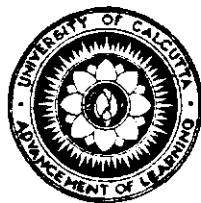


THE SPIRIT OF INDIAN CIVILIZATION

BY

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PUBLISHED BY THE
UNIVERSITY OF CALCUTTA

1938

PRINTED IN INDIA

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY BHUPENDRALAL BANERJEE
AT THE CALCUTTA UNIVERSITY PRESS, SENATE HOUSE, CALCUTTA

Reg. No. 1164B—November, 1938—E

To
THE PEOPLE OF INDIA

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THEORY AND PRACTICE OF LEGAL ETHICS

THE PHILIPPINES AND INDIA

STUDENTS' LOGIC

SOCIAL LIFE IN INDIA (*In the Press*)

THE BUGBEAR OF CIVILIZATION

(*In preparation*)

FOREWORD

BY

DR. SYAMAPRASAD MOOKERJEE,
Former Vice-Chancellor, Calcutta University

FOREWORD

Indian civilisation claims a hoary antiquity like the civilisations that dawned on the banks of the Nile and the Euphrates several millenniums before the Christian era, but unlike Egypt and Babylonia the cultural life of India has shown a movement, an adaptability and continuity that enabled it to withstand the ravages of time and survive in most of its essential features to the present day. The only parallel to this is supplied by the great country which draws its life and strength from the perennial waters of the Yang-tse-Kiang and the Hoang-ho. Centuries have rolled away. We are now living in a new world. The barriers raised by the hand of Nature and buttressed by the laws of man, no longer split up civilised humanity into isolated units ; and the cultural life of the world to-day tends to stream through the same big channel. What is to be the position of India in this *Prayaga* of world culture ? It will not do to say that like the waters of some sequestered

rivulet which have served the countryside well for ages, Indian civilisation is best left in isolated eminence. If isolation is no longer possible, it will have to be proved that beneath its sluggish and apparently muddy surface the stream of Indian culture possesses a life-saving quality whose touch will curb the maddening impetuosity of torrents fresh from their mountain altitudes and turn frowning wilds into smiling gardens.

The time has come to evaluate Indian culture and its fitness to survive. This is the task that the author has essayed. The following pages bear witness to the range of his studies and his knowledge of the ways and manners of his own people. He has travelled in various climes and has had the benefit of a first-hand acquaintance with the social polity and culture of several foreign countries. He has thus equipped himself for a reasoned and comparative estimate of the ways of life in the East and the West. His work covers a wide range of topics—the essentials of Indian civilisation; India's contribution to world culture; position of women; caste. In language lucid and vigorous,

which some may regard as polemical, he has sought to interpret the culture and ideal of India and defend the civilisation of this country against critics who show no proper appreciation of its inner meaning and spirit. But this does not mean that he is an uncritical admirer of everything that is old. If he draws pointed attention to the fundamental features of our glorious heritage, he is not oblivious of the tangled weeds that obstruct our progress towards a fuller and better life. What he aims at is a just and balanced estimate of our culture. The work, though erudite, is free from technical details. The reader, be he a specialist or a layman, a conservative or a reformer, a lover of old ways or an admirer of modern civilisation, will find in it ample food for reflection.

SYAMAPRASAD MOOKERJEE

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

The preparation of this book was started about three years ago at Manila where I had been the Head of the Philosophy Department of the Philippine Government University. It was the dismal cultural situation in international life coupled with the unfortunate position of India in the eye of the average foreigner, as a result of the widespread misrepresentation of her civilization carried on by the unscrupulous agents of some powerful nations, which led me to undertake this task. The preparation was interrupted for some time owing to my departure from Manila but was resumed soon after my arrival at Paris where the work was practically completed about a year ago.

Meanwhile, events in Europe and in the Far East have been moving fast as a fake civilization soaks its pretending hands with the blood of the innocent and drags the world to a new Armageddon which may turn out to

be one vast cultural holocaust. Things look extremely ominous indeed, but not without providing some grim lessons for us who are still held under the spell of cant and hypocrisy posing as civilization. The last World War did not convince us, in any effective manner, of our error of judgment and hence, probably, it is going to be repeated soon in such a thorough and impressive manner as will make it appear like a sort of perfect house-cleaning, so that whatever is left of civilization thereafter will not deceive the world any longer. To us war is despicable, barbarous—a relic of our jungle inheritance. But how can we help witnessing its grim exhibition, at some intervals, as long as there are nations who take cultural pride in thickly foresting their portions of the earth's surface with bayonets, guns, cannon, shells, tanks, armoured cars, gas bombs, war planes, zeppelins, dirigibles, dreadnoughts, cruisers, destroyers, submarines, and so on? The terrible forest which they thus make and then live in, naturally sheds its own colour on them and keeps on quickening their old forest nature. If they would only know that this

kind of forestry is not civilization, but just its reverse !

In interpreting the conception of civilization I have tried to develop an organic theory of it—somewhat in the manner of Oswald Spengler. But an organic theory of civilization may tend to lead one—as it has led Spengler—to pessimism. According to this great German philosopher, a civilization has, like an organism, a natural term of years in which it arises, thrives, matures, decays, and finally passes away. Evidently, he had before his view, as he sought to develop his theory, the histories of the various ancient civilizations that are now dead and the history of what is known as the Western civilization which, as it appears to him, is about to strike its own death-knell. Basing the organic theory on the facts of these dead civilizations as arranged by Spengler, one may see the force of logical induction and prophesy a sad destiny for all the living civilizations of the world. But it seems Spengler has not considered carefully the facts of the two great civilizations—Chinese and Indian—each of which has successfully withstood so far the natural laws of organic life

by beginning its term with the oldest of the dead civilizations and yet continuing to-day with full confidence, fresh hopes, and great aspirations which can arise only from its youthful spirit. Perhaps he has thought that because Indian civilization has failed to be as highly creative at present as it used to be, its youth has passed away and it is now in a state of decay. He does not seem to have realised that if it has ceased to be highly creative now, it is because its youthful energy has to be used in the long struggle which it has been carrying on against the invading cultural forces. Its youth is there, exerting itself in ceaseless acts of resistance. Thus in considering his view we do not find the facts of Indian civilization very apposite. The truth is that a civilization is an organism, but not exactly like one of physical nature. It is not Nature's creation. Natural laws are not inexorably applicable to it. It is the creation of man's higher nature which may not always submit to natural laws. Even if it may submit, the average span of life may not be as definitely fixed as that of the individual. Who can tell how long Indian civilization is

still going to retain its youthful vigour and energy? If it has gone through many alternate periods of expansion and shrinkage, evolution and involution, it has never suffered a pronounced change to show the passing of its youth. It is the creation of the collective spirit of the Indian people. As long as these people maintain the youthful nature of their collective spirit and preserve intact the vital relation with their civilization, there is hardly any ground for pessimism. Indian civilization may continue to maintain its youth for even a far longer future than its long past. Of course, the people of India are not so dogmatic as to assume that their civilization will never come to an end, although they would not like to think of such a painful destiny. Just as they cannot understand the theological absurdity that the soul of a man has its beginning but it has no end, they cannot hold that although their civilization has its beginning it will never have its end. It will have its end, but that end may take myriads of years yet, nay countless ages, to come at last. It depends upon how long the Indian people will succeed in preserving the youthful nature of their collective spirit as

signified by their united power to resist opposing forces, to dream, to hope, to act, and to create, and how long they can maintain the vital relation with their civilization.

In view of this important consideration it has become very necessary, in this age of cultural iconoclasm, that one should know how our Indian civilization stands to-day. If the following pages prove helpful in this direction, I shall consider that my labour has not been in vain.

A few of the earlier chapters were published in some Philippine and Indian magazines. I express my sincere thanks to the editors of those journals for kindly allowing me to use them in this book. I owe a great debt of gratitude to Dr. H. C. Raychaudhuri, M.A., Ph.D., Carmichael Professor of Ancient Indian History and Culture, Calcutta University, who carefully went through the whole of the typescript and helped me with valuable criticisms and suggestions. But above all, I am heavily indebted to Dr. S. P. Mookerjee, M.A., D.Litt., Ex-Vice-Chancellor of the Calcutta University, who evinced a deep interest in the publication of this work and,

in his usual affable manner, yielded to my request to write its Foreword. But for his generous help the book would not have come out at this time.

D. N. R.

P-102, LAKE ROAD, CALCUTTA,
September, 1938.

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