

India's Mysterious Unity

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This report will cover only the last three weeks in India. The first week of March or so was spent reading some of Professor S. K. Ramchandra Rao's books and articles on the history and background of Psychology. He drew on both Sanskrit and Pali texts of Hindu and Buddhist works. A truly remarkable series of volumes with still another in press yet to come. My respect increases for this man.

The Easter weekend and part of the first week of April was used for a trip by rail and bus to Khajuraho, Sanchi, Ajanta, and Ellora. I was truly amazed at the tremendous achievements of medieval India. The sheer work represented by the hewn rock temples, both Buddhist and Hindu at Ajanta and Ellora, the magnificent sculpture at all four places show a very different India from that at present. How much of the resources of the medieval period may have reached the mass of people is another question but the sheer outpouring of talent and energy is truly remarkable. Can it be done again by modern India to meet what have become the even more crucial needs of the vast majority of its people?

In a way one is impressed by the basic paradox of the public monuments. The tremendous outpouring of money, treasures, and energy towards the single end of religiosity at first glance seems to collapse of its own exaggerated and apparently over-extended efforts. Somehow an impossibly defined goal seems to grow to replace the obtainable but difficult goals that stimulate such cultural flowerings. Somehow the unreachable produces what Gilbert Murray has called a "failure of nerve." This gives the people of the culture a sense of defeat and frustration. Or is it that the almost "Texan" pattern of achievement which so appeals to the tourist of whatever culture is soon thought to be after all not worth the effort, slavery, and sacrifice that must have become apparent? In as vast a country as India, with its almost mysterious underlying unity (culture if not political), this latter realization may have come to a degree never before appreciated in the West. In addition, the basic philosophy behind Hinduism and Buddhism undoubtedly reinforced this discovery, if indeed they were not an expression of it.

The West discovered a series of small nations and empires which flowered as each in turn (sometimes spectacularly like Greece and Rome) for a period built its monuments and were

replaced by other new growths in new combinations. A degree of isolation of each part of its European continent from each other probably helped this. A glance at a map of Europe suggests not a land-mass continent – such as India or China or Russia – but a sprawling, tumbling, partly dismembered octopus which is all arms and little body. The history of Europe is a succession of wars and heroes of each peninsular defending against or attacking another. Except for the dominance of Rome or the later Holy Roman Empire, one does not have a sense of European unity such as even a fragmented India gives. Each European enclave built its monuments only to be replaced by another pattern. In the psychoanalytic sense the values of adolescence were the predominant ones – heroic phallicism, enterprise, and erection. On the other hand, India seems to have gone on to a kind of maturity with attendant involitional depression from which it was prevented from recovery by recurrent devastating invasions from over the Northwestern frontiers. The language of maturity was there in India's philosophy from Buddha to Shankara and it was celebrated in song and tale by its people. It was lived by the enlightened and liberated. But the rowdiness and hooliganism of the relatively adolescent phallus erecting invaders turned maturity into quietism and involitional defeat. Only Ghandi, in recent times, makes this theme sound mature. The dominant popular note is mainly one long diatribe against corruptions and "imperialism," real or fancied. The major theme is a preadolescent willingness to be almost orally receptive, dependent on some mysterious never-never supplier of the good things of life, the central government.

So I would like to suggest India in the days of Khajuraho was on the threshold of maturity. It was willing to face the picture of sexuality - fully and publicly. It had a glimpse of what lay beyond sexuality. In a more civilized world India might have gone on beyond its great achievements to set a pattern for mature nations in a threatened world. Instead, its wisdom in recognizing the limits of achievement made it vulnerable to external invasion and its lessons unmarked. Now sections of the West stand on the very same threshold. Has England not learned the lessons India knew a millennium ago? Is not the United States also showing signs of true maturity? But will these nations also be able to withstand the newly aroused proto-adolescent barbarism of Asia and Africa? Or is the time not yet ripe now either?

My third week was spent in the beginning of preparations for leaving Allahabad. The temperature is consistently hitting 110 degrees. The dust created by the incredible land

abuse that chops grass at its roots and kills most of the ground cover, exposing what little fertile soil is left to dry, and erosion by sun and wind fills the air like an earthen smog. Yet I have seen more people socially in the last week than any period before. It seems like we've only just been discovered, now we are about to leave. We had only just gotten started.