

OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE*

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Very few memorial lectures have attracted me and inspired me to participate as much as this lecture in the name of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. It is a name to be remembered for ages in India. I had occasion to meet him in Karachi when he came there to conduct the very crucial elections just before partition. He and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, came to Karachi to see that the Congress won, so that partition would not take place. After exchanging ideas and thoughts I told him that as I was going to Delhi I would like to meet him there and discuss some matters. Though he was such an outstanding personality, things were very informal at that time. He suggested that he would be in the Parliament, and upon my visit there I could wait for him in the visitors' gallery. He would then call me at the appropriate time. That was the simple arrangement in those days. So I came to Delhi, went to the Parliament, sat in the visitors' gallery, and then raised my hand. He looked up and recognized me. After the session was over we met in a room adjoining his main office and had our discussions. That was the personal relationship I had with him apart from what I have studied about him and his great contribution to Indian freedom.

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel is one of the outstanding leaders of modern India. The youth must study him—his life, his courage, and his high character—a source of eternal inspiration for our young people. The pioneers of each country are always studied and remembered by subsequent generations. For instance, every American child

learns about its founding fathers—Washington and others. India has a set of outstanding founding fathers of the modern period. Our education must inspire our generations with the qualities of leadership, great patriotism, tremendous courage, and intense humanism of all these great leaders. Among them, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel has a very high place. Sardar Patel was not handling a new nation, a new people. He was handling a very ancient culture which was facing the challenge of the modern period. And so we shall have to first study this wonderful culture that has come to us as a great heritage from the past.

Blending and Synthesis

On this subcontinent of India a big cultural experiment was staged by the ancient Vedic and pre-Vedic people. They became unified into a single people. That is the beginning of India: a wonderful assimilation of two types of cultures—one urban, the other rural. The Aryan was rural and the Indus Valley was urban. There may have been a little conflict in the beginning as always happens, but the greatest thing that took place was the huge synthesis of diverse elements, and that has continued to be the hallmark of Indian culture. If the Vedic and pre-Vedic people can blend together into a great people, then another two, another three, another four can also join together. That is what has happened to Indian culture.

Behind this great blending and synthesis was a spiritual vision, a philosophical outlook which came to be known as 'unity in diversity'. Diversity enriches a culture. We do not want to destroy diversity, but we shall subject our diversity to a central thread of spiritual unity. That was the vision of the ancient sages. That vision has continued to inspire India through the ages, including this modern period. Originally it was a spiritual vision—the

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one behind the many, one thread of spiritual unity running through all of us. Some of the most beautiful verses of the Upanishads deal with this great subject. The senses reveal to us diversity and variety. This becomes a challenge to the human mind. Is it really true? Is there a unity behind this diversity? This is a great scientific quest. In modern physical science we ask the same question. Is this diversity the main truth about nature? Is there a unity behind this diversity? In various departments of science— physics, chemistry, botany, zoology—in every one of them we ask this question. The senses reveal diversity. Is it true? Then, we penetrate into the heart of nature and discover unity behind this diversity.

This idea is prominently expressed in modern biology. Darwin says there is a wonderful kinship between one species and the other—between humans, animals, and plants. And biology tries to find links between one phenomenon and another. This search for the one principle behind humankind was an exceptional search that ancient thinkers undertook in India. Behind our culture is a profound thinking, profound philosophy. First, there is a scientific outlook on the external world, and second, a scientific outlook on the internal world of the human being. Indians did discover great truths of the physical sciences. An eleventh century Arab Muslim scholar from Spain places India as the foremost among nations that have cultivated and contributed to the physical sciences. That was India's first contribution. But the search for unity did not end there. It entered into the human spirit. Human beings are different from one another; different colours—black, white, brown—and various other differences are there. What is the ultimate truth about humankind? It is in this field that India achieved a striking breakthrough that has come down to us as the greatest wisdom of India, the greatest contribution to world thought.

Unity in Religion, Nature and among Humans

Indians discovered a profound unity behind the diversity of human types. In the world of religion they discovered unity. In the world of nature they discovered unity. In the world of human beings also they discovered unity. In the world of religion that was a momentous discovery. You get it in the Rig Veda: '*Ekam sat vipra bahudha vadanti*; Truth is one, sages call it by various names.' It is one of the outstanding utterances of Indian culture. This was a great utterance which was strengthened and reinforced by subsequent teachers and thinkers until it became one of the important cultural inheritances of the people of India. The spirit of harmony, the spirit of concord, and the spirit of tolerance and acceptance that is

so characteristic of India comes from this first great discovery in the Rig Veda, that is, unity in religion.

Second, unity in the whole of nature. Everything in this world comes from one original source. That is the great idea you find in the Upanishads. The first verse of the Rig Veda deals with the principle of fire. Fire is a supreme reality in this world. The whole universe is a manifestation of fire. It is not this fire that you find on earth, but the very principle of fire—the fire in your heart, fire in the sun, and fire in your stomach digesting food—they all belong to the same category. There is unity behind all these. That was a remarkable generalization. These are all tremendous achievements of the human mind very early in history.

Finally, turning to human beings, we see all differences outside. Let us penetrate into ourselves. It was in this field that India contributed something unique that has never been repeated anywhere else. This is the discovery of the one behind the many, the one infinite in all beings, like a thread that runs through all the gems in a necklace. Gems are different in colour or shape, but the thread unites all of them. This discovery of the one single spiritual thread of being behind all this diversity has been sung in a very inspiring language in several Upanishads.

The great scientist Sir J C Bose demonstrated before the Royal Society in London his discovery of a fundamental unity behind all matter, the living and the non-living. Though they appeared different, he could discover a unity behind them. That demonstrative speech received high comments from *The Times* of London. At the end of his speech, Bose referred to this wonderful ancient heritage of India. When he saw the results of his scientific experiments, he realized the greatness of the ancient Indian sages who discovered, sitting on the banks of the Ganga, this profound truth of unity in diversity, unity in variety. He quoted from the *Katha Upanishad*: '*Eko vashi sarva-bhutantaratma*; the one Controller, the Self in all beings' and '*rupam rupam pratirupo babhuva*; assumes separate forms in respect of different shapes'. To those who realize this truth belongs eternal peace. One infinite Reality appears in diverse forms. Realize this truth. That is the way to gain life. That is the way to become truly immortal. That is a wonderful passage he quoted towards the end of his lecture.

It is here that we have the spiritual philosophical foundation of a tremendous cultural experiment that has continued for five thousand years and that has given us an 'immortality' not found anywhere else in the world. To give a firm foundation to India's cultural experiment, and

that too on a continental scale, has been the greatest contribution of the Vedic sages. They have given a firm basis for Indian culture. In discovering the immortal behind the mortal human being, they made the culture itself immortal. How many challenges came to this culture! A fraction of these challenges has destroyed many cultures in the world. But India could stand all this because of the extraordinary spiritual strength behind its culture.

How Is Indian Culture Spiritual?

Writers and speakers generally say that Indian culture is spiritual. What does it mean? Does it mean that all the people of India are spiritual? India has its own share of wicked people, non-spiritual people, evil people. But if this statement has any meaning, it means this: that the direction of Indian culture is towards the high spiritual. Truth hidden in every human being and that the honour the nation gives to any person depends upon the spiritual quality of that person. You can study a culture by asking the question: What is the highest human excellence that is appreciated in that culture? In one culture it is military power, in another culture it is intellectual strength, in another it may be money. In India, all these are respected, but the highest respect goes to a person of God, one who has realized oneness with all through spiritual development. Throughout history, India has maintained this quality; the highest person in India is a person of God, a person of spiritual realization. Indian hearts recognize in that person someone great and in this recognition there is no distinction of creed, no distinction of religion—any religion showing high spiritual quality will receive adoration from the people of India. It is not credal, it is not dogmatic, it is just spiritual; that person—whatever may be his or her origin in a particular race and particular religion—has gone beyond the many. That is why many Muslim mystics and mystics of other religions are honoured in this country. They represent the spiritual development of the human being, the spiritual fulfilment of humankind.

This was the background of the developments in Indian culture, commencing from the Vedic period. Very few cultures have received this philosophical and spiritual stimulus from behind. That is why there has been a succession of great teachers, great spiritual luminaries, throughout Indian history. Even in the most difficult and tumultuous period of history India did not fail to produce great spiritual teachers. Take the sixteenth century—Babar's invasion. The whole of North India was shattered. There was so much suffering and killing, so many men and women were taken away as slaves at that time. In Babar's history you will find the story. At that very time,

in that very Punjab, where these events largely took place, India produced a Guru Nanak. He could see all the problems going around, the sufferings of the people; and he had referred to those issues in his own songs as well.

Guru Nanak provided a new type of approach to the challenge that India faced at that time, harmonizing the new elements that had come. Several times has India achieved this harmony. New people come. When the Greeks came, India took from the Greeks their great ideas and developed a synthesis of Indian and Greek cultures at that time. Foreign invaders came, they brought their culture. Slowly India assimilated them and became richer with such assimilation. Then came the Muslim period, the great invasion.

In the beginning it was all a good way of India's religious relationships; missionaries came, spoke of great ideas. Then came invaders. It is when invaders came that the challenge became very big. To meet that challenge India had to produce great personalities, great movements. Guru Nanak represents that tremendous response of the very spirit of India. If there is anything good in the new system, India shall take it in. So he became a harmonizer of the Hindu and the Muslim traditions, and in all the bhakti movements that came thereafter there is the impress of these two—the spiritual heritage of India and the social heritage of Islam. That is why they were democratic. This democratization took place in the middle ages. It was needed because from ancient times India classified the humans in society into the four varnas: brahmana, kshatriya, vaishya, and shudra. It is an old classification. Originally it never meant anything more than certain capacities, certain talents, certain roles that people play. But slowly it became ossified. All evil elements began to enter into it. It was at that time that India faced Islamic invasion, Islamic influence; and the essential influence of Islam is that social democratic experiment in which there is no distinction between one human being and another.

So, the democracy of Islam strengthened Indian society at that time, though conditions were markedly unpropitious. There was violence and destruction everywhere—destruction of temples, destruction of holy places—even then India had that wonderful mind to take what is good from any system that came from outside. All the religions that took birth in India were living side by side in harmony and cooperation; and there were many such religions. First came the Vedic religion, and this religion itself contains many facets. Then arose, in the sixth and fifth centuries BCE, the great Buddhism and Jainism. These were all wonderful developments—great

spiritual teachers instructing people how to live in peace with oneself, in peace with others.

Impersonal Culture

Buddhism has as its background the entire spiritual philosophical development prior to it; the ancient Upanishads, the great Bhagavadgita teachings of Sri Krishna—all these were there behind the development of Buddhism. It was strengthening the nation, giving it a tremendous spiritual and social vigour and dynamism. Buddha himself was an extraordinary personality. India has a culture and a philosophy that is essentially impersonal. Nobody has founded the religions of India. Nobody has founded this culture. The discoveries of a number of thinkers and scientists constitute the basis of the culture of this country. In many other places one individual stands behind a culture or behind a religion. But the Vedas contain so many sages. We do not know who they were. We know so little about their life, but their thoughts are wonderful. We have an expression for this cultural, religious, and philosophical heritage. We call it *apaurusheya*. What is known as Hindu religion and philosophy is *apaurusheya*. There is no *purusha*, person, behind it. It is thoroughly impersonal. It is based upon a number of truths that are universal. They were discovered by the sages. You can rediscover them. That is the nature of scientific truth.

So, this science of the human being in depth, this *adhyatma vidya*, is the product of great sages. They gave us this insight and asked us to check and verify this profound truth. When Vivekananda addressed the Chicago Parliament of Religions in 1893, he explained this Indian approach to religion. By the Vedas, he said, no books are meant; they are the accumulated treasury of spiritual laws discovered by different persons at different times, and the discoverers of those laws are called rishis or sages. They may belong to any caste, any community, any race. And he added that he was glad to tell the august audience that some of the greatest of these sages were women. Very early in its history, India had an impersonal background to its cultural, philosophical, and spiritual experiments. No other system had this kind of an impersonal background. Because it is impersonal, it is universal. No person can dictate to the Indian people. An impersonal truth is universal. Two plus two is four to everyone in any part of the world. So, spiritual truths are universal. You can realize them for yourself. That is the background of India's development.

Against this impersonal background, India produced a galaxy of mighty personalities in every department of life. Great scientists, great humanists, great spiritual

teachers, great intellectuals—all these great personalities developed upon that impersonal background. In its prehistoric period, India had Rama and Krishna—two great personalities that dominated Indian culture, whose influence has gone beyond India to all over South East Asia. In the historic period India had Buddha and Mahavira—two gigantic personalities. Buddha was born a prince, but renounced that princely life and became an ascetic trying to realize this truth in the forest through deep meditation. This story has been with us for two thousand five hundred years. What a wonderful event it was in human history. A prince renouncing a kingdom, going into the forest, entering into deep meditation, and realizing profound truths—and within a few centuries Buddha entered into the hearts of millions and millions of people throughout Asia. That is a remarkable movement. The great Mahavira and the Jain religion were confined to India. But Buddhism went outside India.

Buddhism is the first great missionary religion; and because of the Upanishadic background, that Vedantic background of tolerance, understanding, and intense concord among religions you find one quality in the expansion of Buddhism within and outside India—absolute tolerance. Not a single act of violence or persecution you find associated with the expansion of Buddhism in and outside India. This cannot be said of any religion born outside India. Every religion born in India has this touch: the spirit of harmony, the spirit of understanding.

In the wake of Buddha came the great cultural development of India—all-round development. Indian morale went up, its economic conditions went up, and many other outstanding developments took place at that time. Vivekananda says that the most glorious period of India's long history was just three hundred years after Buddha, when his spirit of humanism spread throughout the nation. Ashoka opened hospitals not only for human beings but for animals as well. That was the compassion realized by this great spiritual personality. In the wake of Buddha came great empires, great political states and the greatest of them was the Mauryan empire of Indian history.

Concord and Respect

We are all facing war, violence, international destruction, and the thinkers look up to India. H G Wells, who produced the first world history—*Outline of History*—places Ashoka as the greatest crown head in the whole of human history: one who renounced war as an instrument of political policy and declared international peace as the greatest teaching of his empire and his political thoughts. That has not had any second example in human

history. Similarly, in the world of religion, Ashoka proclaimed this truth of harmony and concord. That also has no parallel in human history. In various edicts on rocks and pillars, Ashoka proclaims this humanistic message which India was absorbing from the teachings of Buddha. The teachings of the earlier great spiritual teachers and the edict on toleration are historic. You will not find it in the history of any other country. The twelfth rock edict of Ashoka mentions that King Priyadarshi—that was what he called himself, '*devanam priya*; dear to the gods'—respects every religion, race, and followers of every religion, and he gives to followers of every religion, and he wants that virtue and spirituality must come out of every religion. Then he makes a wonderful statement: If a follower of any religion considers his own religion as the only true one and disparages the religions of others, that very person really disparages his own religion. For in religion, harmony, concord, is the right way. That particular utterance is something very historic, very unique.

Couched in the smallest utterance, purest words, we have the deepest meaning. In Sanskrit that utterance reads thus: '*Samavaya eva sadhu*; concord alone is proper.' In the world of religion *samavaya*, concord, alone is correct and proper, not discord, not violence. Coming from the Rig Veda and getting strengthened through the teachings of Sri Krishna and the Gita, this principle did not remain merely with saints and sages. It influenced Indian political thought, political state policy, both of big empires and smaller states. That is one of the greatest inheritances of the people of India: the spirit of harmony, the spirit of tolerance, and respect for every religion; and there were many offshoots of this great policy when foreign religions began to come.

By 'foreign religions' I mean religions that had their birth outside India. Today most of them have become naturalized in this country. But when they came, they came from outside; and what respect, what welcome, they received in this country. This is something outstanding. The first group that came was the Jew, the Israelites. They were received very kindly, sympathetically and with respect by a small state in Kerala. They were persecuted everywhere. Their temples were shattered by the Romans in 70 CE. They dispersed all over the world. A group came to India, and to this day they have been here, respected, honoured, allowed to practise their own culture and religion. It is an outstanding aspect of human history. They were persecuted all over the world. In every country they were looked down upon. Only in India they received respect and were revered.

Later came the first Christian in the first century CE to Kerala—St Thomas. He was also given all welcome. This land is a land of many religions respecting every religion. And one coming in the name of God or a great spiritual teacher is honoured here. Another outstanding event was the coming of the Iranians, the Parsis, the Zoroastrians. There is a book by one Mr Nanavati titled *The Parsis*, published from Bombay. I was fascinated to read that book. You see a picture of the Parsis coming to the Western part of India—the Gujarat coast. The following scene is depicted in that book: All the Parsi refugees are there, their high priest is there, and the prince of that particular state is also there. A big meeting is going on and the prince is asking the high priest, 'What do you want us to do for you?' The high priest says, 'Give us permission to practise our religion and culture in this country.' 'Granted.' No argument at all. 'Granted.' 'What else do you want?' 'Give us a piece of land which we can cultivate so that we do not become a burden on your society.' 'Granted.' A few such questions and the answers are very quick: 'Granted.' Another beautiful scene follows: That priest asks for a bowl of milk. Somebody brings a bowl of milk before the whole audience; the priest puts a little sugar into that milk and tells the audience and the king: 'This milk represents you, the people of India and the sugar is we the Parsis who have come from Iran. We shall sweeten your life here, and nothing more.' How true it has been throughout the history of these twelve hundred years. When two cultured people meet, this is what happens. Have you any parallel to this in any part of the world?

Today's young generation must understand what the quality of India's culture is. Our education does not give us any insight into this. That is why our youth misbehave. They become un-Indian in their attitude, un-Hindu in their reactions. In the wake of Buddhism came the wide diffusion of the idea of harmony, tolerance, and understanding. The same political state would support several religions, giving respect and honour to every one. When the Chinese pilgrim Hsuan Tsang came to India in the seventh century, he saw what an amount of tolerance, what an amount of understanding there was. He saw India, a land of great knowledge, great universities: Nalanda, where he spent six years; Takshashila in Peshawar, a great university especially known for its teachings in the medical sciences.

This land was devoted to knowledge, devoted to wisdom, devoted to humanistic ideas. But later on bad days came. When you live long enough, there will be ups and downs in life. India has lived long enough. It has seen so many ups and downs. That is why it saw high

prosperity; and then came adversity, centuries of foreign invasions; and India was not strong enough politically to resist foreign invasions.

Spiritual and Political Wisdom

When you study Indian culture you find two dimensions to this culture, one is called the *rishi vamsha*, the other *raja vamsha*. The first is a spiritual tradition, and the second a political tradition. And between the two, the *rishi vamsha* is always strong, always continuous, unbroken. The spiritual succession of India from the Vedic times to Ramakrishna has been uninterrupted. But the political succession of India has been interrupted again and again, broken again and again. This is one aspect of Indian history one must constantly keep in view.

Even in the most tumultuous period of its history, India produced Guru Nanak, during Babar's invasion. During the most dismal period of history, in the nineteenth century under the British rule, India produced gigantic personalities like Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, and others. That is the spiritual strength of India, the spiritual continuity of India. That is called *rishi vamsha*; the other is *raja vamsha*. India has fared extremely badly in this *raja vamsha* aspect of human life. India is not politically well educated. It is lacking in political wisdom. When we study the long history of India, we find numerous occasions when it broke its political states. Greeks could easily invade India because it was not united. It had petty little states here and there. As a reaction to this invasion India produced the mighty emperor Chandragupta, the Maurya Empire uniting much of India at that time. Empires like this and the Gupta Empire have arisen again and again. But as soon as some great ruler passed away, weaker rulers came and empires broke up into petty little states. This is also has happened repeatedly. Congeries of little states often fighting with each other, often joining with foreigners to fight with others—lack of political wisdom has been written very ingloriously in Indian history. We have to correct it in the modern period.

But the spiritual side of India has been outstanding. India has never been an aggressive nation, remember that. That is because of the spiritual background. When you respect every religion, every being, how can you hate anyone? How can you go and fight and exploit any other person. The Upanishads saw this truth: '*Yastu sarvani bhutany-atmany-evanupashyati, sarva-bhuteshu chatmanam tato na vijugupsate*; one who sees all beings in the Self itself, and the Self in all beings, feels no hatred by virtue of that (realization).' When you see the same Atman in every being, when you see every being in the

Atman, you cannot hate anyone—only love can come from you. This teaching, which was strengthened later on by the great Buddha and others, has gone deep into the blood of India.

Any nation that expands its energies immediately becomes an imperial nation with imperial conquests. Greece did it. Tiny little native states were there, always fighting against each other. They were all united by Philip, and later by Alexander. The energies so generated could not be contained within Greece. It exploded into a military conquest of all the neighbouring countries from Greece to Punjab. The entire region became the Greek empire. In recent period we have seen the British—a small nation involved in quarrels. So they started a foreign policy by invading France. Then they became united. Many countries do this to overcome internal differences. You start an aggression outside, and all join together. Britain has done it several times. Vivekananda refers to it. India had not that kind of stimulus to unite—unite to fight with somebody. It has never done it. And throughout the centuries, when it expanded its energies—in Buddhism, and later on in the Gupta period—it was expressed only in the cultural sphere, the philosophical sphere. India has invaded the rest of the world philosophically, spiritually, again and again.

Cultural Influences beyond Borders

In his book *The Message of Plato*, the famous British writer E J Urwick says you can never understand Plato and Aristotle without understanding the Upanishads. Study the Upanishads, you will find Plato and Aristotle become clear to you. So India has influenced so many of these foreign countries throughout history, in the world of thought, in the world of ideas, in the world of culture. Look at that scene presented by Plato: Socrates, the noblest of men, was condemned by the Athenian democracy as one who was misguiding the youth of Athens. Therefore, he must be killed. He must drink poison and die. Can you imagine men like Socrates being put to death in a country like India? He will be the centre of worship. Indians will honour him. Even later, when Jesus Christ was crucified in Palestine, that was due to intolerance—intolerance of any new idea. If Jesus Christ were in India, he would have been worshipped even in his lifetime as divine. This is India's culture.

Bertrand Russell once said that if you teach the world faster than it can learn, you are in trouble for yourself. Socrates spoke something beyond the comprehension of the Greeks at that time. Jesus did the same thing, whereas such teachings are well known to Indians. When Buddha

spoke high ideas—highly metaphysical, highly rational—all Indians understood them. They accepted it at that time. Shankaracharya did it, and in recent times Vivekananda. He said beautiful things; he criticized Indian religion, Indian society, but Indians did not kill him. They honoured him. That is India, a wonderful country. That culture is behind this nation.

Here is that scene: Socrates drinking poison, so many disciples are sitting around. They are weeping. Socrates is calm, but the disciples are weeping. Socrates chides them, 'I sent away the women from here and now you are also weeping.' They become quiet. One of them named Crito asks, 'Socrates, how shall we bury you?' Socrates smiles and says, 'You must first catch me and the real I before you ask to bury me. Be of good cheer Crito. You refer to this body; as to the body, do with it what you do with other people.' This could as well be a chapter from any Upanishad. We read in the Bhagavadgita: '*Nainam chhindanti shastrani nainam dahati pavakah, Na chainam kledayanty-apo na shoshayati marutah*; this (Atman, the Divine in man) no weapon can cut, no water can wet, no fire can burn, and no air can dry.'

The Atman is immortal. This is why Socrates could face death with a gentle smile. This is the great teaching of India which has influenced some other cultures by way of mutual collaboration. In this modern period India has a great challenge before it. It has a tremendous cultural inheritance. It has got diverse aspects. At one time we thought India is only a religious country. Its culture is only religious or philosophical. No positivistic element is there in Indian culture. That mistaken idea was there towards the end of the nineteenth century. But one supreme aspect of Indian culture that everybody could see was the artistic aspect. The aesthetic element in Indian culture is remarkable.

What is the source of that aesthetic element? In the *Taittiriya Upanishad* there is a beautiful description of the supreme Divine. That is not only *sat*, real, not only *chit*, pure consciousness, but also *ananda*, bliss. It is of the nature of bliss. Out of this bliss element of the divine Reality came the momentous impulse to develop art and aesthetic ideas in this country: literature, poetry, and drama; then dance and music of various types. Today India's artistic heritage—in spite of much destruction during the medieval period—is marvellously rich. For the [1985] festival of India in the US, two thousand art objects had been sent to that country. I was in America at that time. The *National Geographic* wrote: 'Eighty million Americans will be touched by this cultural blitzkrieg from India.' What a wonderful blitzkrieg. That is the wonderful

touch of India. So the artistic heritage of India is immense. Though much has been destroyed, what remains is so impressive.

The other great heritage is Indian philosophy and spirituality, so rational. In no other country you will find rational religion. You cannot question religion in other countries. Religions are based on creeds and dogma. They do not allow you to break them down. On the contrary, the Upanishads ask you to question. Buddha asks you to question. Today Ramakrishna, Vivekananda ask you to question. By questioning alone you can get the truth of religion, because religion is a science of human possibilities. That is the nature of philosophy presented in India. They call it 'Vedanta', the great philosophy of India coming from the Upanishads through various phases, including the Buddhist phase. That is the Advaita Vedanta of India, very rational, very practical, very universal; and that is the philosophy that is challenging even the most advanced aspects of modern science today. That is India's cultural inheritance.

India's political inheritance has been very weak, and today that is the problem it faces. India has a bright soul, ever pure, and every contemporary civilization has tried to come in touch with that soul of India, so healthy, so pure. It has no evil intentions against anybody, only love and human concern. That is why every contemporary civilization wanted to come in touch with India for two things: one, the wisdom of India; two, the wealth of India. The wealth of India invited trade. This trade has been very extensive. Even recently, in Tamil Nadu, a whole city was being unearthed from the sea—a Roman port, where Roman ships are lying below. We are trying to bring them up for the time being. Roman coins have been found in various places. The ancient Roman Senate once passed a law against Indian trade because too much of Roman gold was coming to India. India had massive trade with Arabia, with Egypt, with Palestine, with Rome, and Greece as well. This was material. But more important was thought. Everybody was coming here to understand the philosophy, the spirituality of India. Even Alexander came in touch with the spiritual people of India. More than one Greek historian refers to Alexander's meeting with a holy man in Punjab at that time. So that is the ancient heritage of India.

A tree has sap in it—it is strong. The bark supports the tree. The tree grows, the bark also grows. Then it is a living tree. If the bark does not grow along with the tree, it will compress the tree and kill it. But a living tree will shed an old bark and put on a new bark for itself. India is a living tree. It has shed many barks; the bark is always

new, always fresh, but the tree itself is eternal, *sanatana*. The Gita says: ‘*Urdhva-mulam-adhah-shakham-ashvattham prahur-avyayam*; they speak of an imperishable pipal tree with its root above and branches below.’ The universe is compared to the Ashwattha tree. The only difference is that the roots are upwards; branches are below. The unseen, the unheard, and the transcendental—that is the root. This side is the visible universe. The Gita and the *Katha Upanishad* compared the universe to that Ashwattha tree.

So, we have this wonderful Ashwattha tree growing, strengthening, widening. In the modern period bigger challenges have come and India has met these challenges.

It is still strong today. That is the wonderful story of the Indian people. Studying history is good. You look backwards. But do not look backwards too much. You are living today, see the future. Vivekananda wanted us to look at the past and learn its lessons, and look to the future and create history. So, I tell all young people wherever I go in India, do not merely study history; remember now you are engaged in creating history. Till now you were victims of history. Other people created history. Indians became creatures of that history for the last thousand years. Today you have the capacity to create history, and through this creation you will influence the whole world. □