

## WHAT INDIA CAN TEACH US

If I were to look over the whole world to find out the country most richly endowed with all the wealth, power and beauty that nature can bestow—in some parts a very paradise on earth—I should point to India. If I were asked under what sky the human mind has fully developed some of its choicest gifts, has most deeply pondered on the greatest problems of life, and has found solutions of some of them which well deserve the attention even of those who have studied Plato and Kant—I should point to India. And if I were to ask myself from what literature we, here in Europe, we who have been nurtured almost exclusively on the thoughts of the Greeks and Romans, and of one Semitic race, the Jewish, may draw that corrective which is most wanted in order to make our inner life more comprehensive, more universal, in fact more truly human, a life, not for this life only, but a transfigured and eternal life—again I should point to India.

I know you will be surprised to hear me say this. I know that more particularly those who have spent many years of active life in Calcutta, or Bombay, or Madras, will be horror-struck at the idea that the humanity they meet with there, whether in the bazaars or in the courts of justice, or in so-called native society, should be able to teach us any lesson.

Let me, therefore, explain at once to my friends who may have lived in India for years, as civil servants, or officers, or missionaries, or merchants, and who ought to know a great deal more of that country than one who has never set foot on the soil of *Âryāvarta*, that we are speaking of two very different Indias. I am thinking chiefly of India, such as it was a thousand, two thousand, it may be three thousand years ago; they think of the India of today. And again, when, thinking of the India of today, they remember chiefly the India of Calcutta, or Madras, the India of the towns. I look to the India of the village communities, the true India of the Indians.

What I wish to show to you, I mean more specially the candidates for the Indian Civil Service, is that this India of a thousand, two thousand or three thousand years ago, aye the India of today also, if only you know where to look for it, is full of problems, the solution of which concerns all of us, even us in this Europe of the nineteenth century.

If you have acquired any special tastes here in England, you will find plenty to satisfy them in India; and whoever has learnt to take an interest in any of the great problems that occupy the best thinkers and workers at home, need certainly not be afraid of India proving to him an intellectual exile.

If you care for geology, there is work for you from the Himalayas to Ceylon.

If you are fond of botany, there is a flora rich enough for many Hookers.

If you are a zoologist, think of Haeckel, who is just now rushing through Indian forests and dredging in Indian seas, and to whom his stay in India is like the realisation of the brightest dream of his life.

If you are interested in ethnology, why India is like a living ethnological museum.

If you are fond of archæology, if you have ever assisted at the opening of a barrow in England, and know the delight of finding a fibula or a knife, or a flint in a heap of rubbish, read only General Cunningham's *Annual Reports of the Archaeological Survey of India* and you will be impatient for the time when you can take your spade and bring to light the ancient Viharas or colleges built by the Buddhist monarchs of India.

If ever you amused yourselves with collecting coins, why the soil of India teems with coins: Persian, Canaan, Thracian, Parthian, Greek, Macedonian, Roman, and Mohammedan. When Warren Hastings was Governor-General, an earthen pot was found on the bank of a river in the province of Banaras, containing 172 gold coins. Warren Hastings considered himself as making the most munificent present to his masters that he might ever have it in his power to send them, by presenting those ancient coins to the Court of Directors. The story is that they were sent to the melting-pot. At all events they had disappeared when Warren Hastings returned to England.

The study of Mythology has assumed an entirely new character, chiefly owing to the light that has been thrown on it by the ancient Vedic Mythology of India. But though the foundation of a true Science of Mythology has been laid, all the detail has still to be worked out, and could be worked out nowhere better than in India.

Even the study of fables owes its new life to India, from whence the various migration of fables have been traced at various times and through various channels from East to West. Buddhism is now known to have been the principal source of our legends and parables. But here, too, many problems still wait for their solution. Think, for instance, of the allusion to the fable of the donkey in the lion's skin, which occurs in Plato. Was that borrowed from the East? Or take the fable of the weasel changed by Aphroditê into a woman who, when she saw a mouse, could not refrain from making a spring at it. This, too, is very like a Sanskrit fable; but how then could it have been brought into Greece early enough to appear in one of its comedies, about 400 b.c.? Here too, there is still plenty of work to do.

We may go back even further into antiquity, and still find strange coincidences between the legends of India and the legends of the West, without as yet being able to say how they travelled, whether from East to West, or from West to East. That at the time of Solomon there was a channel of communication open between India and Syria and Palestine is established beyond doubt, I believe, by certain Sanskrit words which occur in the Bible as names of articles of export from Ophir, articles such as ivory, apes, peacocks, and sandalwood, which, taken together, could not have been exported

from any country but India. Nor is there any reason to suppose that the commercial intercourse between India, the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea and the Mediterranean was ever completely interrupted, even at the time when the *Book of Kings* is supposed to have been written.

Many of you may have studied not only languages, but also the Science of Language. And is there any country in which some of the most important problems of that science, say only the growth and decay of dialects, or the possible mixture of languages, with regard not only to words, but to grammatical elements also, can be studied to greater advantage than among the Aryans, the Dravidians, and the Munda inhabitants of India, when brought in contact with their various invaders and conquerors, the Greeks, the Arabs, the Persians, the Mughals, and lastly the English?

Again, if you are a student of Jurisprudence, there is a history of law to be explored in India, very different from what is known of the history of law in Greece, in Rome, and in Germany, yet both by its contrasts and by its similarities full of suggestions to the student of Comparative jurisprudence. New materials are being discovered every year.

If you have learnt to appreciate the value of recent researches into the antecedents of all law, namely the foundation and growth of the simplest political communities—and nowhere could you have had better opportunities for it than here at Cambridge—you will find a field of observation opened before you in the still existing village estates in India that will amply repay careful research.

And take that which, after all, whether we confess or deny it, we care for more in this life than for anything else—nay, which is often far more cared for by those who deny than by those who confess—take that which supports, pervades, and directs: our acts, thoughts and hopes—without which there can be neither village community nor empire, neither custom nor law, neither right nor wrong—take that which, next to language, has most firmly fixed the specific and permanent barrier between man and beast—which alone has made life possible and bearable, and which, as it is the deepest, though often hidden spring of individual life, is also the foundation of all national life—the history of all histories, and yet the mystery of all mysteries—take religion, and where can you study its true origin, its natural growth, and its inevitable decay better than in India, the home of Brahmanism, the birthplace of Buddhism, and the refuge of Zoroastrianism, even now the mother of new superstitions—and why not, in the future, the regenerate child of the purest faith, if only purified from the dust of nineteen centuries?

You will find yourselves everywhere in India between an immense past and an immense future, with opportunities such as the old world could but seldom, if ever, offer you. Take any of the burning questions of the day—popular education, higher education, parliamentary representation, codification of laws, finance, emigration, poor-law, and whether you have anything to teach and to try, or anything to observe and to learn, India will supply you with a laboratory such as exists nowhere else. That

very Sanskrit, the study of which may at first seem so tedious to you and so useless, if only you will carry it on, as you may carry it on here at Cambridge better than anywhere else, will open before you large layers of literature, as yet almost unknown and unexplored, and allow you an insight into strata of thought deeper than any you have known before, and rich in lessons that appeal to the deepest sympathies of the human heart.

You know how some of the best talent and the noblest genius of our age has been devoted to the study of the development of the outward or material world, the growth of the earth, the first appearance of the living cells, their combination and differentiation, leading up to the beginning of organic life, and its steady progress from the lowest to the highest stages. Is there not an inward intellectual world also which has to be studied in its historical development, from the first appearance of predicative and demonstrative roots, their combination and differentiation, leading up to the beginning of rational thought in its steady progress from the lowest to the highest stages? And in that study of the history of the human mind, in that study of ourselves, of our true selves, India occupies a place second to no other country. Whatever sphere of the human mind you may select for your special study, whether it be language, or religion, or mythology, or philosophy, whether it be laws or customs, primitive art or primitive science, everywhere, you have to go to India, whether you like it or not, because some of the most valuable and most instructive materials in the history of man are treasured up in India, and in India only.

And while thus trying to explain to those whose lot will soon be cast in India the true position which that wonderful country holds or ought to hold in universal history, I may perhaps be able at the same time to appeal to the sympathies of other members of this University by showing them how imperfect our knowledge of universal history, our insight into the development of the human intellect, must always remain, if we narrow our horizon to the history of Greeks and Romans, Saxons and Celts, with a dim background of Palestine, Egypt and Babylon, and leave out of sight our nearest intellectual relatives, the Aryans of India, the framers of the most wonderful language, the Sanskrit, the fellow-workers in the construction of our fundamental concepts, the fathers of the most natural of natural religions, the makers of the most transparent mythologies, the inventors of the most subtle philosophy, and the givers of the most elaborate laws.

- **Max Muller**

#### **About the Lesson**

The present piece has been taken from the collection of lectures *India: What Can It Teach Us?* Max Muller, the great admirer of Indian Culture, history and literature, delivered them at the University of Cambridge where he portrayed India, specially, the Vedic India as an epitome of virtuosity and morality. In this extract, Max Muller analyses the greatness of India and maintains that it has solutions for many problems that confront mankind and cites various examples in support of his view.

Friedrich Max Muller (1823-1900), a German born philologist and Orientalist, lived and studied in Britain and became a professor of Modern European Languages at Oxford University. He translated, edited and commented on numerous Sanskrit texts.

### **GLOSSARY**

endowed with :	to naturally have a quality, feature etc
pondered :	thought deeply
exclusively :	entirely, only
bestow :	to give something. impart
semitic :	racess which include, Hebrews, Arabs, etc
transfigure :	change the shape and appearance
Ethnology :	science of the races of mankind
archaeology :	the branch of anthropology that studies prehistoric people and their cultures
Vihars :	Buddhist centres of learning
Parathian :	of Parthia, an ancient Kingdom of West Asia
munificent :	splendidly generous
Mythology :	the body of stories associated with a culture
legend :	old story handed down from the past
celt :	a member of a race of people from Western Europe settled in ancient Britain before the Romans came
jurisprudence :	science and philosophy of human law

### **Activity 1: COMPREHENSION**

#### **A. Tick the correct alternative :**

1. In the writer's view, which country is bestowed with all the wealth, power and beauty?  
(a) Germany  
(b) India  
(c) Syria  
(d) None of the above
2. Which one of the following is the main source of legends and parables?  
(a) Vedic mythology  
(b) the book of the ring  
(c) Buddhism  
(d) all the above
3. According to Muller, whatever discipline you select for your study, you will have to go to-  
(a) Athens  
(b) Britain  
(c) India  
(d) Germany

**B. Answer to the following questions should not exceed 10-15 words each:**

1. What, according to the author, is the principal source of our legends and parables?
2. Why does Max Mueller call India a paradise on earth?
3. What, according to the author, are two different Indias?
4. Which India does the author look to in 'What India can teach us'?
5. On whose thoughts Europeans have been nurtured?

**C. Answer to the following questions should not exceed 25-30 words each:**

1. What opportunities do various disciplines offer in India for intellectual work?
2. Why has the study of mythology assumed an entirely new character?
3. What makes the writer think that a channel of communication was present between India, Syria, and Palestine?
4. What important problems related to the Science of Language can be studied in India?
5. 'India can offer a laboratory for the disciplines.' What are they?

**D. Answer to the following questions should not exceed 60-80 words each:**

1. What are Max Muller's views about Sanskrit literature?
2. What, according to the writer, have been the most important contributions of the Aryans of India?

**E. Say whether the following statements are true or false. Write T for true and F for false:**

1. In the writer's views, true India is in villages. [ ]
2. India, according to the author, has solutions for almost all kinds of problems. [ ]
3. The allusion to the fable of the donkey in lion's skin, which occurs in Plato was not borrowed from the east, is the view presented in the lesson. [ ]
4. The study of mythology has assumed entirely new character chiefly because of the light thrown on it by the ancient Vedic mythology of India. [ ]
5. Fables have travelled through various channels at various times from East to West. [ ]

**Activity2: VOCABULARY**

- (a) Anthropology is a sub-branch of knowledge of Archaeology. There are a number of words associated with Anthropology. Some of these are as follows – anthropo, anthropocentric, anthropoid, anthropologist, anthropomorphic  
Look up their meanings in the Dictionary and construct a sentence using each word.
- (b) In the lesson you have studied, the words 'legend' and 'myth' have been used. The sentences given below use varied grammatical forms of these words. Identify them and state their meanings –
- (i) She was a legend in her own life time.
  - (ii) Legend has it that the lake was formed by the tears of a god.

- (iii) Her patience and tact are legendary.
- (iv) Scott of the Antarctic was national hero of mythic proportions.
- (v) The mythical rich uncle that he boasts about.

**Activity 3: GRAMMAR**

**Tenses : The Simple Present, The Present Continuous and The Simple Past**

Look at the following sentences:

- (A)
  - (i) Mohan (usually) gets up at six o'clock.
  - (ii) He (always) shaves before breakfast.
  - (iii) Mr. Lal spends most of his Sundays with the Guptas.
  - (iv) They play football in the evening.
  
- (B)
  - (i) At this moment you are reading *this* sentence.
  - (ii) I am writing (now).
  - (iii) The teacher is talking (now).
  - (iv) The students are listening (now).
  - (v) It is raining (now).
  
- (C)
  - (i) Mohan went to London in 2004.
  - (ii) They bought a house in Delhi two years ago.
  - (iii) They went to a movie last Sunday.

I. The sentences in **A** denote events that happen usually.

The verbs in the sentences in **A** are said to be in the Simple Present Tense. This refers to the form of the verb.

The Simple Present Tense is used to show something that happens habitually- every day, every month, every year, in general, as a matter of course:

Mohan gets up at six o'clock.

She (usually) *sings* in her bath.  
 On Sundays they go for outing.  
 It generally rains in June.

*Roses* bloom in summer.

The sun rises in the East.

In some special contexts the Simple Present Tense form is used to denote something that is happening now.

II. The sentences in B show an action which is in progress at the moment of speaking or writing.

All the verbs in the Present Continuous Tense end in *-ing*: reading, writing, talking, listening, etc. All the verbs are preceded by a form of 'be': *are* reading, *am* writing, *is* talking, *are* listening. The form of 'be' as a helping verb is accompanied by a verb ending in *-ing*.

The verb group (i.e. the helping verb 'be' + the main verb ending in- ing) is called the Present Continuous Tense form.

The Present Continuous, like the Simple Present, can show a habitual activity; but when the Present Continuous form is used to show habitual activity, it carries an overtone of some emotion.

My scooter is always breaking down (shows irritation).

My scooter always breaks down (just a statement).

Mahesh is often coming late to class these days (shows emotion, irritation, surprise, etc.).

Mahesh always comes late to class (just a statement).

Note that in sentences like those which express well recognised facts or statements relating to universal time, the Simple Present form of the verb is used without adverbials like 'always', 'generally', etc.

There are many verbs that are generally not used in the Present Continuous; often, they denote a state or perception or cognition. These include - abhor, abscond, agree, astonish, be, believe, belong to, care, concern, consider (as in 'We consider him a good student') consist of, contain, cost, depend on, deserve, desire, detest, despise, differ, disagree, disbelieve, distrust, displease, dislike, doubt, equal, feel (mental condition), fit, forget, forgive, guess, hate, have, (possession or relationship), hear, hold (=contain), imagine, impress, include, intend, involve, know, lack, like, love, matter, mean, mind, need, notice (if followed by 'that' clause), owe, own, perceive, please, possess, prefer, presuppose, realize, recall, recognize, refuse, regard, remain, remember, require, resemble, result, satisfy, see, seem, smell, suppose, sound, suffice, taste, think (when followed by a clause) trust, understand, want, wish, etc.

Some of these are used in the Continuous Tense, then they have a meaning other than 'state' or 'perception'.

She is seeing me tomorrow, (see = meet).

He is having a nice time, (have = experience)

Verbs of bodily sensation (ache, feel, hurt, itch, etc.) can be used either in the Simple Present or the Present Progressive with no difference in meaning:

- III. The sentences in C at the beginning of this section denote events that happened in the past.

Look at the form of the verb: 'went'; 'bought',

They are the past forms of the verbs: 'go' and 'buy'. The past form of the verb is called the Simple Past Tense form.

Notice that the Simple Past form of the verb is used with a past time expression like 'in 2004', 'two years ago', 'last Sunday'. If the Simple Past is used with adverbs or adverbials like 'often', 'always', 'every day', etc., it shows a habitual or repeated action in the past:

I always finished my work on time.

**Exercise:**

- I. Fill in the blanks with the appropriate forms of the verb given in brackets: (Use the Simple Present or the Present Continuous or the Simple Past.)
- i. I..... (grow) a beard now.
  - ii. I..... (forget) to wind the clock last night.
  - iii. Every year he..... (spend) his holidays in Kashmir.
  - iv. It..... (rain), take your umbrella.
  - v. Keep quiet, we..... (listen) to the music.
  - vi. That silly boy always..... (make) stupid remarks.
  - vii. She..... (hate) cats.
  - viii. My friend..... (come) to see me yesterday.
  - ix. Who..... (discover) America?
  - x. What a noise! What on earth .....(happen).

**Activity 4: SPEECH ACTIVITY**

“If I were to look over the whole world to find out the country most richly endowed with all the wealth, power and beauty that nature can bestow..... I should point to India” Organize a symposium on the theme stated in the lines.

**Activity 5: COMPOSITION**

In this essay Max Muller describes how the world owes a lot to India. Prepare a comprehensive list of India’s contributions to the world.