

## ***The Forgotten Values of India***

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An old Breton woman who looked after me during my childhood told me that the fairies, who have no milk, are obliged to abduct a human baby, placing their own child in its cradle. The fairies' child grows like other children but feels a stranger in the world in which he lives. One day, with a few bizarre words, he betrays his origin and must then depart to seek his true native land. The old woman remarked that I had two toes growing together and that my feet were consequently rather like cloven hooves. Her conclusion was a secret that could not be revealed to anyone. Poets and musicians are often fairy-children, rootless people who by chance were born in a society that is not their own, which they must abandon in order to realise their destiny.

Nobody wishes to leave places dear to them, where they have learned to live, where they have friendly bonds with trees, animals and people. Then one day, by chance, you see on the horizon a strange land that attracts you and soon takes hold of you, envelops you, possesses you. But, once you have reached this promised land, it takes a long time to train yourself, to get to know and understand the country that has chosen you. You have to forget everything that you have patiently sought to learn and rediscover the wondering humility of childhood. Adaptation to a new world, to its language, its beliefs and customs, its way of thinking, requires a long and difficult apprenticeship. It involves a constant and exalting discovery of new horizons of thought, knowledge, of the art of living and dying.

I had never been interested in India, or in what is termed spirituality, whether Western or Eastern. What enchanted me, from my very first sight of India, was the beauty of its people, its climate, its trees; the rice paddies which, like mirrors, reflect the clouds heavy with the monsoon; the naked muscular peasants who decorate every corner of the countryside, the fast-moving oxen with gilded horns with their dancing step, who gaily draw multi-coloured carts. Little by little, I became familiar with the ways of thinking, feeling, living that reveal the inner nature of a people. This first happened with the fanciful poet Rabindranath Tagore, then, when I had mastered the complexities of the language, with the scholars of the holy city of Benares.

I studied music, the difficult and subtle art of the *rāgas*. The narrow gate that allows you to penetrate a culture is always the technique of a craft. Once you belong to a group, as a modest apprentice, you can learn the secrets of social and human relations and can, without committing any indiscretion, make contact with other castes and climb the social ladder to the sources of knowledge. Hindus live familiarly with the gods, consequently they need not worry about religion or ethics. A few magic rites suffice to cajole the divine powers. The people of India are lively, amusing, erotic, full of humour, gently blasphemous. Many perform lascivious and ecstatic dances, sometimes with the aid of a cool beverage, based on Indian hemp, known as *bhang*, which is also used by ascetics to facilitate mental concentration. Shaivite Yoga teaches that bodily perfection is essential for the harmony of the soul, so seeking it is an important virtue.

Like all countries, India has seen rivalry between the moralistic religion of the city and the ecstatic and mystical search taught by the god of Nature and Love, the antimony of Shiva and Vishnu, of Dionysos and Apollo, of exuberance and morality. The impact of monotheistic oriented, restrictive, puritanical and exclusive doctrines in India is undeniable, but it has always remained superficial. Sects that restrict freedom have never been able to extirpate from India the erotic-mystical Dionysian cult on which popular culture is based, as well as that of higher levels of religious thought, represented by the confraternities of wandering ascetics. The cult of the phallus and of the Great Mother, as principles of Life, have remained the centre of ritual performance despite the presence of Vedism, Jainism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity.

The puritanical attitude imposed by dogmatic religions that have assaulted the world for nearly two thousand years and have separated mankind from the rest of Creation is, in traditional India, only a misleading façade. Amongst the sister-religions of the ancient world, only India has been able to preserve a Dionysian view, the art of living in harmony with the gods of Nature, the trees, animals and the elements. In this mystical India, impregnated by magic, Western exiles can find their *raison d'être*, the simple happiness of living. The profound, real India is where we find the cruel exhilaration of sacrifices, ecstatic and erotic dances, sacred magic, alchemy, the development of subtle powers through which man can contact the mysterious forces of Nature, communicate with the spirits and gods without waiting, after a sterile and monotonous life, for the vague eventuality of an illusory paradise, somewhat like workers who, after a lifetime of labour, await the boredom of retirement. The India known as Tantric (Shaivite or Shakta) is still a land where life is happy, a land that teaches that it is through ecstasy that man can enter into contact with the divine. It is in this world that, in

conformity with my nature, I lived and studied the arts, philosophy, rites, literature, music, history, myths, as well as social and human relations.

One day, the Ganges abandoned my home, leaving a sand-bank in front of the door. This was a disturbing omen. Soon after came the civil war, the partition and independence of India. The British transferred power to collaborators of the opposition, London barristers imbued with romantic socialism and British Puritanism. All this was undertaken to undermine the basis of a multi-millennial civilisation. Nehru never denied that fact. I left a land that I loved, where I had spent the fullest years of my youth, like others, fleeing from tyranny, seeking refuge in exile. For me, India was never an exotic country: it belonged to a cultural universe that included the roots of Egypt, Greece, and Rome, something ultimately rooted in an adequate human response to the mystery of Nature. It is only in India that this universe was able to survive, which is why living in a certain India means being transported back to the very sources of Western civilisation – and of religious experience.

India was my homeland, because for me it was not an exotic adventure, but a reunion with the true basis of the world to which I belonged by the chance of birth, eclipsed by fifteen centuries of ecclesiastical tyranny. It was in India and through India that I rediscovered and understood that Diogenes and Euripides, Hesiod and Petronius were very close, whereas the Apostle Paul and Thomas Aquinas were totally foreign to me. India gave me back my roots and, wherever I live, I take them with me as a precious heritage of ways of thinking and living that have acclimatised effortlessly in the still very Etruscan Italy where I live. The Dionysian vision of the world that puts man back in his place in Creation goes far beyond Greek culture. It belongs to the most archaic bond of humans with Nature – without which our species won't be able to survive.