

THE MEETING OF THE EAST AND WEST: A VIEW FROM
INDIA

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It is an honor to address this distinguished gathering of faculty and BIARI participants here today. I am deeply impressed by the range of talent, experience, professionalism, advocacy and knowledge that all of you participants in BIARI represent. You are truly the world and speak with an authenticity that is valuable and enriching.

I have chosen as the topic of my talk today a theme that is rather wide in its scope and I shall attempt to interpret it in as intelligible a way as I can. I will of course, be happy to take questions after the talk. The basic question is whether definitions like East and West are really all that absolute in a world where all is being redefined because of the tectonic shifts that surround us. It seems a new geography is being structured, one that must be recognized as the shape of a world that is yet in formation.

As Indians, we balance many identities within ourselves. It is said of us that we speak in many tongues – our home tongue, that is, the first language we learnt to speak from our mothers, then, the street tongue that we learnt when we played ball or other children’s games with our playmates, and finally, the “upstairs” or “parlor” tongue which is, English. So, it can be said justifiably that we draw East and West into our identities – East and West – those “two most famous twins in history”, as Amaury de Riencourt¹ once called them. And East and West as they exist for us, are not an either/or but a part of the many-

¹ Amaury de Riencourt: “The Eye of Shiva: Eastern Consciousness and Western Science”: India International Centre Quarterly, Vol. 12, No. 3 (September 1985), pp.

sidedness of life. Being born in India, brings the gift of seeing human life with many eyes and speaking about it with many tongues. Indian thought as the world well knows, believes that human life is a composite of opposites. Mahatma Gandhi, our founding father, laid stress on India's civilizational treasures of the mind and spirit but also told us not to close our doors and windows to the winds that blew in from the four quarters of the world; he warned us, of course, not to be blown off our feet by these winds.

The West, as Giuseppe Tucci² once said, can be anywhere on our planet, depending on the point we are looking from. Speaking in the same vein, Tucci spoke of the need of writing history from the viewpoint of both East and West, since we live in a world where no event can take place in one part without having consequences or "echoes", or influences on the other. Even if narrow nationalisms rear their head, as they do today in every part of the world, including in Asia, there is no denying the fact that in India, we have learnt a great deal from the West, just as much as we have given of our philosophy, our treasures and the products of our scientific enquiry to those who have come to our shores from very far beyond.

Perhaps part of the ease with which India communicates with the world is the fact that we have adopted English as a foster child, regarding it as part of our linguistic family. And a vast majority of us render English in our own idiom, in

² Cited by A.K. Damodaran: *India and Europe: India International Centre Quarterly*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (December 1985), pp. 357-372. The reference is on p. 370

a stream of present continuous tense, adorning it in our own Indian way. Let me read to you this poem written by the late Indian poet, Nissim Ezekiel; it is called a “Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.”:

*You are all knowing, friends,
What sweetness is in Miss Pushpa,
I don't mean only external sweetness
But internal sweetness,
Miss Pushpa is smiling and smiling
Even for no reason
But simply because she is feeling...³*

This is *Babu Angrezi* as we say in Hindi or Indian English. Here is yet another poem, “Very Indian Poem in Indian English”, by the same poet that uses English the way many Indians who want to speak it, speak, and proclaim their knowledge of it, straight out of an Indian earth:

*I am standing for peace and non-violence.
Why world is fighting, fighting,
Why all people of world
Are not following Mahatma Gandhi,
I am simply not understanding
Ancient Indian wisdom is 100% correct.
I should say even 200% correct.*

³ <http://www.english-for-students.com/Goodbye-Party.html>

*But Modern generation is neglecting—
Too much going for fashion and foreign thing.*⁴

Incidentally, Ezekiel wrote perfectly correct and idiomatic English. Here he was mirroring the way English is spoken in cramped offices and crowded trains, or even the corridors of power, in a genuinely Indian voice. Of course, one must also concede that much in Indian culture and belief is not easily expressed in English. Concepts like dharma and nirvana are not easily translated and there is always a dichotomy that exists between embedded Indian cultural beliefs and life-styles and the Westernization that is implied in use of the English language. As the historian S. Gopal points out⁵, skylarks and daffodils, sceptered isles and country churchyards mean very little to the vast majority of Indians – just visualize this image, he says, from Malcolm Muggeridge of enraged, unemployed graduates chasing the British out of India, “hurling after them curses and copies of the *The Oxford Book of English Verse*.”⁶ Perhaps, this is why as literacy levels in India have gone up substantially in the last decade, the publishing industry especially for newspapers, in Hindi and the regional languages has flourished outpacing English. The content of such publications is by no means local, but wired into global and regional developments thus signifying that the reading masses in the remotest countryside are aware of the world that exists beyond their village or township. Television has of course, made the pace of this change even more frenzied.

⁴ <http://khanindradutta.wordpress.com/2013/11/01/review-of-very-indian-poem-in-indian-english-written-by-nissim-ezekiel/>

⁵ Srinath Raghavan, ed. : “Imperialists, Nationalists, Democrats, The Collected Essays of Sarvepalli Gopal”: “The English Language in India Since Independence” by S. Gopal, Permanent Black, 2013, p.373

⁶ Gopal, op.cit

The two greatest leaders of modern India, Gandhi and Nehru, and the outstanding poetic voice, that of Rabindranath Tagore, owed a considerable deal to their European experience. Let me cite the example here of Nehru's speech at the dawn of India's freedom, our tryst with destiny, that has become a part of anthologies of English writing everywhere. Tagore loved the English language and also learnt German so he could read Goethe and the other great German writers in original. At least a 50 to 100 million Indians speak and write English at varying levels of proficiency and after the United States and Britain, we are the largest producers of books in English, today. And the use of English, definitely fostered the nationalist idea and the quest for freedom in modern India. The precise form such political movements took had of course, a lot to do with indigenous Indian ideas. As one of my very distinguished colleagues in the world of Indian diplomacy, A.K. Damodaran once said, "a certain inclination towards tolerance, a certain receptivity to foreign ideas, a certain willingness to explore alien experiences made the Indo-European interaction over the centuries ultimately rewarding, despite several episodes of cruelty and whole areas of alienation."⁷ East did not clash with West in India, rather they met, mingled, and Indian culture assimilated, absorbed and indeed transformed the Western, even while being transformed itself.

India is like a kaleidoscope and every way you flip this kaleidoscope, the colors and their combinations change spectacularly. Our recently concluded

⁷ A.K. Damodaran, "India and Europe", India International Centre Quarterly, Vol. 12, No. 4 (December 1985). pp 357-372

parliamentary elections have demonstrated not only the solid foundations of Indian democracy in a vast country of over one billion people, but have also shown the world the face of aspirational India, with accelerated levels of social mobility, where there is no mountain high enough that cannot be ascended. India's new Prime Minister, Narendra Modi exemplifies this new face of India, robust, self-confident, seeking modernization without westernization, and a constructive global engagement that serves the country's advancement and progress. This, in my mind also connects to what Vikram Seth stated in an interview when his novel "A Suitable Boy" was published. He told the interviewer that his story would appear much more authentic when translated from English into Hindi because "It is in its Hindi translation that my book will look like its original version"⁸. That is the paradox of India. Even when they speak or write in English, the Indians reflect the historical and political evolution of India. They are not "de-Indianized". And, one may also provocatively ask, "Whose English is it anyway?"⁹ Indian writing in English has however helped its readership in the West to develop a more variegated picture of India than two or three decades ago when the most that Western audiences had read about India was Rudyard Kipling's "Kim" and Katherine Mayo's "Mother India".

Does it not occur to us that very often the West would like to see the East ordained in Western raiment, as the West itself? The West would like to see the East in its own image, gleaming, modern, punctual. Japan and China are seen

⁸ Max Jean Zins: "Whose English is it anyway?" : India International Centre Quarterly, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Spring 1997), pp 19-31

⁹ Max Jean Zins, op.cit

in this light for the most part. Or, there is also, an inclination to etherealize the East, creating the East of the imagination. Very often, images of India acquire an exotic hue in this fashion. On the contrary, India needs to be seen for what it is, one continuing, unbroken civilization, which to use Tagore again, has drunk of the elixir of life.¹⁰ Despite corruption, despite maladministration, despite political mistakes, India is not going to be broken into pieces. She is a wonderful balance of mutual obligations¹¹. Tagore felt that the West was all plan and purpose incarnate and without any superfluous humanity, “that deep delight of hospitality which life offers to life”¹². He felt the contrast between East and West most strongly in early twentieth-century Japan. He was also distressed by the horrors of war in Europe and the passion for power that he saw in the West. Writing soon after the end of the First World War, Tagore describes a visit to the battlefields of France:

“The awful calm of desolation, which still bore the wrinkles of pain – death struggles stiffened into ugly ridges – brought before my mind the vision of a huge demon, which had no shape, no meaning, yet had two arms that could strike and break and tear, a gaping mouth that could devour, and bulging brains that could conspire and plan. It was a purpose, which had a living body, but no complete humanity to temper it. Because it was passion –

¹⁰ “When we find a people with a long and continuous history, we must know that it has found some elixir of life” : “ The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore”; ed. Sisir Kumar Das, Vol.4 , p. 535

¹¹ Tagore, op.cit, p. 537 : “It is this nervous system of the body-politic based on mutual obligation, which makes for its unity. All classes are bound in the East not by contract, but by this inner living bond of unity”.

¹² Tagore, op.cit, 531: talking of Japan, “In that country the old world presents itself with some ideal of perfection, in which man has his varied opportunities of self-revelation in art, in ceremonial, in religious faith, and in customs expressing the poetry of social relationship. There one feels that deep delight of hospitality which life offers to life.”

belonging to life, and yet not having the wholeness of life – it was the most terrible of life's enemies".¹³

The West, in Tagore's mind, had no simple-hearted welcome for man. The West needed to be easternized, as West met East, "a momentous meeting of humanity, in order to be fruitful, must have at its heart some great emotional idea, generous and creative"¹⁴. It had to incorporate the acknowledgement of the East as a collaborator with the West, contributing its riches to civilization's common stock, a joining of hands in comradeship by the two great hemispheres of the human world. Speaking to those who had said that the twain of East and West shall never meet, he utters these words, "the East and the West are ever in search of each other, and..they must meet not merely in the fullness of physical strength, but in the fullness of truth; that the right hand, which wields the sword, has the need of the left, which holds the shield of safety"¹⁵.

Tagore was not trying to create a mystique about India. He was stressing the assimilative outlook, the irreducible diversity that had characterized the civilization of India, which here assumes the garb of "the East". My native state of Kerala, in southern India is an example. It is a state where Hindus, Moslems and Christians have coexisted peacefully for centuries. This tenor of coexistence essentially meant, as the writer, Krishna Chaitanya says, "each leaving the other

¹³ Tagore, op.cit, p. 531

¹⁴ Tagore, op.cit, p. 532 : "The most significant fact of modern days is this, that the West has met the East. Such a momentous meeting of humanity, in order to be fruitful, must have in its heart some great emotional idea, generous and creative".

¹⁵ Tagore, op.cit, p. 536

to come to terms with his God in his own fashion and realizing that difference here in no way militated against close cooperation in activities that ensured the livelihood of all”.¹⁶ Kerala is also the state whose literature is rich with creative writing from all the three main religious communities. Its great twentieth century poet, Vallathol, a Hindu, wrote a narrative poem on Mary Magdalene which is treasured by the Christian community both for its spiritual high notes as well as its sheer beauty. Here the reality of integration exists in the “undeniable verity that the myths of the majority and minority communities have become interchangeable and shared possessions”¹⁷. For instance, the story of the Genesis is integrated with the Hindu myth of the churning of the primeval ocean by the gods and demons. This is true symbiosis.

Kerala is a state that has prided itself on engagement with the outside world, particularly the Indian Ocean world, through the centuries. It is the land of the monsoon, and the monsoon winds brought visitors and trade from the west. It is also where the west was able to see, even in early times, India’s pluralistic dimension. Pepita Seth, an English woman who has made India, and Kerala, her home writes eloquently about this aspect:

“In northern Malabar there is a Theyyam deity, Kshetrapalan, the guardian of temples, who once demolished a semi-ruined shrine and built a mosque to give a growing community of Muslims a place of worship. This, in essence is a sharing of cultures and spaces, even as the other is respected. This fineness shows India’s profoundly pluralistic dimension. It is beyond me to suggest what can be done, political will being what it is. The great hope is that our children can, at an early age, be shown what is common to us all, that with

¹⁶ Krishna Chaitanya: “A lesson in symbiosis – Kerala’s experience; India International Centre Quarterly, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Spring 1988), pp. 69-77

¹⁷ op.cit, p. 74

opened minds they come to recognise that this will give them a share of the wider whole.

As India is railed against for the dreadful things that now too often happen, it can help to recognise that the other side of the coin exists. And that I have been lucky to experience it.”¹⁸

This narrative governed by mutual respect, of a sharing of cultures and spaces, this fineness that shows India’s “profoundly pluralistic dimension” is what we need to valorize, to preserve and to internalize as we chart our future course. India encompasses many parables of human experience that hold lessons for men and women everywhere. That is the power of her example. And that is also what Tagore meant when he said: “I love India, but my India is an idea and not a geographical expression”¹⁹.

India, as Shashi Tharoor says, can only be spoken of in the plural²⁰, it’s map is a map of many migrations. India speaks to both East and West when it demonstrates the fact that labels like Hindu, Moslem, Christian, American or Chinese, are no more than the starting points that Edward Said once referred to. Our long traditions, our languages, the homelands we inhabit, these cultural geographies, all have blurred and indistinct boundaries, interrelated contexts of meaning. Separation and distinctiveness do not define them. Human life is not

¹⁸ Pepita Seth: “Heaven on Earth: The Universe of Kerala’s Guruvayur Temple”: Niyogi Books, 2013

¹⁹ The quotation appears in Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan: “Most Dear to All the Muses”: pp xvii to xxv in “Rabindranath Tagore; A Centenary Volume 1861-1961; Sahitya Akademi, 1961: “Rabindranath loved India because of her ideals. He says: ‘I love India but my India is an idea and not a geographical expression. Therefore I am not a patriot. I shall seek my compatriots all over the world.’

²⁰ Shashi Tharoor: “The singular thing about India..is that you can only speak of it in the plural”; Column in The Hindu, August 19, 2001 The phrase first appears in Tharoor’s “From Midnight to the Millennium”, New York: Arcade Pub. :1997

about such separation, it is about connection, and the realization that there are those strange echoes that inhabit even the most manicured gardens.

Hinduism, the majority religion of India has withstood a history of conquest of its homeland over millennia. Conquerors came, went, some stayed to rule and dominate, but the religion and its followers stayed within themselves, as if the Other, signified by the foreigner or non-believer, could do nothing to encroach upon this ringed consciousness of being Hindu. Islam for instance, remained the “other” in the Hindu perspective, although it became “Indianized” over the centuries. That the West could not, or did not, do. The advent of Western colonialism in India stirred this native consciousness as nothing had done, before. Reconciling the contradictory images of Europe or, the West – one which was the bearer of rational thought, ideas of justice and equality and the other, the face of arrogance, passionate acquisitiveness and power – was near impossible. At the same time, European images of India were basically of its rich civilizational “past” and its impoverished present, of bones bleaching the northern plains as Marx famously said. In the heyday of empire, the Englishman in India remained insecure and ever conscious of his foreign-ness – as anyone who has read E.M. Forster in his “Passage to India” would affirm.

Was this a clash of civilizations? With the advent of English education, and what came to be known as the Bengal Renaissance when many young men in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Bengal took avidly to studying Western thought and ideas, the feeling that the culture of India was backward and riven with old superstitious beliefs among young upper class Indians became more and more evident. The very concept of the Indian “self” became

colonized. For the first time, Indian consciousness was lacerated, it became keenly self-conscious as it had never been before. Minds had been cleaved that had for centuries remained impervious and insulated from the world. Out of these depths, a consciousness of being Indian grew towards the latter half of the nineteenth century. Personalities like Gandhi, Nehru and Tagore, were able to bridge East and West in their lives, while cultivating a distinctly Indian identity. Gandhi drew inspiration from Thoreau and Tolstoy, and was equally immersed in the philosophic ideals of the traditional religious poets and preachers of rural Gujarat, weaving both strands of influences in his life and work in a manner that was magnetic and resoundingly powerful. His was a combination of modernity grounded in indigenous tradition, eschewing the individualism of the west, but stressing one's conscience and not religious faith alone as the ultimate arbiter between good and evil. His approach was to create that space where both East and West could speak to each other.

One of the characteristics that set India apart are the connections of human life with the non-human world or, the universe that surrounds us, which have never been lost. These mythical sources of culture have been kept alive through the ages even when the West thought that India's civilization was past and not present. To quote the scholar Nirmal Verma, "India has often been called a 'sleeping civilization' by the historically awakened European nations, but of her sleep those dreams are born which have kept it in touch with the voices of the dark wood and the bright and moving script of the stars"²¹. The form and pattern of questioning in each civilization is based on the traditions native to it,

²¹ Nirmal Verma: "India and Europe: The Self and the Other": India International Centre Quarterly, Vol. 20, No. 1 / 2, PERCEIVING INDIA: INSIGHT AND INQUIRY (Spring-Summer 1993), pp. 137-164

but the Indian answer to the question “Who am I” which is “I am that” or Tat Tvam Asi, signifying a oneness with all creation, has a resonance even in the West, because it speaks to the innermost recesses of our lives as planetary beings. Thus it is that the West and the East can seek some form of completion in one another, creating a common space. This is a dimension that supersedes Orientalism which Said called that ontological and epistemological distinction, that “imaginative geography” between the Orient and the Occident.

Let me turn the telescope eastwards now, where India becomes the West. This is the ancient world of the Silk Road, and the spread of religious and metaphysical ideas from India through the desert kingdoms of the Gobi and the Taklamakan to China and beyond. In Chinese history, India becomes the Middle Kingdom (the word that is used for China in our common knowledge) or the Sanskrit *Madhyadesa* of the Buddhist chronicles. In Chinese tradition, India is the Heaven in the West from where the teachings of the Buddha came. It is through the writings of the ancient Chinese travellers like Fa Xian and Xuan Zang that we learn of the India of those ancient times, of Indian cities, of universities like Nalanda and of the courts of philosopher kings. Thus, geography becomes omni-directional – East is not always East nor West always West. They can each become the other.

Traditionally, East and West have come together in Asia, because of the traffic of ideas over the centuries, the peaceful absorption of different religions without proselytization – at least until the advent of the colonial era –and trade in a common economic space. This balanced equilibrium was enhanced by the concept of spiritual unity. One has only to visit the caves of Ajanta in western

India or see the murals of Dunhuang in China to see the capturing through the eye of the artist of this vision of unity – for instance, their depiction of various nationalities thronging royal processions or, expressing their grief before a dying Buddha. In the 8th century, an Indian astronomer, Gautama, was named the President of the Board of Astronomy of China.

It is also the concept of non-interference that is particularly Asian in connotation and application. Just as the concept of sovereignty is Westphalian and western, the non-interference principle is directly correlated to the spiritual and philosophical precepts, the civilizational values, of the Asian world. It became enshrined in the doctrine of Panchasheela or the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence jointly declared by India and China in 1954. The ancient, therefore, need not be antiquated as the application of these principles in the foreign policy of many Asian countries would demonstrate. The Panchasheela was in many ways, the progenitor of the non-aligned movement whose priorities and concerns are very much misunderstood in the West, and particularly in the United States, to this day. While the principles of sovereignty and the structure of the nation-state predominate in international relations, perhaps we have foregone the creative spaces where civilizations meet because we are obsessed with essentially western notions of center and periphery, mainland and margins, and the use of force in their defense.²²

In the ambit of international affairs today, the separation of East and West does not really apply. We all know that the problems of nuclear proliferation, of disarmament, terrorism, economic development and financial indebtedness,

²² I have derived this from Dr. Patricia Uberoi of the Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi.

inequality and gender discrimination, and flows of trade in goods and services are global in terms of the challenges they pose. The Chinese saying which goes: there is me in you, and you in me could apply to the world itself bridging divisions of east and west. The Sanskrit word, “Viswabodh” or, awareness of the whole world also applies here.

When speaking of the technological explosion taking place around us very few focus on the explosion of human consciousness that is taking place, particularly in the developing world. Economic development brings in its wake rising expectations and a heightened consciousness of identities. In the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America while people want access to the modern world of science, technology and economics, they are also re-discovering the strength of their own cultural and moral heritages. In the words of Kishore Mahbubani of Singapore, “The paradox that the West hasn’t grasped yet is that you have modernization and de-Westernization taking place at the same time.”²³ In Asia, particularly, there is a sense that “I’ve had the Western veneer covering my mind, now I can peel it off. Now I can be myself. I may speak English fluently, but I have a different soul”.²⁴ The revival as an Asian project under the East Asia Summit, of old civilizational centres like India’s Nalanda University which flourished in the Buddhist era and was destroyed by conquering Mohammedan armies in the 12th century, is a manifestation of this.

In fact, as Mahbubani also notes, the Indian capacity for engaging other cultures and civilizations may well define India’s role in the relations between

²³ Kishore Mahbubani in Conversation with Nathen Gardels: “Peeling Away the Western Veneer”, *New Perspectives Quarterly*, Spring 2008: pp 7-13

²⁴ Mahbubani, op.cit

East and West – that India could convince leading minds in the West that they cannot see themselves as safe guardians and custodians of one leading civilization, the Western civilization, but as guardians and custodians, collectively with the East, of a human civilization. There is in fact, a “cosmopolitan, global personality”²⁵ emerging where Bollywood music can be played and enacted hilariously on *The Simpsons* or be a hit at western discotheques or, Punjabi Bhangra music can be played at Chinese functions in Singapore.

It is this enormous renaissance in the developing world that also justifiably seeks a re-ordering of the structure of global power and authority. The membership of the United Nations Security Council, and distribution of powers within the governing bodies of the World Bank and the IMF all point to an anachronistic global order in which the West wishes to remain custodian and arbiter of the world’s destiny despite the fact that new power alignments, to use a phrase from George Soros, have emerged in recent years. This is an arc of skewed advantage that must be re-aligned if true inter-regional equilibrium is to be realized.

The term “westernization” is not easily embraced in the world outside the west today. “Modernization” is a much more accepted word. By modernization is implied well-planned urban settlements, state-of-art infrastructure, 21st century levels of connectivity, educational institutions of excellence, access to the latest technologies, the empowerment of women and marginalized sections of society – but not the loss of life cycle-related cultural and religious practices, local

²⁵ Mahbubani, op.cit

languages, traditional and practical knowledge and family values on which emotional strength is predicated. All this spells the need for the arrival of a new world, pan human civilizational order and the creation of the cultural premises that will nurture and uphold it.

Lourdes Arizpe²⁶ spoke many years ago about the need to build a collective international development plan for the future, a universal code of meaning that will bind human societies together. Such an order respects the value of cultural diversity, of local knowledge systems, and the preservation of fast disappearing traditions that are the markers of age-old civilizations. New technologies from the developed world need to be adapted, remixed, reinterpreted and adjusted to the needs of those in the developing world. And, in this Age of Galloping Patents as Arizpe calls it, we must ensure that the continuing outflow of autochthonous knowledge and techniques from the developing world – a process that has gone on since the sixteenth century – ensures genuine benefit for its originators.

In the conduct of affairs governing India's relations with the world, it is obvious that India is zealous about preserving her independence of action, that she is concerned that the global system is unequal. Some Western notions of internationalism like conditionalities on development aid and "responsibility to protect" as well as the unwillingness to wholeheartedly accept the concept of "common but differentiated responsibilities" in areas like climate change, the role of multinational pharmaceutical majors in the mounting challenges involved in delivery of affordable health care and medicines to millions of those

²⁶ Lourdes Arizpe: "Politics of culture as an issue for survival": *India International Quarterly*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Monsoon 1988), pp. 69-74

living in poverty are all sticking points. At the same time, Western definitions of freedom, liberty, democracy, human rights, free enterprise are not seen as alien to Indian sensibilities and every Indian will also tell you that concepts of inclusiveness, democratic debate, freedom of religious practice had been successfully internalized in India for centuries, with rulers like Ashoka and Akbar being exemplars of such traditions.

Our freedom struggle and the memories of imperialist and colonial domination generate a natural ambivalence in India about dealings with the West. Challenging the giants, particularly the United States has a popular resonance that plays well to public opinion. However, there is no such ambivalence about “imitating western skills in the material domain”²⁷ as the scholar Partha Chatterjee puts it. But the opinion of leftist groups that the Western World Order is no different from the hegemony of eras gone by and only serves western interests still holds powerful sway. As India’s weight in the global economy and global politics grows, it is my assessment that while she will stand powerfully for democratic values, international economic and trading standards and fundamental freedoms, she will increasingly assert a non-Western identity on the basis of her self image as a pluralistic society, built on diversity, her civilizational and cultural core, and a preference for multipolarity rather than the dominance of one or two great powers. In this, she will be expressing her own national personality as an area of the world that has overriding historical memories of dealing with domination, conquest, and a resultant depletion of strength and vitality. It follows thus that drawing from the traditions of her

²⁷ Partha Chatterjee: “The Nation and its Fragments”, 1993, p.6 quoted in Amartya Sen: “The Argumentative Indian”, p. 156

national movement, she will spiritedly defend her prerogative to take independent decisions on economic, defense and foreign policy matters. To this end, and as the world's largest democracy occupying an enormously strategic position in Asia, she will seek greater representation in the councils of global power.

All this does not exclude areas of convergence with the West. India's encounter with the West has been too much a part of her being over millennia to be forgotten or set aside. She sees no civilizational clash here, rather she believes that there is need for a creative global commons, a space where interests and concerns of a humanistic nature are defined. In the ultimate sense, India is the East that the West should see as the mirror of the world's future, as a repository of the world's history, and a compelling interpreter of the interests of that exploding human consciousness we are witnessing in the world of the 21st century.

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