operations raised caste consciousness to a feverish pitch, incited caste animosities and led to an all-round hardening of the system. ... Britishers of all pursuits, missionaries, administrators and orientalist, were quick to grasp the pivotal role [of the Brahmins] in the Indian social arrangement, [in which] Brahmins were the principal integrating force. This made them the natural target of those seeking to fragment, indeed atomise, Indian society. This was as true of British conquerors as it was of Muslim rulers in the preceding centuries. ... Clearly it is time to sit up and see reality as it is before we complete the task which the British began – the atomisation of Indian society and the annihilation of Indian civilisation.⁸

4. A fourth way of negating the value of Indian culture has been to blame India’s social, ecological and human problems on its religions and spiritual temperament. India’s spirituality is decried as pessimistic and world-negating. But it is a misrepresentation to say that Indian culture denies all value to life, discourages terrestrial interests and insists on the unimportance of the life of the moment. Most European commentators seem to think all Indian thought and religion consist of little but the nihilistic school of Buddhism and the monistic illusionism of Shankara. But it is absurd to see in all Indian art, literature and social thinking nothing but a recoil from the falsehood and vanity of things. As Sri Aurobindo has pointed out:

The ancient civilisation of India founded itself very expressly upon four human interests; first, desire and enjoyment, next, material, economic and

other aims and needs of the mind and body, thirdly, ethical conduct and the right law of individual and social life, and, lastly spiritual liberation; kama, artha, dharma, moksa. The business of culture and social organisation was to lead, to satisfy, to support these things in man and to build some harmony of their forms and motives. Except in very rare cases the satisfaction of the three mundane objects must run before the other; fullness of life must precede the surpassing of life. The debt to the family, the community and the gods could not be scamped; earth must have her due and the relative its play, even if beyond it there was the glory of heaven or the peace of the Absolute. There was no preaching of a general rush to the cave and the hermitage.”⁹

Again, the whole of the Gita deals with the theme of a yogi being also able to act on the world, even when the action appears unpleasant. Many Western students of Indian civilisation still believe that Indian spirituality is essentially pessimistic and world-negating. Certain schools of Indian philosophy might be characterised as such, but they represent only a small part of the vast spiritual tradition of India. Besides, as Sri Aurobindo has noted, India has had a varied and rich history of achievements in many fields of human endeavour.

India has not only had the long roll of her great saints, sages, thinkers, religious founders, poets, creators, scientists, scholars, legists; she has had her great rulers, administrators, soldiers, conquerors, heroes, men with the strong active will, the mind that plans and the seeing force that builds. She has warred and ruled, traded and colonised and spread her civilisation, built polities and organised communities and societies, done all that makes the outward activity of great peoples.”¹⁰

One of the reasons why some Western critics of Indian philosophy persist in characterising it as life-negating is the inability of the reasoning mind of the West to grasp the spiritual outlook of the mind of India. The spiritually illumined intuitive mind brings to us a knowledge which is superior to the purely intellectual knowledge but does not reject it. To some, the subjective outlook of Indian philosophy appears not only impractical and sterile but threatening to the solidity of their world-view. To one attached to objective forms, the inward turn required by spiritual endeavour looks like a kind of negation. But the spirituality that has flourished in India can be described as world-negating only in one sense: the world, which it negates, is not the real one, but a model of the world constructed by our senses.¹¹

Once we clear our minds of misinformation about our past and remove the negative stereotypes about ourselves, we will be able to see clearly what our civilisational strengths have been and what weaknesses brought us low. Mere enthusiasm for building a great India is not sufficient; we must know what made India great in the past and then find ways to realise its full potential and become the dynamo of spirituality it is intended to be. This does not mean that we must revive our past in its old forms. Sri Aurobindo was clear on this point: “The spirit and ideals of India had come to be confined in a

mould which, however beautiful, was too narrow and slender to bear the mighty burden of our future. When that happens, the mould has to be broken and even the ideal lost for a while, in order to be recovered free of constraint and limitation.”¹²

3

Spirituality is indeed the master-key of the Indian mind and heart. But it is a mistake to think spirituality deals only with the supra-sensible, the ranges of mind beyond our present mind, the Infinite and the splendours of the Spirit. Spirituality touches every aspect of human life and has the capacity to transform it with its unimaginably prolific creativeness. India’s creativity in the past has been as splendid as it has been multifarious. It is to this many-sided labour that India must now return with spirituality as its governing principle. Then spirituality will flourish on earth.

India can best develop herself and serve humanity by being herself and following her *Swadharma*, the law of her own nature. This does not mean rejecting blindly all that is new. That would be unspiritual, for true spirituality rejects no new light, no added means of our human self-development.

Sri Aurobindo was no blind admirer of everything in India’s past. He has diagnosed the causes of the decline of the Indian civilisation; we should ensure that we do not repeat the old mistakes even while deriving inspiration from our tradition. He has pointed out that India’s decline was prepared by three movements of retrogression:

- a. There was a sinking of that super-abundant vital energy and a fading of the joy of life and the joy of creation.
- b. There was a rapid cessation of free intellectual activity, a slumber of the scientific and critical mind as well as the creative intuition; what remained became more and more a repetition of ill-understood fragments of past knowledge.
- c. Spirituality remained but it burned no longer with the large and clear flame of knowledge of former times, rather it burst forth in intense jets and in a dispersed action which replaced the old magnificent synthesis by emphasising certain spiritual truths to the neglect of others.¹³

One of our cardinal weaknesses as a civilisation has been our inability to defend ourselves against those who had evil designs on us. As Will Durant has pointed out we failed to organise ourselves for the protection of our frontiers, our capitals, our wealth and freedom from the hordes Scythians, Huns, Afghans, Turks and others. Civilisation is a precious thing whose delicate complex of order and liberty, culture and peace may be overthrown by barbarians invading from without and multiplying from within. The bitter lesson we have to learn from our history is that eternal vigilance is the price of civilisation. A nation must love peace, but keep its powder dry.

Hopefully as we progress in this century and millennium, a better world order may emerge; the United Nations may be able to guarantee freedom from aggression to all

nations in the world. But that day is still far away. Sri Aurobindo repeatedly called on his countrymen to develop the Kshatriya spirit, almost lost during our centuries of subjection. “The Kshatriya of old must again take his rightful position in our social polity to discharge the first and foremost duty of defending its interests. The brain is impotent without the right arm of strength”.¹⁴ He also said in another context: “What India needs especially at this moment is the aggressive virtues, the spirit of soaring idealism, bold creation, fearless resistance, courageous attack; of the passive tamasic spirit we have already too much.”¹⁵

The scientific and critical mind of India must be reawakened from its slumber. Uncritical adulation of the past and the tendency of producing commentaries on commentaries on commentaries of great books of the past is not a very healthy intellectual activity. Thus we need more science, more critical inquiry.

We have already referred to an exaggeration of certain tendencies of our spiritual culture since the time of the Buddha. The ancient Indian culture based on the vision of the Vedic and Upanishadic seers did not minimise the importance of our earthly life. In fact, opulence, inner and outer, was the driving force of this culture. But for about a millennium and a half now our culture has let go of this fine balance and got trapped into the ascetic denial of our terrestrial life. With this began the decline of the great Indian civilisation.

I may note in passing another crying shame that has afflicted our nation and keeps it under bondage to the West, and that is our education. For one thing the present educational system aims at making the child an information-recording machine and a robot for making money. Mathematics and computers are in these days, because they are the gateways to lucrative jobs, and subjects which do not enjoy this reputation -- namely, history, geography, languages like the mother tongue and Sanskrit, -- are out. The second grave defect of our education system is that it is gravely denationalising. No German education would be regarded compete without a good acquaintance with Goethe, but Indian education has no such concern about the sources of our culture. Ananda Coomaraswamy, the famous art critic, noted this about Indian education nearly a hundred year ago:

It is hard to realise how completely the continuity of Indian life has been severed. A single generation of English education suffices to break the threads of tradition and to create a nondescript and superficial being – a sort of intellectual paraiah who does not belong to the East or the West, the past or future. The greatest danger for India is the loss of spiritual integrity. Of all Indian problems the educational is the most difficult and most tragic.¹⁶

It is ironical that Indian education should uncritically try to emulate the West just when the West itself is going through a crisis of faith with regard to its institutions of education and culture. It is desperately wondering what has gone wrong as it faces mounting problems of drug addiction, teenage pregnancies among high school students, an

existential hopelessness among people of all ages and a social organisation that sets a premium on greed rather than on compassion and love.

If India is facing a crisis today on several fronts it is not because of our great spiritual heritage but in spite of it. In part we owe this crisis to foreign invasions of the past few hundred years, in part at least it is of our own making. Sri Aurobindo pointed out nearly a hundred years ago that few societies have been so tamasic, so full of inertia as Indian society in later times. Few have been so eager to preserve themselves in inertia. Few therefore have attached so much importance to authority. Every detail of our life has been fixed for us by Shastra and custom, every detail of our thought by Scripture and its commentators -- but oftener by commentators than by Scripture. The only exception to this has been in the field of individual spiritual experience.

Sri Aurobindo does not advocate for India a return to the spirituality of the last thousand years. This spirituality was so preoccupied with the Eternal and the Beyond that it virtually grew indifferent to the temporal and the terrestrial. Its one supreme end was to retire from life once the aim of self-liberation had been achieved. It is true that love and bliss, good deeds and service and compassion poured from some of these self-realised men onto society. But they did not have as their aim a transformation of the world, which is now a battlefield of virtue and sin, truth and error, of joy and suffering. They wanted merely to give rise to other people cast in their own mould who would ultimately turn to the call of the spirit and necessarily renounce the world.

In Sri Aurobindo's conception the real mission of spirituality is to gradually change material life so that it becomes a progressive manifestation of the Divine. In India, during the last thousand years or more, spiritual life and material life existed side by side, but to the exclusion of the progressive mind.¹⁷ Spirituality and material life entered as it were into a pact of mutual non-interference. Those who wished to pursue a purely spiritual life were free to do so, and if they assumed the recognised symbols of a spiritual life such as the garb of the Sannyasin, they were entitled to absolute reverence. The society on its part cast itself into a religious mould in such a way that every customary act in the individual's life reminded him of the spiritual symbolism of life. By this compromise the society gained the right to inertia and immobile self-conservation. This destroyed much of the value of the religious mould in which the society was cast. The religious mould remained fixed, its formal symbolic reminders became routines and lost their living sense. New religions and sects, joining the old, did not have much success because although they brought new routines, they failed to revive the saving element of the free and active mind. Material life was handed over to the Ignorance.

The various schools of Indian yoga readily acquiesced in this compromise. Individual liberation through yoga became the aim of yogic endeavour and the renunciation of life its culmination. Attempts were made to restrict yogic knowledge to exclusive groups. All this time society remained immobile. In this process India became a fortress in which the highest spiritual ideal could maintain itself in its absolute purity. But it was a compromise at best and in this bargain the society lost its vigour, its creative urge and also its divine impulse to growth. In a sense the coming of the British can be seen as a liberating

influence on India, because it brought to the fore the very element India had rejected – namely, the progressive mind.

The neglect of the progressive mind encouraged the tendency to tradition. This bondage to tradition has led to an increasing impoverishment of the Indian intellect, one of the most gigantic and original in the world. We continue to feel helpless in the face of the new conditions and new knowledge imposed on us by the recent European contact. As Sri Aurobindo put it:

We have tried to assimilate, we have tried to reject, we have tried to select; but we have not been able to do any of these things successfully. Successful assimilation depends on mastery; but we have not mastered European conditions and knowledge, rather we have been seized by them, subjected and enslaved by them. Successful rejection is possible only if we have intelligent possession of that which we wish to keep. Our rejection must also be an intelligent rejection; we must reject because we have understood, not because we have failed to understand.¹⁸

Sri Aurobindo goes on to point out that this is true even of the way we have possessed our Hinduism, our old culture. We do things sanctioned by the Hindu tradition without knowing why we do them, and we believe things without knowing why we believe them. We assert things not because we understand them but because some book or some Brahmin enjoins them or because they are according to somebody's interpretation of what he asserts as a fundamental Scripture of our religion. Even here, nothing is our own, native to our intelligence; all is derived. About Europeans we have understood what they want us to think about themselves and their modern civilisation. Our English education has increased tenfold the evil of our dependence instead of remedying it.

Successful selection of ideas and institutions requires the independent play of intellect. If we receive them as they are presented to us we shall be imitating blindly and foolishly instead of selecting them. If we try to receive them in the light given by our previous knowledge, which was almost nil in many areas, we shall as blindly and foolishly reject them. Selection demands that we see things not as the foreigner sees them or the orthodox Pandit sees them, but as they are in themselves. But we have selected at random, we have rejected at random, we have not known how to assimilate or choose. In the upshot we have merely suffered the European impact, overborne at some points, crassly resistant at others and we have been miserable on the whole. We have shown a certain ingenuity and subtlety, we have imitated with an appearance of brightness mostly, the minutiae of a subject, but we have failed to think usefully, we have failed to master the life and heart of things.

How shall we recover our lost intellectual freedom and elasticity? By liberating our minds in all subjects from the servitude to authority, whether of Sayana or Max Mueller, of Shankara or Karl Marx, of the written Shastra or the unwritten law of European social opinion, of the Brahmin Pandits or the European scientists, thinkers and scholars. Let us break all our chains, venerable as they may be, but let us do it in order to be free. "It

would be a poor bargain”, said Sri Aurobindo, “to exchange our old Indian illuminations, however dark they may have grown to us, for a derivative European enlightenment or replace the superstitions of popular Hinduism by the superstitions of materialistic Science.”¹⁹

And he added, “Our first necessity, if India is to survive and do her appointed work in the world, is that the youth of India should learn to think – to think on all subjects, to think independently, fruitfully, going to the heart of things, not stopped by their surface...”²⁰ We must entirely shake off the twin obstacles to self-fulfilment, blind mediaeval prejudice and arrogant modern dogmatism. And he added:

The old fixed foundations have been broken up, we are tossing in the waters of a great upheaval and change. It is no use landing ourselves in the infirm bog, neither sea nor good dry land, of a second-hand Europeanism.... No, we must learn to swim and use that power to reach the good vessel of unchanging truth; we must land again on the eternal rock of ages.

Let us not, either, select at random, make a nameless hotch-potch and then triumphantly call it the assimilation of east and West. We must begin by accepting nothing on trust from any source whatsoever, but by questioning everything and forming our own conclusions. We need not fear that we shall by that process cease to be Indians or fall into the danger of abandoning Hinduism. India can never cease to be India or Hinduism to be Hinduism, if we really think for ourselves. It is only when we allow Europe to think for us that India is in danger of becoming an ill-executed and foolish copy of Europe. We must not begin by being partisans, our first business as original thinkers will be to accept nothing, to question everything.²¹

The task before us looks formidable but it is not really beyond us. We have a most inspiring legacy in the matter of original thinking. Subhash Kak²² has reminded us that the ancient Indian mind anticipated several of the most fundamental concepts which govern the world-view of modern science today at least a couple of millennia before Western science could come up with them. This is Kak’s list:

1. According to the *Puranas* the cycle to which the present creation belongs is about 8.64 billion years old. This is about right based on current astrophysical estimates. This sounds revolutionary when we note that until a couple of hundred years ago the dogma in most of Eurasia was that the world was created in 4004 B.C.
2. The atomic doctrine of Kanada (Second Century A.D.) is much more interesting than that of Democritus. Kanada also postulates, like Sankhya and Vedanta, the subject/object dichotomy that has played such a crucial role in the creation of modern science.

3. The idea that space and Time need not flow at the same rate for different observers is a pretty revolutionary notion which we encounter in the *Puranic* stories and in the *Yoga Vashishtha*. We are not speaking here of the mathematical theory of relativity, which is of recent European origin, yet the notion in these stories that time acts differently for different observers is quite remarkable.
4. The *Puranas* say that man arose at the end of a chain which began with plants and various kinds of animals. The theory of Vedic evolution is not at variance with Darwinian evolution although its focus is consciousness and not mere physical forms.
5. The science of Mind described in the Vedic books and systematised by Patanjali is a very sophisticated description of the nature of the human mind and its capacity. The Western world did not even take up this field for study until very recently.
6. A binary number system was used by Pingala (according to traditional accounts, Panini's brother, who lived around 450 BC) which must have helped the invention of the zero sign between 50 BC and 50 AD. Without the binary system the development of modern computers would have been harder, and without a sign for zero, mathematics would have languished. In the West, the binary number system was independently discovered by Leibnitz only in 1678, 2000 years after Pingala.
7. Finally, Panini's grammar of Sanskrit, *Ashtadhyayi*, describes the Sanskrit language in 4000 algebraic rules. This has been hailed by the American scholar Leonard Bloomfield as "one of the greatest monuments of human intelligence". No grammar of similar power has yet been constructed for any other language since.

Isn't our educational system a miracle of mental slavery? Why haven't we been told about any of these seven wonders of the ancient Indian mind in our schoolbooks? My purpose in listing them is not to make us feel smugly proud of our heritage but to convince the modern generation of Indians what wonders can be achieved if only we break our intellectual bonds, cultivate the progressive mind and learn to think for ourselves. India can be revitalised, and, I believe, it will be revitalised, but we must learn to think for ourselves.

¹ Francis Fukuyama: "The End of History?" *The National Interest* 16 (Summer 1989)

² Sri Aurobindo: *Bande Mataram*, (SABCL Vol. 1) pp. 728-31.

³ Thomas S. Kuhn *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, p. 166-67, *The University of Chicago Press*.

⁴ Reported in *The Times of India*, Hyderabad, 22 October 2003.

⁵ Reported in *The Times of India*, Hyderabad, 22 October 2003.

⁶ This quotation is taken from one of Rajiv Malhotra's many postings on the web-site Indic Traditions E-group. He has rendered great service in fighting the attempt made in the West to project a negative image of India by rallying scholars settled in the U.S. to this cause. Another source to which I am greatly indebted for some of the materials and insights contained in this paper is Prof. Subhash Kak, some of whose writings are posted on Sulekha.Com and other web-sites.

⁷ See Dr. V. V. Bedekar, V. Y. Sardesai: "How the British ruined India".

⁸ Dr. Meenakshi Jain: *Indian Express*, 18 and 26 September 1990.

⁹ Sri Aurobindo: *The Renaissance in India*, (The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo Vol. 20) pp. 124-125.

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 246

¹¹ Dan Salmon: "Is India Civilized?", www. Sulekha.com

¹² Sri Aurobindo: *Karmayogin* (SABCL Vol. 3), p. 212.

¹³ Sri Aurobindo: *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, (SABCL Vol.14), pp. 407-08.

¹⁴ Sri Aurobindo: *Bande Mataram*, (SABCL Vol. 1) p. 718

¹⁵ ibid. p. 405

¹⁶ Ananda Coomaraswamy: *The Dance of Shiva*, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, p. 170

¹⁷ Sri Aurobindo: *The Synthesis of Yoga* (Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo Vol. 23), p. 28.

¹⁸ Sri Aurobindo: "On Original Thinking" in *The Harmony of Virtue*_(SABCL Vol. 3) pp. 110-114.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ ibid

²¹ ibid.

²² Subhash Kak: "Seven Astonishing Ideas" [http// WWW. Sulekha.com/column.asp?cid=108397](http://WWW.Sulekha.com/column.asp?cid=108397)