

# Reactions to the Indian Academic Social Scene by James B. Klee

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Let us acknowledge at the outset that we are hardly in a position to make accurate predictions about the ultimate success of student personnel services in Indian Universities. We have been visiting in India for the brief span of nine months and we can, therefore, only describe what we saw - with perhaps some comment on the general outlook as it appeared to us.

We found the range of activity in the area of student personnel work to vary as greatly in India as it does in the United States - that is, from almost ideally complete in Baroda University to total unawareness of or indifference to student welfare elsewhere. Yet the mean or average in India is considerably below that of the United States. That this in part is a matter of timing is obvious. Student personnel services in the U.S.A. have grown to what they are almost wholly in the years following World War I. They have just begun to grow here and the pace of change may be more rapid than we have been led to expect from our brief encounter here. Ambassador Chester Bowles has pointed out that India has a way of growing most unexpectedly.

It is common to speak of East and West, and spirituality vs. materialism to account for the differences between these two. But there are other factors too - for example, the contrast Marston Bates makes between North and South in his book *Where Winter Never Comes*. India is after all essentially a tropical country. The Western European countries and the U.S. are temperate. Bates has pointed out the fact that in temperate climates there are *many* individuals of a *few* species whereas in tropical climates there are *many* species with *few* numbers of each. Although this is an observation based on subhuman zoology and botany, when these ideal types are applied to human culture in conjunction with Toynbee's terms of *challenge* and *response* it has interesting implications. The challenges posed by the relatively uniform natural surroundings of the temperate West would be both different from and fewer than those in the tropical East. But even more important than this, in the West

more individuals would share each of the few variations to be found. Thus there would be a larger *agreement* concerning what the social and cultural problems are that they face.

The temperate West continually tries to assert a dominant theme of uniformity via only one God, only one nation. Due, however, to an undercurrent of heterogeneity, gods and nations are in relentless competitive conflict with each other. Even democracy is defined in terms of majority rule. In contrast, India has an enormous variety of problems faced by an enormous variety of peoples. Its gods are varied. Its multiplicity of castes must seem doubly natural not only on account of the intricate customs, but also due to "nature" itself. The West expects uniformity and is almost shocked by variety. Only by hard-won law does it ever manifest its needed variations. Minorities have at best an uneasy place. "Conformity" and "mass" seem not only currently fashionable epithets but "natural" there, as well. Only the greater Western philosophers seem to rise above this uniformity and appeal for creativity, independence, true democracy. Perhaps that is why the West talks so much about freedom; mostly just talks about it while its true achievement, the mass production of monotonously standardized goods and consumer tastes, lies largely ignored. Everyone shares equally in everything - in politics, in education, in religion. It is basically unthinkable to the Westerner that he does not face the same future in the same way as everyone else.

India is almost the opposite. One is immediately struck by the variety of subtle repetition - each in its own way individual and discreet. Although poverty reduces the scope for individual expression, there is a natural variation. The great philosophers have as their theme the oneness of the all, non-dualism, the essential identity of the endless varieties of Maya, the paradox of the many gods in one. The cultural unity of the Indian subcontinent - despite its enormous variety of languages, castes and cultures, is their work - their great contribution. Still caste differences for the average individual must seem the most natural thing in the world and the separations of individuals by age and rank equally impenetrable. The mutual reinforcement between cultural environment and family pattern would also go to strengthen the family's limiting effects on the individual. And the immediacy of social reinforcement for every act leads to the easy belief in nepotism and corruption even where it is not present. Yet the evidence of its presence would seem ubiquitous. The typical individual's horizon appears narrow in comparison with the Freedom of which the West speaks, as it is meant to be shared only by the few members of family and local caste. But these few persons seem vivaciously real in his expectations.

The breakout from this bind will be the most difficult problem in the next few generations. The cost in anxiety to each individual will be enormous. To learn to trust in others, even strangers, as together they plan toward a shared future is a step that the people of India must take consciously since they will need to do so without the natural reinforcement of a shared discipline. At present we see many problems engendered by the relatively idiosyncratic life horizons of each individual or small group. Let us describe briefly but a few of these problems as they immediately affected us during our brief stay.

Although the great Indian philosophers richly deserve their reputation for spiritual insights, the alleged spiritual superiority of the East quickly disappears from view in the daily encounter. The stranger faces on onslaught of over-charging rickshaw wallas, vegetable and fruit wallas, and the refusal to make or find change on the part of servants, taxi drivers, salespeople, postmen and others. The continuous demand for baksheesh by professional beggars - not to mention the vast number of children and self-declared holy men - impresses one not with the ultimate spiritual meaning of holy wanderers but with a too-immediate materialistic concern. The very presence of innumerable small shrines, temples and idols also suggests a narrow concentration on immediate salvation more personal and material than spiritual. It has been pointed out by Indian writers that the majority of Hindus venerate Shiva, Kali and Durga as symbols or idols of great power over the individual's personal daily welfare primarily because of the restrictive view of life borne by the poverty-ridden masses of villagers and urban proletariat. Few persons feel that they share the creative power of Brahma, few identify themselves primarily with the Whole. A somewhat larger minority venerates Vishnu as the power which maintains and protects what little wealth and position has been allotted to each. The temperate West, on the other hand, is considerably further advanced in the understanding of an expanded allocation of labor and reward through time. The notion of long-term investment can be applied to labor and human energy. It carries with it the strong overtone that a well-planned expenditure today will deliver its returns in the distant future and is a worthwhile confidence to place in one's own abilities and those of others. After all, ritualistic veneration of an idol is paradoxically more materialistic than laboring diligently for the realization of an improved and ensured standard of living in which the whole population participates and from which everyone can benefit. The value of one's daily wage in the fiduciary society literally depends upon the confidence each individual can place in the public zeal, endeavor, and support. Trust in the integrity and creative power of the Whole is essential for the ultimate

value returned to the individual. ("In God We Trust" is printed on most American coins). The attempt to influence directly the "spiritual" powers for one's short-term personal benefit - or even for that of one's loved ones - expressed in the veneration of discreet idols is the most primitive form of materialism in man. It is "spiritual" only in that it does not "work" except as a reassurance for the practitioner. Magic and ritual are the technologies of such primitive materialism. The wish is its immediate father, fear of offending "the powers" its mother and nurse. For people whose living horizon is so seriously foreshortened, the fear of that which lies beyond the vista of family and caste boundaries must be immense and will dissipate but slowly. All psychological research has borne this out. Responses engendered by fear or anxiety are most easily established, need only infrequent reinforcement, and are almost impossible to eliminate. Fortunately, if most ritual does little good it also does little harm. Rituals have become merely the autonomous functional remnants of a former glorious age. What was once a creative act or insight has become in time an automatic habit. The habit, its goal and significance lost, is maintained as a social tradition. When even society no longer knows its meaning, tradition is preserved as ritual only because no one dares to stop for fear of the unknown powers it still may serve. At best, a ritual is observed because, like Everest, "it is there."

In a "small world" the problem of independence or pride becomes exaggerated. India is still predominantly an agricultural society, and as such tends to emphasize individual existence only as a particular name or class role to a degree that makes individual and social mobility very difficult in spite of their growing importance. The early age of entrance into "intermediate" college, graduation with a Bachelor of Arts at eighteen, Master of Arts at twenty, early marriages and still earlier betrothals tend to exaggerate the need to appear mature and independent at premature ages. The current social system does little to sustain this apparent maturity. Assuming and expecting young boys to act like gentlemen in the British manner prevents their own individual growth yet inflates their status. The emphasis on academic degrees and titles makes it appear that a cultural elite exists, but one rears it is largely a "paper" culture, one which gives the individual little inner security and which leads him into easy defeat when actually challenged. One wonders if the social isolation between faculty and students does not emerge as a form of mutual defense against this lack of depth of experience in knowledge. Confidence in one's learned culture - on the part of the younger faculty member, especially - is too tenuous to permit him to share his experiences, much less their objects with the student. (One must remember that the

majority of present faculty members came to maturity during the agitation for independence, when not to learn one's lessons could be justified as a form of legitimate disobedience. Hence, not to learn English, not to learn science, law, literature or philosophy must have been deemed a daring and independent thing to do. Now that they have to teach they find themselves on the wrong side of the desk and not as well prepared as the older generations. The attitude towards English and, in many areas, Hindi still reflects this). Hence the refuge behind lectures and notebooks and the deep suspicion that neither teacher nor student knows his material. Hence also the emphasis on the external examination system through which knowledge is standardized into obsolescence. No one trusts the faculty member enough to allow him to administer his own examinations. His critical abilities, his fairness in assigning marks are suspect. Hence also the de-emphasis on the tutorial, the participant sharing through discussion in what after all is a mutual problem and endeavor. This is fortunately beginning to break up, and gradually the pattern of instruction in the sciences, the criteria of external nature and the workable inventions of men, are becoming the ultimate tests.

Repeatedly we were told by our colleagues on local faculties that our suggestions were not practicable because there were no funds available, and then would be informed by their local administrative officials that there were not only funds but that no one had asked for them. This fear of expansion is beginning to diminish, but quite slowly. The external examination system is giving way in part. At the behest of faculty requests, up to one third of the total marks are now sometimes administered locally, based on examinations and class participations. Yet few faculties have asked for such a system and the fear of the administration is too apparent. We have the impression that although much authority is administered in arbitrary ways, there is much unnecessary and self-generated fear of the vertical hierarchy. Fear of authority is certainly not endemic to the Indian social system and seems hopefully a phenomenon of the transition from Mogul-British authority to true independence. The inflation of position and rank is often symptomatic of the basic lack of trust. Fear of both higher and lower ranks (and, indeed, of one's colleagues, as well) - coupled with an exaggerated importance imputed to the relative status of each - are mutually reinforcing and tend to confirm one's suspicions of the others. If I am expected to do too much too soon I become aware of my own hollowness, of my own inflation; but, if I am hollow, inflated, I must doubt the abilities of others above and below me or at my own rank unless I can face the feeling that the guilt is mine alone. It is not easy to recognize,

however, the sense of self-inflation for what it actually is worth. Hence if they move more quickly than I, are too successful, I am more likely to ascribe their success to influence, to claim they were corrupt, to believe they had some external source of support even where cases of success are autonomously achieved. A few widely-publicized cases of corruption seem to confirm corruption behind all success. Undoubtedly there is corruption. If idols were given gifts to win their benevolent influences, in fact offered bribes to insure the prayerful wish, it is only natural to make gifts of wealth or service to those people we wish to influence on our behalf rather than face the task by ourselves. This is universal, East or West. In America, corruption is ever-present, especially in the business community, but the national wealth is so great that the corruption is but a small, perhaps insignificant part of the total exchange of products, money and services. The history of American expansion and growth had an aspect not present in India. The early Americans faced comparatively unpopulated and unutilized vast spaces, at least by the prevailing European standards. America's success was in part the result of this "windfall," as Walter Prescott Webb has put it, yet the American had to do it by himself for himself. There were few others to turn to or expect from. He was relatively more responsible to himself alone. India must face and consult millions of differently oriented individuals and groups at every turn. Its problems are social to a degree never present in the independent colonies of the West. Hence, social fears and factors are likely to play a part to an unusual degree in India's growth. And hence these social issues must be faced with a rigor never before appreciated and for which the Western example will not suffice. India must invent new social means rather than amplify the Western approach to some unprecedented extent. Insofar as India does face this emergent problem and works it through, it may set a pattern for all to follow in the near future. As one of our participant colleagues, Professor Rath, put it, "India is on the threshold of and may represent the 21st Century." The United Nations may stand or fall by the pattern developed next in India.

India can no longer afford to foster the inflated, immature, pseudo-independence of its youth. To be truly independent one must paradoxically admit all one's limitations, material as well as spiritual. One must offer to the growing individual every possible opportunity for support and nurture. We all know the rachitic consequences to undernourished infants. Emotional independence and maturity must also be adequately sustained if all is to be well. Student Personnel Services are designed to buttress their development to the best of our present abilities, just as education and knowledge help the individual achieve intellectual

maturity. It is well cultivated bodies, emotional capacities, and intellects together that lead to a wiser world.

If India fails in the resolution of its problems, the recurrently evident trend towards a paranoiac defensiveness will undoubtedly result in the periodic revolutions and futile dictatorships so characteristic of Latin America, Africa, and most of Asia. We have only too recently witnessed the terrible consequences of such developments among the youth groups of Germany, Italy, Spain, France, and the Middle East. In this connection, both Freud and Erich Fromm have commented extensively upon the incidence of homosexuality as a frequent correlate with the paranoiac. These are two apparently quite different manifestations and I am elaborating slightly upon their distinctive features in a footnote given below. Extensive and acute analysis, however, does reveal that the difference is more superficial than real. What for convenience we may call a "shift" phenomenon undeniably relates the transvestites with the often secret, "pseudo-elite" groups which lie behind unrepresentative social foment. In the setting of the clinical examination, these two behavioral responses to the largely imagined and always hyper-magnified "threats" from the world-at-large, exhibit peculiarly similar symptoms of a common syndrome that make their differences more a matter of degree than of kind. Theoreticians have been led, therefore, to postulate the notion of a shift from the one to the other which they find proceeds with a mercurial subtlety within the exclusive circles homosexuals tend to form. Perhaps it will help here to recall the difference between the Greek meaning of homo - which is "like" or "similar" - and the Latin meaning, "man." The pseudo-elite groups tend to gravitate around a core of like-mindedness that they jealously defend as the inner sanctum of their *raison d'être*. Yet, frequently the formation of individuals who experience the same insecurities into pseudo-elite groups results in taping the sexual element as well. (The popular meaning of homosexual conjures up visions of men acting like women, and vice-versa, because they are unable to truly accept their own sexual natures and hence they imitate the opposite sex. These are termed transvestites and treated as individuals with serious emotional problems. Co-related with them is the public display of certain external or overt characteristics of cliquish behavior. The vast majority of those who practice this latter "overt" homosexuality may be neurotic, but more often they choose their ways into their "small worlds" because it is much easier than heterosexual association. Although the social consequences to the overt homosexuals may be most crippling and tending to reinforce their disabilities to move more widely and freely, still the temptation is very great to like or love those most like

oneself. Such behavior is partly narcissistic and partly a result of the failure to develop a true sense of the "other," especially of the opposite sex. W. H. Sheldon finds in *Varieties of Delinquent Youth* that the largest loading of homosexuality in men is not among the most physically female males, but among the almost perfectly male boys. Hence the overt homosexuality among the pseudo-elite or "we happy few" type of groups. It is this source of homosexuality which is behind the "cultural" homosexuality of the Romans and the Greeks, of Islam and the arty cliques of the avant garde, the "artsy craftsy" groups, the fraternities and sororities, and among those more pseudo-sophisticated hostel groups who feel "so superior to it all." It is rampant at present in many of the most sophisticated sections of Western culture). On the basis of our understanding of the gradient or shift phenomenon it is not presumptuous to suggest that the scores of hand-holding youths we see in parts of India could turn from their present relative innocence of friendly brotherhood into more widespread displays of cliquish aggression.

Such negative trends are not wholly absent from the Indian social scene. During just this past year of my visit to India we have all witnessed the day-to-day irritations of regional parochialism, the mutual frenzy of various intercommunity conflicts and only recently the small world hostility that underlay the violence of a widely publicized episode of serious student indiscipline. In this last specific incident, a fantastic defensive justification unfolded itself in the face of all reason, not unlike the self-righteous defenses proffered for any of the internationally notorious purges. An additional unhappy fact was that the leaders were totally unrepresentative of the student body which had neither participated in nor endorsed the student leadership responsible for the violence. Shamefully, the majority of the students had not bothered to vote or to run their own candidates in the student elections. They seem not to have cared about their responsibility to support mature leadership and retreated happily into their enforced vacation. (The strike coincided with the Dussehra holidays in other areas although they were not to be held in the area of this strike until a month later. Perhaps, however, it is this behavior of an indifferent majority that is more representative of the true position of Indian college youth. Defensive indifference is a gravely serious problem that requires steadfast, thorough and constant probing to resolve).

Another contribution to the defensive indifference of young people is their inability at present to see opportunities outside direct participation in the Central and State governments. In contrast, college students in the United States turn to the Federal



government for employment opportunities as a last resort, not a first - and certainly not as "the one and only." The private sector seems to offer little hope of opportunity as yet, although this should change move rapidly as Indian industry gains its feet more firmly. But for the moment few students seem to envision a role outside the government agencies except to go outside of India altogether. The resulting hopelessness expressed by so many young people is contagious to the rest and does little to inspire individual effort. Once again, a defensive pride of caste or whatever else is engendered and provides sustenance to the defeated ego (Sinha, D. [1962, November 2]. Psychological analysis of caste in modern India. Caste Tension, A Symposium. A. N. Sinha Institute for Social Science: Patna). Luckily the groupings are so many and so varied that the likelihood of a coincidental drive of many youths in a single direction such as the culmination of a cliquish defensiveness that developed into the Nazi or Fascist groups is small here. The danger is more of small groups defensively indifferent than of mass movement. Yet the paranoid defensiveness will continue to cry corruption and danger in the face of any truly individual creative enterprise and thereby delay and obviate small steps towards culturo-economic developments. In a way, despite their extraction of wealth and raw materials, the British Raj served the needful function of the "shabbas goy" in sparking Indian innovation. (Shabbas goy is a Jewish expression. For orthodox Jews, no work can one on the seventh day of their week, Shabbas. In this mechanical age some things like motor cars or electric lights are difficult to do without, so a non-Jewish, goy, or servant does the work of turning the lights on or off, preparing food, driving the car, etc.). To take the first steps comes hard to the socially overconscious but now the whole industrial development of the 19th and 20th Centuries can be obtained as a package with its dislocations expected and planned for and hopefully minimized if not averted. Yet an enormous social trust is needed for its faithful execution and this social trust is lacking or being defended against where it might possibly grow best - among the young.

The pity of corruption is that it is not truly evil in intention so much as in result. Rather, most corruption seems the fruit of timidity, immaturity and anxiety. As stated earlier by Moriz Schlick (*Problems of Ethics*, 1962), one acts according to pleasurable (confident) ideas of states, not in terms of pleasurable ends in view. To sustain action toward a distant end requires trust, faith, hope, morale. The ever-evident bribery shows how little outside of home and family the vast majority can envisage. Success of the most limited sort must be obtained immediately. Like the honey bee or homing pigeon, the initial flights from hive or

cote are but short and timid and - in the dominant atmosphere of anxiety - easily defeated. Bribery is the most immature and indeed materialistic device to attempt to force and insure immediate results and thus maintain what little confidence has been achieved. Like most of the more spectacular sex criminals, one finds upon investigation not a monster but a very timid dependent child who loves his mother and who has not been able to go beyond her as yet in his newly round sexual manifestations. The results of corruption and bribery are similarly most horrid - but the cause is immaturity, childlike immediacy, and materialism of the most primitive kind. The immediate response to each form of corruption is to seek vengeance. Yet the cure is to lead gently the anxious individual to hope, trust, and faith in his fellow men. Such trust must once have made possible the creation of the caste system with its division of labor and responsibilities many centuries ago. Today's socio-cultural system requires a more complete use of the total individual than the hereditary system of caste permitted. Talent must be searched out and revealed wherever it exists and fully utilized. Hence the necessity for personal and social mobility. And hence also the necessity to trust the stranger, the autonomous individual whose talents are revealed by his own behavior and not just by his lineage.

In summary then, we found a situation which because of various causal factors encouraged a too immediate pride based on academic degrees and titles, which fostered a defensive immaturity on the part of many of the youths and did little to encourage the adventurous spirit of hope and faith and trust in fellow men so necessary to growth and true responsibility. Defensiveness closes off the individual and prevents a critical self-examination and awareness necessary to responsible adventure and inspiration. Too often the individual turns upon those "outside" with accusations of corruption. The world in which he attempts to live is filled with fears both real and imagined but often overestimated. Yet the potentialities, like the problems to be faced, are equally unlimited. There is nothing which of necessity will keep India from inventing the life we all might happily share in the next century. Perhaps if we can keep in mind as a symbol of India the infant Krishna with the ball of butter in his small hand rather than the classic civilization now worn and hoary with age, we can foresee and more fully help the India that is to come.