Remembering the Past and Looking Forward to a Better Future

One of the worst consequences of British rule in India was the systematic attempt at inculcating especially in the minds of the young, a contempt for their own culture and developing an inferiority complex. Generations after generations of Indian youth were taught that it was British power that protected and brought enlightenment to them and that they were fit only to be ruled by an outside power. Even the beneficial acts of educating Indian youth in English was not without an ulterior motive. The British administrators made no secret of the fact that they wanted clerks at subordinate levels to assist them and it was for this reason schools and colleges were first started to provide higher education in English. Macaulay in his famous minute declared that by teaching the English language to Indians, they will come to realise its grandeur and will begin to despise their own culture and literature. How well he succeeded in this campaign is too well-known.

Another British luminary Sir Richard Temple stated that when Indians are exposed to an education in sciences, they will be overwhelmed with the grandeur of western science and will develop the requisite sense of inferiority. The education that was imparted and the history that was taught did, in fact, inculcate in the minds of an average Indian a sense of inferiority. Educated youth began to view everything from the west as sacred and worthy of emulation. They developed a contempt for their own language and culture. They began to ape the west in dress, manners and customs. Dependence became a badge of honour and recognition of indigenous talent relegated to the background.

It is necessary to project before our degenerated minds the facts of true history. We must not tend to forget that there was a time when India excelled in the art of even mining and metallurgy. Our ancestors had explored the length and breadth of the country and located almost all the gold, copper, lead and zinc occurrences that were exposed at the surface. In spite of all our recently acquired knowledge, it has not been possible to locate a single new deposit of gold or copper which the ancients had overlooked or neglected to explore. So thorough and intimate was their knowledge. Evidences of their handiwork is to be seen everywhere. It is no longer denied that Indians were experts in iron and steel making. Wootz steel is an example. They were also master builders and erected great monuments which stand testimony to the skill and taste of those forgotten masons. Thousands and thousands of artisans were engaged in industry. Foreign travellers, even as late as the 17th century, have testified to the fact that India was humming with industrial activity.
India unfortunately did not keep pace with the developments which overtook other countries as a result of the industrial revolution. The minions of the East India Company had captured power by then and began functioning as freebooters. Their sole object was to extort money. They devastated the rich province of Bengal. The trade in every district was captured and millions were thrown out of gainful employment. Famine stalked the country. The ancient nobility of the land was eliminated and ordinary soldiers from the west paraded before the people as sovereigns. The depredation of Bengal is the blackest chapter in the history of British rule in India. The present day corruption which has assumed alarming proportions pales into insignificance compared to the unlimited graft and extraction practiced by the officers of the East India Company. They saw to it there was an end to all development. All industrial activity was smothered out of existence.

In saying this, we are not blind to the benefits of English education or of the contribution made by British statesmen. In later years, British officers in charge of districts dispensed justice in all fairness. In fact, it is they who were the first to point out to the greatness of our forgotten culture. English education helped to open out a window to the outside world and was responsible for enlarging our vision. A new enthusiasm to learn more of our own heritage was born. Strife-driven India was welded into one unit and it began its slow march once again towards progress.

A time has now come to recapture glimpses of that forgotten glory and cherish that priceless heritage as our own. The permanently enduring past of India must be made to live before our minds eye. A spirit of pride and a determination to work for a better future must pervade our thinking. An attitude which can discriminate between the immemorial tradition of ages and the injurious and borrowed trappings of the west must be developed. We must know more about the tradition and the true history of our land and not the garbled history that has been dished out to us. We must get to know more about the wonders of our ancient edifices and of our ancient cities. Very little is known about these matters.

Jawaharlal Nehru, in his monumental work, ‘Glimpses of World History’, pointed out how “Europe which was smaller than Asia had grown up in recent centuries, emerging from its own undeveloped state by borrowing or stealing the know-how from Asia and developing its own technology. For example, the technology of the printing press which produced revolutionary changes in the fifteenth century, Gutenberg lifted this from China without paying copyright royalties or licence fees as Europeans charge today for the transfer of technology. Travellers like Marco Polo have testified to the manufactures of Asia were eagerly sought by Europe. The currents of civilization thus once ran from Asia to Europe, long before they were reversed to Asia. Who can say that this trend will remain unchanged?

“History that has been taught to us was largely wrong and distorted. No doubt the glitter of modern Europe is very attractive. But let it not be forgotten that the earlier glitter of Asia which produced great civilization,
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leaders of world thought was no less resplendent. These leaders had influenced mankind more than any one or anything else”.

It is said that the greater part of the social and intellectual structure of a nation is bequeathed to it by former generations. The tradition and past experiences of our country are thus a precious heritage which we should take the trouble of discovering and assimilating, especially at a time when the alchemy of European culture is transforming our entire socio-religious fabric beyond all recognition. We must make a beginning to know everything about our physical, intellectual and spiritual ancestry and develop a sense of pride in it.

Earth scientists should make a special effort to discover the essentials of our past culture. They must get to know more about their achievements in the fields of science and art. It is easy enough to pick up the absurd things in the ancient texts and dismiss them as worthless. What is required now is a diligent study by discerning students with a view to distill from these books the essence of knowledge which made our ancients great.

As a step in this direction, we have brought out a new publication, ‘An Introduction to Ancient Indian Metallurgy’, authored by Karunakara Hegde, Professor of Archaeology at the University of Baroda. A perusal of the book will give the readers an idea of the level of excellence attained by early Indians in the metallurgy of copper, iron and zinc. We would urge our readers to go through this book, if only to feel that the blood of these ancient artisans is coursing in their veins.

Years ago, Max Muller, the great Professor of Sanskrit at the University of Oxford wrote:

“If I was to look over the whole world to find out the country most richly endowed with all the wealth, power and beauty that nature can bestow – in some parts the very paradise on earth, I should point to India”.

How different is the dismal picture of present day India. To what abysmal depths have we descended! If there is a sense of shame still left in us, should we not strive our utmost to deserve so eloquent a tribute?

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ETHICAL STANDARDS IN A JOURNAL

To edit a journal that wishes to maintain the highest standards of journalism and service is a challenging and humbling experience. It is challenging because high standards are always challenging and humiliating because combining two professions in one journal reveals how difficult it is to develop universal ethical standards.

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‘Science’, 5th July 1991