

# CURRENT SCIENCE

Vol. XI]

JUNE 1942

[No. 6

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## THE IDEA OF PROGRESS: EASTERN AND WESTERN

THE Western concept of progress needs to be modified at an essential point if it should not be extravagant and therefore misleading. Progress, if taken as implying continuous, uniform and illimitable improvement in our conditions of living, is nothing more than pleasant fancy-play. As improvements do certainly take place in some parts of our life and environment in consequence of the free functioning of man's will and intelligence, impairments too do as certainly set in in other parts. Seeds of the latter are as much a part of our nature as seeds of the former.

..... Progress is  
The law of life; man is not Man as yet.  
..... Progress, man's distinctive mark alone,  
Not God's and not the beasts'; God is,  
they are,  
Man partly is and wholly hopes to be.

—BROWNING

Progress or improvement may relate to either or both of two totally different things:

to man's outward state and circumstance and to man himself. Not only material conditions and social environment,—wealth or poverty, health or sickness, education or ignorance, freedom or slavery, justice or inequity,—but also intellectual and æsthetic conditions must be counted as pertaining to the exterior. What makes the man himself are the postures and proclivities of his soul,—how it looks upon the objects of the senses, how it yields to or resists temptation, how it reacts to defeat or victory, how it regards life-entities other than itself.

It is true that the subjective and the objective in us are closely interrelated and modify each other. But the question is—which of the two predominates. The Vedanta postulates a degree of freedom of judgment and of action for the human individual—a degree that has within itself the potency for further growth. If man uses his freedom of choice properly, his soul's emancipation

is merely a matter of time. Progress in the subjective sense is the soul's ability to control its own impulses and bring into mutual harmony the stimuli offered by the objective world and its own reactions thereto. In this sense, the progress of the world has not kept pace with the advances which science has made possible to it in realms of external existence. In the weighing and valuing of the paraphernalia of life, instead of the soul forming the fulcrum of the balance, it has become a neglected quantity in the modern world. The reason for this may partly be in that religions, which are particularly concerned about the soul, are not unanimous among themselves in their intimations and are confusing in the variety of their counsel; and further in that they have not been able to withstand the onslaughts of science. Partly it may be in that science, which began the offensive upon religion, has itself not been able to find anything positive to offer as a substitute for bringing those ministrations to man which formed the office of religion. And the new paraphernalia designed and perfected by science are so alluring and so gratifying to the bodily senses as to expel from the mind all thought of the soul. But the soul persists and is real. It is the only thing really real. Its ignoring has led to an erroneous sense of values; and in the train of that error have followed illusion and tragedy. The true foundation of the new world-order must therefore be laid in the souls of men. It is right souls that make a right world. If our effort to establish a new world-order of peace and freedom should be more successful than previous attempts in the same direction, our first business it should be to restore the

soul to its sovereign place in the scheme of life. The mission of the Vedanta is to see to this.

Progress, in the sense that the conscious, conscientious and all-sided pursuit of improvement in our conditions is a duty, is undoubtedly a rational and inspiring ideal. But to assume that improvement is bound to follow uninterruptedly and without limit so as to convert our very earth on some near enough day into the Paradise celebrated by poets and prophets is to feed our minds on a false hope and to ensure ourselves endless disappointment. There is always bound to be disparity between ideal and achievement in a field where there is greater uncertainty in the material and in the instrument than in the design. Man's powers have seldom proved sufficient for man's purposes. Purposes are fashioned inside the mind and the heart; achievement depends upon external factors; and the best directed effort is often suddenly interrupted by a snag that was not till then suspected. Such is the illimitable complexity and incalculability of the forces of human nature. There is an ancient dualism in human nature—the egoistic and the bad placed in intimate association with the altruistic and the good. Man's true progress is in shedding the first and transcending the second and finally reaching a tertiary state in which there is no consciousness of either "I-ness" or "other-ness" and therefore no question of resisting either the good or the bad,—but there is only the "Oneness of All" realized in one's consciousness, and in which as a result the qualities we call goodness and kindness proceed from one spontaneously and without effort, like the breath in one's nostrils. But

this tertiary condition is only for individuals, and individuals of highly evolved natures. When that is reached, the goal of progress is reached. In other words, there is a finality practicable to the moral and spiritual progress of the individual man,—a stage of perfection when there is no more need for striving, no more seeking, no more want, no more toil. Such a man acts his part in the cosmic scheme as though it were a vast complicated play and he an appointed actor in it, and is never pained or excited at heart. To him only is there a place of rest at the end of progress. To all others, progress is a perpetual process of yearning and struggling, achieving partial improvements and suffering partial frustrations. While one set of impulses within us goes on bringing about ameliorations and felicities, another set keeps introducing deteriorations and perversities. Verily, the business of material and social progress is like repairing an ancient fort or mansion. While alterations and renovations go on in one part of the structure, sags and crevices keep on appearing in some other part. We as a race are like an old rheumatic; you may drive out the pain from the knee, it will re-appear in the ankle; you can never completely expel it from the entire body.

The Vedic seers have likened human life to an *Aswattha tree* (the Sacred Peepul, *ficus religiosa*), but an *Aswattha* growing inverted—roots up above and branches down below. The meaning of the symbol is that our life has its origin in high heavens, immortal and beyond any mortal's reach, and that it is only its temporal and spatial manifestations that move about here on earth. The word "*Aswattha*"

means—"not tomorrow as it is today". It is a wonderful tree, ever-changing and yet ever-lasting. The most noteworthy fact about this long-lived tree is the juxtaposition of branches dry and decaying and branches bearing fresh shoots of golden foliage. It is growing old and growing young simultaneously. Onset of age in one part and renewal of youth in another are its normal condition. That is the story of the world's progress as well.

To discard the exaggerated part of a hope is not to abandon all hope. To admit the possibility of some conditions worsening while some others get better is not to suggest either that the idea of progress is a delusion or that human effort at improvement is a futility. Whether crowned with outward success or not, man is inwardly all the better for his effort. His will and intelligence undergo a discipline in the process, and so grows his mastery over himself and his environment. That, at any rate, is a gain, an incidental gain though it be; and a capital gain it is. This, it seems to me, is the meaning of the Gita's teaching of duty without thought of consequence,—of right deed without expectation of reward.

Progress in conditions of outward existence is certainly possible, but not perfection. Perfection is possible only in the realm of the soul, and that only after prolonged effort and evolution. And imperfections in the outward progress are of use as spurs to the inward progress.

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To put the matter categorically, the message of India to the world may be said to comprise broadly three points:

- (1) The recognition of an all-enveloping and all-pervasive Power in whom and through whom all beings are put in relationship with one another; whose workings reveal both cosmos and chaos, both order and caprice; who seems to uphold the law of *Karma* and yet to supplement that law by prerogative dispensations; and to whose providence all human wills and endeavours are subject.
- (2) The freedom and therefore the responsibility of every man to choose and follow that line of conduct which is, rather than that which is not, in accord with his acceptance of his kinship with all living things and which therefore is in harmony with universal life. This is *Dharma*, and it implies the duty of striving to uphold justice and goodwill and to effect improvements in conditions of existence.
- (3) The moderating of one's desire for material possession and sense-gratification by a constant remembrance of the naturalness of similar desires in others and of the limitedness of nature's resources within man's command as well as of the defects and perversities of human nature and, withal, of the comparative ephemerality of the things of the earth.

in renouncing the narrow separatist self and cultivating that larger self which sees its counterparts in the universe around—that is the spirit of the Vedanta. Is there not need for its infusion into relations between class and class and country and country today? Indeed, without a general acceptance of that spirit, world-reconstruction can never proceed smoothly, and the world can never come to find peace. More than any nice apportionment of the world's goods among countries and classes, more than any delicate contrivance of governance, more than the limitation of armaments and more than international pacts and treaties is the spirit in which men look upon life and its relationships. Have they persuaded themselves that life is a thing sacred and precious, lovingly and carefully to be treated? Have they come to see that promoting life for all is better than increasing life's paraphernalia for some at the expense of others? Have they learnt to prize peace above possession and justice above glory? If they have, the New World-Order of which we dream today will surely be a fact some day. But if the world will not learn the lesson, our escape can be only from one kind of chaos into another.

The characteristic difference between the Indian and the European, or the Oriental and the Occidental, as regards their attitudes towards life's problems and tasks is to be seen in how they habitually react to defeat and disappointment. Aspiration is common to both, and so is striving. Both alike plan for the right and the good, and both struggle for it with the best of their skill and strength. But when, for all that best, failure and frustration confront them, the Oriental's first thought is of an invisible

Practising oneness with all life, judging of right and wrong in the light of that vision of Oneness, and shaping one's relations with the world in consonance with that scale of values, restraining selfish ambition and standing up for righteousness regardless of consequence,—in one word, finding joy

Judge who dispenses all things from above and whose scale of values and calendar of events may not coincide with his (the man's) own; whereas the Occidental's mind turns at once to find in the world around some one responsible for the mis-carrying of his plan and to deal with him suitably in the expectation that when that source of trouble is set right, the rest of the path will be smooth and easy. The Oriental does not lose his peace and balance of soul; he declines to take the defeat of the moment as the final outcome of his effort and will wait on in hope, not swerving from the good path and continuing to trust himself to the working of the higher Power. The Occidental on the other hand is thrown off his balance by impatience,—well-meant impatience though it be,—lets himself be moved to some desperate action against some one or something in the established order and insists on either mending things according to his own scheme or ending himself. Quietism comes sooner to the first, violence sooner to the second. The difference between the two is made by the part assigned by them respectively to the Super-human in human affairs. The Hindu believes that man can never be self-sufficient and must learn to reckon with something outside of himself and his world. The European thinks that human instruments must suffice for human purposes, and if they ever fail, the fault must be looked for in the method of attack, not outside the world. The Hindu takes it as established that a certain modicum of suffering will remain to be borne here on earth, even after the very best that human intelligence and energy could achieve has been achieved. The European refuses to put up with any

kind or degree of suffering as irremediable and would go on vexing himself and vexing others in his quest of a remedy.

Pushed beyond a point, both the views must prove equally pernicious, the first leading to passivity, the second to fretfulness of spirit. In a moment of tiredness of body or dimness of mind, one might easily persuade oneself that one's very best has all been done and finished, and cease further exertion in the name of submission to the will of God. There is always the possibility of one's mistaking sluggishness of intellect or of conscience for the exhaustion of one's vital sap or for the adverseness of fate, and attaching to cowardly or indolent shirking the pious label of resignation. On the other hand, there is equally the danger of one's trying to overreach oneself, forgetting that after all there is a limit to human energy and resource, and wasting oneself in a perpetual whirl of impassioned activity that can bring no peace or satisfaction either to oneself or to those among whom it is carried on. The first kind of error or delusion brings on faint-heartedness, fatalism, stagnation; the second is the road to fidgetiness of soul, to turmoil, to anarchy. Neither can mean progress.

But the two views, when not pushed to extremes, are not antithetical; and it is the task of wisdom to make a synthesis of them. Search for improvement fortified by preparedness not to chafe under such failure as may come inevitably, strive to reform society without breaking its foundations and tearing its decalogue to pieces, work with zeal and yet be resigned as to the result—such is the synthesis to be reached. Resignation should co-exist with activity. It is not after the feeling of self-

exhaustion comes that one should invoke the spirit of resignation; for, as already observed, one can never be sure when that feeling in one is well-founded and when not. Whether one is full of energy and enthusiasm or is feeling weak and hopeless, the need for submission to the Invisible Judge is always there; and equally, for the same reason, namely—that one can never be sure of the correctness of one's own self-analysis, the need for incessant exertion also is always there. "Toil unsevered from tranquillity"—that should be the motto.

One lesson, Nature, let me learn of thee,  
One lesson which in every wind is blown;  
One lesson of two duties kept at one  
Though the loud world proclaim their  
enmity—

Of toil unsevered from tranquillity!  
Of labour, that in lasting fruit outgrows  
Far noisier schemes, accomplished in repose,  
Too great for haste, too high for rivalry!

A national culture produces some distinctive intellectual or moral ethos—a faculty, a habit of mind, an ideal—which is of value to other nations. The product, if accepted, will gradually become absorbed into their life-processes and after a time

lose its distinctiveness. It will afterwards be one among the various strands of international life and so a part of the world's possession. It is no longer either only oriental or only occidental; it is both, indeed universal. That great minds, being trans-national and universal, are able instinctively to reach a synthesis of the dominant notes of the East and the West is shown by the lines of Matthew Arnold above quoted.

Man's conquest, if it can be full and unqualified anywhere at all, can be so only in the inner world, over his own nature,—not in the outer world, not over cosmic nature. In the outer world, his triumphs can only be partial and qualified, because of the intractability of other factors which are partners with him there. Complete triumph and the joy thereof can come to him, even though after ages of preparation and ordeal and self-purification, only in the inward realm, the realm of the spirit.

[From an address delivered by Mr. D. V. Gundappa to the Joint Easter Session of Science Associations in Bangalore on the 4th April 1942.]

## DEVELOPMENT OF INDUSTRIES IN INDIA

ALMOST any article can be manufactured in this country. What the country needs is a proper industrial structure and organisation backed by the Government and by the joint strength of the leaders of industry and trade or at least by one of these agencies. At the end of this war, it should probably be necessary to launch industrial schemes involving an outlay of, say, Rs. 1,000 crores or more on a five-year plan. This sum is not large, considering the vast resources of this country and the enormous size of its population.

"At the end of the war, we must plan to make our own industrial machinery with

the help of machine tools freed from munition manufacture both in this country and abroad. At the end of hostilities, the belligerent nations will have considerable replacements to make for their own needs, and they will not be able to spare for us industrial machinery and shipping space to the extent that we will require. At present we should push on with the extension of machine tool-making in India."

—SIR M. VISVESVARAYA.

[From an address delivered before the first meeting of the Central Committee of the All-India Manufacturers' Organisation, Bombay.]