

Is India headed the right way?

Francois Gautier | February 05, 2007 | 14:58 IST

Today, there is a sense of deep satisfaction, of gloating even, in India.

The economy is booming, there are more and more cars on the roads, shares are soaring, a plane is taking off every six seconds, hotels are full, shops do roaring business.

It looks as if India has moved from *tamas* to *rajas*, and has come out of its slough of depression and inertia of the last so many centuries, which was characterised by lack of self-esteem, confidence and dynamism.

Today, we see a much more dynamic and self-confident India, galvanised by the liberalisation taking place at this very moment.

But if one looks closer at what is happening here, one is bound to feel a little unsettled. For what we see today is an India veering blindly, without restraint, towards total globalisation and Westernisation.

Yes, there are great values in the Western world: Freedom, democracy, equality (not always though), respect for the environment, less corruption. And India must, and has already borrowed from these qualities.

But since the last two, three years, it seems the Indian political and intellectual mind is pushing these qualities to an illogical extreme, as if it wants to prove to the West that 'we are as democratic, as liberal, as free as you are.'

Thus, democracy in India has been hijacked. It takes a fortune to be elected. Politicians, elected by and for the people, once they are locked in the ivory tower that is Delhi, forget all about the people.

Thus we see that freedom is such an obsessive mantra in India that an artist who paints one of the most revered ancient Hindu gods doing unmentionable things to a Hindu goddess is defended by India's intellectuals.

Thus we see that someone who is part of a diabolical plot to kill Indian leaders and storm Parliament gets the benefit of the doubt from the same intelligentsia in the name of judicial correctness.

This process of copying the West to the point of aping it has, of course, already happened many times in the developing world. And it killed the soul of many countries, making them just another replica of the West -- with a youth that wears the latest Calvin Klein jeans, knows the No 1 bestseller on the *Time* list, can quote a few lines from Dante, reads *The Times of India*, but knows nothing about pranayama, has never read a verse from Kalidasa and does not know who Sri Aurobindo is.

The Westernisation of India must not be at the cost of her culture and spirituality. Yet, there are signs that it is already happening here.

You may notice in the Indian media, that there is a witch hunt against gurus, a deriding and mocking of Indian spirituality, a marginalising of Hinduism and Hindus, who constitute the immense majority in India and are a billion worldwide, one of the most law-abiding, religious, educated, affluent communities in the world.

More and more, Indian television particularly, but also newspapers and magazines, are casting a look on India that is not only very critical (if you open any newspaper nowadays, you can only end up depressed), but which in its very nature is a Western look -- which judges India according to Western standards.

But these Western standards do not necessarily apply to this country, which has a different psyche, different culture and different standards.

Why not judge India according to Indian wisdom, which is much more ancient than Western democracy and philosophy?

More importantly, some Indians are more and more divided. Instead of feeling first Indians, they feel they are first Muslims and then Indians, first Dalits and then Indians, first Christian and then Indians. This is a dangerous trend and it spells the death of the minimum unified nationalistic pride that can take a country forward.

Instead, Indians today take pride in melting abroad, or adopting a 'secular' creed, which basically makes them soul-less and identity-less, however brilliantly they ape the West.

What is it that which India is fast losing as you read this article?

Its culture, firstly.

Entire patches in the northeast are being converted to Christianity. Tribals are told by missionaries that it is sinful to enter a temple, women are asked not to wear *bindis*, children are taught to look down on their culture as animist or heathen.

Its communal harmony, secondly.

Whatever the shocks of invasions, there was always a certain syncretism in Jain, Sikh, Buddhist, Christian and Muslim communities. The ordinary Muslim in Kashmir or the Christian in Kerala, even if he thought that his or her god was the only true one, had a certain understanding and acceptance of the age-old Indian culture. Reverence for women, respecting others' festivals and customs, harmony with one's neighbours were hallmark traits.

Today, even the Sikh community feels it wants to separate from its Hindu brothers and Christian and Muslims are encouraged to look down upon Hindus.

As a foreigner who loves India, I feel that this blind copying of the West's ignorant and doubting mind, the aping of whatever is has proved wrong in the West -- wild consumerism, or savage capitalism -- will be a tragedy for India.

And what is India's soul? The knowledge that there is life beyond life, the understanding of the different planes above the mind, the ancient wisdom on reincarnation, karma, *maya*.

And above all, the acceptance that god manifests himself at different times under different names and that god is one in his infinite diversity.

This knowledge, which once roamed the shores of the world from Egypt to China, is today lost everywhere. Yet it is the knowledge that humanity needs for the 21st century if it does not want to go towards catastrophe as it is now, with the world's two major so-called monotheistic religions still believing that only their god is the true one and that it is their duty to convert 'pagans.'

India must thus achieve its liberalisation and industrialisation, by taking the best of the West, but *preserving* what is good, pure, wise in her own culture.

On a material level, for instance, there should be a revival of authentic Indian traditional forms, such as ancient medical systems like Ayurveda, or Siddha, instead of the total dependence on Western antibiotics.

And what about Indian yogic sciences? Pranayama, for instance, is the most exacting, precise, mathematical, powerful breathing discipline one can dream of. It is also true of hatha yoga, a 3,500-year-old technique, which has inspired all kind of aerobic, so-called yoga techniques and gymnastic drills around the world.

Meditation is also India's gift to the world. The art of relaxing the mind and cooling the nervous system, using simple methods such as observing the breath, or repeating one's god's name.

If these three disciplines were taught in a secular, scientific manner to all Indian children in school, not only it would unify them in the same knowledge, but it would provide them wonderful tools of intuition, endurance and peace of mind, which they could use all throughout their life.

But what we see today instead in India are IIMs or IITs churning out scores of Western clones good for export -- the greatest cause of the intellectual brain drain of India.

And this will be India's gift to this planet during this century: to restore to the world its true sense, to recharge humanity with the real meaning and spirit of life.

India should become the spiritual leader of the world.

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