

## The European Mind and the Indian Intellectual

- *Kishen Pattnayak*

The European mind is fizzling out. Bernard Shaw was the last western spirit that burned with faith and aimed at the edification of mankind. Now that Albert Einstein is no more, it seems unlikely that, for long years to come, a Westerner will arise who will make any really great discovery in science or philosophy. Europe is, however, not completely drained out. In the fields of psychology and biology perhaps it is still capable of enriching mankind. These two sciences specially, because, I am sure, Europe is now introvert and morbidly self-conscious. This has most typically been exhibited in the novel of recent times. Take James Joyce, Virginia Wolf, Christopher Isherwood, Proust or Franz Kafka. Europe is no more in a mood to attack except with arms. Like the stream-conscious novel, it is in pieces.

The two subjects that have assumed universal significance today, and every present and would-be citizen of the world must understand and try to promote, are sex and politics. Both have reached exploding point and threaten to tear asunder their age-old forms. Around the two new points of departure, a new civilization will be woven. Sex will be liberated from religion's fetters and politics from the chains of private property.

The modern man is the double victim of ill-regulated sex and unmanageable politics. But Europe, which till now was the torch-bearer of civilization has suddenly been stripped naked and exposed. It has admitted that it can no longer address us in terms of creative and prophetic politics. Has not Europe admitted this? If anybody had doubts let him repeat this question

thrice and then pause and hearken. Is it the blaze of the fire-brand of faith or the last glitter of warm ash? Is it typified by Eden's internationalism or Guy Mollet's socialism? Europe detests communism today and Europe today is grotesquely right in its detestation. But its socialism is at best a whimper and its capitalism a beggar. And it has long since stopped talking of anarchism.

Bernard Shaw was the West's last fire-brand of faith. But he skipped over at least one phase of mankind's history, more so towards the end of his life. He was a brilliant prophet of the Superman, but the hurdle was Man, fettered miserably by anachronistic institutions of marriage and property. 'With changes in the institutions of marriage and property, Let us hurry up', he said. We can't tarry. His impatience was noble. But it was almost desperate. His inconsistencies, which in other spheres would have been symptomatic of a perate. His inconsistencies, which in other spheres would have been symptomatic of a comprehensive understanding, were dryly mystic and annoyingly absurd in politics. It seems to me that it was in his voice that the first note of defeat was sounded. The defeat of the Western mind.

Since then, Western mind, the most cultured mind albeit, has excelled in songs of frustration, stories of cynicism and novels of morbid self-consciousness. Its philosophy has been mostly analytical and feebly constructive. If you take up the work of any modern European optimist you will find an ocean of analysis with some sand-houses of wishful construction on a shore that can be washed away any moment by one splash

of the ocean's wave. Particularly, I have Bertrand Russell in mind when I say this. I think if the West has any philosopher today it is Bertrand Russell. He is purely analytical. All his books are an endless track of analysis, witty but wasted, useful but not fruitful. With him you go round and round. Like the Hindu woman, around the temple of the human soul but can never touch the deity. His analyses are perhaps helpful, but not inspiring and at times pathetic. He also pretends to hope. But when he hopes, it becomes an utopia with a vagabond's wage. We are not actuated, only glad. His fears are more sanguine and to us are really dreadful. His books on mathematics, conquest of happiness and those of a technical nature seem to be more useful than his essays on social philosophy. That the Western philosopher today is a disintegrated mind was again evident very recently when the celebrated Earl Russell, waxing in his praise of American policy in Egypt, said that the Atlantic military pact and Anglo-American friendship were the vital need of the present age. The thoughtful Westerner today strains to clutch at any straw. But the world-situation needs greater probing, bolder vision and a more detached point of view. Detached, of course, from geographical prejudices.

Or take the case of Toynbee and T.S. Eliot. The study of history was never so prolific as in Europe of today. Verily the western mind at present has excelled in morbidity and analysis. The finest prose and finest poetry of modern occidental literature have arisen out of analysis of failure or the mood of frustration. The haunting melody of T.S. Eliot's earlier poems of despair is not found in his later works of hope. The choruses in his poetic dramas are long and winding and the song dies before the end of the refrain. Perhaps T.S. Eliot is the most symptomatic, in this respect, of the fact that the Western genius has run up a blind alley. It cannot

look ahead. It can only as a ray of hope look back at the values of yesterday. T.S. Eliot is not alone in supposing that the Western genius has run up a blind alley. It cannot look ahead. It can only as a ray of hope look back at the values of yesterday. T.S. Eliot is not alone in supposing that Christianity will save man. He is only the most vocal representative of those who think in this manner. Europe forgets that it has out-grown Christianity which it never fully imbibed. The West's standard of living' and 'scientific attitude' are more abiding contributions than its Christianity. But it has achieved the standard of living at the cost of world inequality and its scientific attitude has deprived man of mental equilibrium.

No doubt, socialism was first conceived by the Western mind as a conscientious reaction to its own sins, but the Western spirit is neither serious about nor capable of implementing its vital aspects. The gains made from capitalism were so overwhelming that its mind is still steeped in its forms and attitudes. Even when the soul decays the body is so glamorous that the awareness of the need of radical change is always obstructed and, therefore, halting.

If the European mind has waned, has the Asian or African mind awakened? The Asian intellectual is by training a slave to the European outlook. He must always wait for the Westerner's appreciation before even praising an oriental work of art, literature or philosophy. The European mind and outlook are not confined to Europe but pervade the educated layers of all colonial lands. The Indian intellectual hesitated to acknowledge Gandhi's greatness till the British rulers yielded to his voice. It requires a great effort of courage on the part of any Indian or Asian writer to declare that the Asian mind has already shown better promise where the European mind has met with a blind alley.

"I think Sri...s writings are as original as Bertrand Russell's or Laski's", said an Indian student and looked round at the faces of his audience with a feeling of growing uneasiness as if he had said something silly. That is how the Asian mind has sold its judgement to the European for a necktie and a dgree.

There is a challenging truth in Rammanohar Lohia's statement that the two momentous phenomena of our age are Gandhi and the Atom-bomb. The west is taking Gandhi by doses. The two Westerners who appreciated his moral worth during his life-time were his own equals and though products of the European process, were really more than Europeans. To second-grade thinkers like Betrand Russell and H.G. Wells, Gandhi was wrapped in mysticism and appeared of the same genus as oriental witchery. To them Gandhism was in its concrete implication reduced to cottage industry. But cottage industry was the most incidental and least prophetic element of Gandhi's teaching. The more abiding and essential elements, such as non-violence, truth and decentralisation are forgotten, sometimes not comprehended by the intelluctual trained in Western attitude. The Indian Intellectual who has not deliberately tried to shake off the slavery imbibed through his education feels very much in tune with Nehru. But Gandhi eludes him still. He too reduces Gandhism to cottage industry, while the Indian Prime Minister who heads the Indian intellectuals and is their doyen, has reduced non-violence to international brokery outside and police-firing inside the country. It would, therefore be silly for me to say that Indians in general, as contrasted with Europeans, have developed a new outlook heralding a new age. I only talk of potentialities. Out of a decadent community a new light ariseth. This arises from that section which is most painfully conscious of its sufferings and

discovers that its malaise can be removed y a total change in the community.

It is the lower-middle class mind that discovered the need of socialism in a capitalistic society. The proletariat is the most suffering class and the real instrument of social transformation in a capitalistic society. But it is so deprived of culture and education that it is not itself conscious of the pangs but needs to be 'awakened'! In today's world-arrangement Asia is the lower-middle calss and Africa is the proletariat. The Asian lands had an ancient background of culture and recently as colonies they had the advantage of modern culture too. That is why, I believe, the Asian mind is the source from which the concepts of the new civilization will emerge. But its carriers will be the 'real' black nations (not the pseudo black Indians!). The body of the proletariat is unspoilt though under-fed, unlike the malfed and disfigured body of the petty-bourgeois intellectual. Its mind has no large legacy, but is fresh, though not ambitious or far-reaching. A parellel may again be drawn. The ex-colonials have the best and most potential mind of the living-world, but the body is corrupt. The one-sided and spiritually oriented ancient culture of India has made its mind criminally callous towards diet and physical weakness. The slavery of one-and-a-half centuries had dampened all its match-sticks of initiative. I doubt, whatever the potential of the Indian 'mind', if it can also be the carrier of the new civilization.

Whether or not there is going to be catastrophe (Toynbee perhaps has written about catastrophes), the new civilization will be most adequately carried in the hearts and lands of the Africans.

The future civilization, I believe, will not be a civilisation of fire works. It will be a civilization of the average man. The Negro is the best fitted personality for such a culture. I also imagine that

the dominant fine-arts of the new age will be music as painting is of the modern. Out of the age of music a new generation will be which we can call a society of more-than-average men.

That the Asian mind has already fired its first shot is evident from the gradual realisation in all parts of the world of the significance of Gandhi's ideas. Had not the Indian government been a betrayer, the signs of such realisation would have been more positive. But if the Congress government of India disregarded Gandhi it has its historically brighter side. The crisis in the world mind (=the colonial mind = the Indian mind) deepened and got a chance blossoming fully and comprehensively. It is not purely wishful to say that new signs of thought and action such as are evident in the writings of Rammanohar Lohia or the ideology of the Socialist Party could not have matured to a prophetic status, Had Nehru been adequate and the traditionally-set socialist movement of India not received a shock. In that case, the impact and the ferment would have occurred somewhere else.

INTELLECTUALS are a class of secondaries. I divide the makers of an age into its prophets, intellectuals (and artists) and engineers. If intellectuals all the world over today are either in despair or serving the cause of worn out ideas, the fault is not wholly theirs. It is the role of the prophet to give the 'word'; it is the role of the intellectuals and artists to enlarge and amplify the word; and the role of the engineers is to carry out the word in practice. These groups, of course, inevitably overlap and should intermix. The great defect of the modern intellectual is that he feels without a prophet. Thus far his deficiency can be traced to objective sources. But this is no excuse for his becoming inert, corrupt and servile to governments.

The plight of the Indian intellectual is even worse. Not only does he want a prophet, but his prophet must essentially be of the white race. Nothing Asian or African will do for him. It is too much for him to believe that a black man can also break new ground in the realm of ideas. The most that he will grudgingly grant to the capacity of a black man is the elaboration and adaptation of ideas inherited from the rulers of the age. In fine, he mistrusts his own genius.

Pinch an Indian intellectual at a sensitive spot on his skin and he will come to his senses and momentarily realise that all round him is a world of make-believe. But he is so bankrupt mentally that he dare not run away from the crowd lest he be discomfited by suspicious attention. When Lohia speaks or the Socialist party acts, a mysterious current goes round his mind. "This sounds right and true...but can it be possible... surely it is a risk!" Many may be the reasons for wishfully believing in what a glamorous Prime Minister says or selling their wares to the only party in the country that is ready to pay a reasonable price to the intellectuals. But the mind is dying in the process. I am sometimes caught with a fear that Indian writers may not be able to respond to the challenge of '**Mankind**'. The pages of the latter may grow thinner in the absence of forthright and genuinely thought contributions from the Indian mind. But this is a both-way traffic. '**Mankind**' may actuate them and they may fulfil its mission and widen its current. We are anxiously waiting to see, how many will break away; how many have the heart to be moved by the prophetic flute. New vistas of civilization are opening. New tools of thought and new modes of action are on the anvil already. We can only titillate the intellectuals and artists by saying; 'O Intellectual, you are a poor creature if you are not bold, and dare not take the risk.'