

The Impact Of Indian Personality On Its Development In The 21st Century

The projection of anything—a physical object, a scientific theory, or a country's development, is based on its past and existing conditions.

We are compelled to go back to India's past and present to make its development projection in the twenty-first century.

If we could accurately establish where India stood in the past and where it stands now on some of the significant things in its purpose and national policy, then we could attempt to make their projection in the future. But such a program can not succeed without it factoring into it the invisible force of the national personality. Human endeavors are not only dependent on the conditions external to them, but significantly depend on the personality driving them.

A nation has a personality, just as individuals have. It plays an extraordinary role in its appearance, conduct, development, culture, and success. But it can not be delineated by summing up the personalities of all its citizens, because the individual and group personalities can be different.

Among the several things which make a national personality, the most significant are:

Cultural Background

History

Economic Background

Philosophical Ethos

Geography

Culture is the preeminent defining quality of a people. It is rooted in experience and vision. It takes hundreds, and sometimes thousands of years, for a people to develop its culture. Though it is spun slowly and feebly by human mind, in time it develops into a force that influences the human mind. Only extraordinary people are able to escape the influence; for the rest culture is the template that shapes their lives. It is changeable, but only slowly or by cataclysmic experience.

For thousands of years Indians have been deeply steeped in religion and religious way of living. This heavy mental conditioning forms the basis of their comprehension of reality, survival strategy, morality, and the driving-force of their lives. The conception of reality is the most significant element of human personality. Indian mind does not “see” things outside it the same way as some of the other people see them. Physical objects and conditions are not significant to it the same way, for example, as they are to the western mind. For the Indian mind elements of the spiritual existence are more significant reality than some of the material reality.

The diminished emphasis on the immediate and the surrounding physical reality is a critical component of Indian psyche. One has to compare the extraordinary level of an Indian’s personal cleanliness to his negligent and apathetic attitude toward the cleanliness of his surroundings to have a glimpse of his relationship with the outside world. Material things do not seem to have been very important to Indians. When one visits Indian villages, one is struck by the degree of the absence of physical things in homes; a condition not necessarily always the outcome of the economic insufficiency of their inhabitants, but something also contributed by their apathy for materialism. Even some of the events of an individual’s life are often taken lightly in light of the heavy weight attached to his destiny.

Indian culture celebrates human life and is studded with high-mindedness and idealism. It reveres nature and highly values family-life. It sees human life as a process and not a means toward an end. Indians believe in destiny and do not see life a struggle with nature. Hinduism does not want to directly talk about human suffering, as is Buddhism's first realization, but it emphasizes man's duty and his karma as the antidote to suffering. Indians are tolerant of foreigners and their faiths but do not deeply identify with them or try to understand them.

Hindu culture is a pulsating storm of contradictions, which course through the fabric of life like a well designed swath of threads, without which, seemingly, the grand tapestry would collapse.

Hard work is appreciated but without the connection to an accepted good goal it passes on as an inconsequential habit. Education is greatly valued but a questioning mind is subject to doubts about its maturity. Women are respected but not considered man's equal. Materialism is looked down upon but wealthy people are treated with deference. Kindness toward people is greatly valued but addressing the underlying causes of the miseries of some of them are not aggressively pursued.

Indians respect older people and people in authority, which has created problems in its social and governing institutions. Equality of all men is not a spontaneously cherished idea in India. Family-life is the main group-life for an Indian, community-life is more of a modern reality. The state and the individual do not seem to be connected.

Indian culture is heavily embellished with mythological and ritualistic symbolism pointing to the supernatural control of human destiny, life's unity, and morality. Wisdom is supposed to be a gift of gods, and not having analyzable basis.

Indian culture like all cultures has a strong tug of the past, but survival depends upon the quickness and the quality of change in response to the changing circumstances, especially in the swiftly changing technology-induced circumstances. Indian culture's heavy inertia to change is a big stone round India's neck. The recently acquired practical sense of the urban dwellers is just a drop in the ocean of India's lethargy. The westernization of some of the same people is also a false indication of the change in the main social folds.

Indian culture does not promote a national identity or purpose because it is not goal-oriented. It weaves an aura over life in general, but it essentially attempts to guide an individual toward the acquirement of an elevated consciousness. We live in an age of individualism, but western societies do identify with some tangible national goals, which is not the case with the Indian society. In special circumstances Indians have risen to identification with national goals, as in the independence movement. But there again it was the reflection of the magnificence of the movement leadership rather than the reflection of the intensity of the will and the pointedness of the direction of the people. The national identity of the Indians is a very diffuse and incoherent thing, more of a realization on their part of the knot they are tied in with each other rather than a sharply laid out mosaic of purposes and ideas that defines them.

India has traversed a checkered history, replete with wars and foreign occupations. The five-hundred years of foreign-rule have left indelible scars and crippled confidence in its psyche. Yet the prolonged and intense foreign interaction has not changed the Indian personality as much as it would have changed some other people's personality. This is due to the Indians' nearly absolute self-absorption. How will this self-absorption fare in the next century in light of it being projected to be the era of instant global interaction. While aspects of Hinduism are admired and put into practice in many parts of the world, a Hindu is not disposed to jump over its identity-fence to mingle freely with the other people. In ancient Indian literature there existed no histories. This is very significant, as it tells us that the past was not considered one of the paramount dimensions of human existence. Even today Indians are not the creatures of their history as, for example, Europeans are. They do not have any deep and living

interest in their grand and textured history. Time seems to have only one significant direction for Indians: present pointing to future. In fact, a type of timelessness reigns over Indian psyche. Materialism is bound with time; and no wonder Indians' half-hearted materialism has remained a norm with them over the long stretches of their history. Indians have not been big on moving out of their national boundaries for territorial and material gains or egotistical conquests.

Indians are a deeply religious and philosophical people. For thousands of years they have woven a rich, vast, and complex fabric of thought, which has dominated their living, conception of reality, and action.

Indian philosophy's long immersion in self-consciousness and consciousness has left a distinct mark on the Indian personality. Environment and time do not have a significant place in Indian philosophy. A grand edifice of thought has been built, sacrificing the scientific outlook on reality. Since the extraordinary success of Industrial Revolution man has been more and more going to science for practical as well as spiritual help. The cold-treatment of science will exact stupendous price of Indians in the science-dominated twenty-first century. Indians can do well in science in schools and universities; it has produced several world-class scientists; but Indians can not be said to have a scientific outlook on life, being, and universe. Universal Consciousness and Brahman concepts of Indian philosophy are brilliant inventions of thought that are scientifically derivable, but they are focused on being and not on environment.

India has remained economically poor for hundreds of years, but now with the rising population and changing cultural and political environment this situation is making a serious impact. The increasing awareness of the masses of their political rights, the focused modern materialistic lifestyle, the fast pace of life, all converge on the economic viability of the individual. Due to the sheer inertia of the cultural and philosophical ethos toward material things, Indians have not worked hard to improve their economic environment. Prolonged poverty saps the appetite for materialistic security and pleasures. Indians have been stretched beyond the

deprivation, agony, and frustrations of poverty such that they have not only learnt to live with it but also to use it as a weapon to fight life. One has to go to Indian villages to see the mind-numbing scars of poverty's terrible destruction of the aspects of the psychological and the physical lives of the people.

Much has been made of the recent (in history) rapid, steep, and wide expansion of the Indian middle-class. It is only a side-show of the economic canvas as the middle-class does not exceed twenty-five percent of the population. Will it spread to the seventy-five percent people living in the villages? It can not do so at the same rate as before, because the economic principles dictate that the people's capacity to absorb goods and services are tied with their capacity to produce income to purchase them. The middle-class boom has a restrictive radius, which does not, at this time, encompass the generationally poor; who can graduate to the higher class only after going through a certain economic, social, and educational process. The expansion plans of the hungry Indian businessmen, who are a tiny part of the population, are solidly thwarted by the government's long arm of bureaucracy, its anti-business, and business-stifling policies. Government Of India does not let any public activity go uncensored and unleashed. People love to bash the government for all their ills. But the fact is that a government is cut from the same fabric that it tries to govern; it has the same values and personality. Indian government's insensitive and benighted intervention in people's lives—both private and public—comes from Indian culture's deep obsession with control and discipline of human activities. Indian philosophy does not see life as a product of nature, but as a carrier of human will and thought.

As India stands at the entrance of the twenty-first century with some of the most awful problems any nation can have, the question arises that does it have the personality to solve them.

Indians are a tranquil people, sensitive and thoughtful; therefore, better able to handle the alienation, insanity, and identity problems engendered by the modern life. But fencing these problems by a cultural tradition is not the same as bringing in an understanding to solve them. In fact, Indians sitting on the periphery of

modern life, sooner or later, are forced to confront them; resulting in personal crisis, leading to reevaluation of the underpinnings of their lives. But still Indian culture and thought carry some beneficial elements to deal with the modern dehumanized existence.

Indian culture's emphasis on the family rather than the individual will also serve as a moderating influence on the individualized existence of the next century. Its sense of self-sufficiency will get it in lesser conflict with its neighbors and world at large. Indians will live less harried lives than their counterparts. Crime and internal group-confrontation will also be lesser.

Having lesser inclination toward science and technology than the western countries, India will continue to be economically outsmarted by them. Not being aggressive enough, it will, from time to time, have conflagrations with its neighbor China.

Twenty-first century will be the age of economic warfare at a scale never seen before. Technology, communication, drive, and aggressiveness will be the weapons of choice used. How will India's national will and identity coalesce to forge the weapons? Ideas of a few people alone will not focus a democratic nation to a goal. It is the national culture and personality that can provide the resonance and the rhythm, the synchrony and the will, to be the high-level competitor in the economic warfare of the twenty-first century.

Unity of India will be sorely tested in the next century. With the Indian population projected to go ahead of China's around 2020, the sheer size of the country will pose a challenge to India's unity and coherence. Here the weak Indian community sense will be a negative. Nowhere in our history, culture, and philosophical ethos do we have a compelling message to remain united and integrated. For a nation to succeed in the twenty-first century its cohesiveness is of paramount importance. Economic frustrations of the youth will from time to time vent out

explosively—violent breakaway from the traditional Indian control and discipline, conformity and compassion.

There will be much copying of the west; but Indians are not good copiers, they will evolve their own hybrid ways. For a good copier one has to be willing to lose one's identity, even if temporarily, which Indian's are strongly inhibited to do so.

Scientific and technological development will be acutely needed in the next century, where conservation of resources, efficiency of the processes, and innovation in design and problem-solving will become the mantras. India's cold scientific personality will show. Science is a way to think; and to change thinking takes time. Also, if you do not desire materialistic success, what are the chances of your acquiring it.

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