

CHAPTER II. Indian Nationality.

What are the things which make possible national self-consciousness, which constitute nationality? Certainly a unity of some sort is essential. There are certain kinds of unity, however, which are not essential, and others which are insufficient. Racial unity, for example, does not constitute the Negroes of North America a nation. Racial unity is not even an essential; the British nation is perhaps more composed of diverse racial elements than any other, but it has none the less a strong national consciousness. To take another example, many of the most Irish of the Irish are of English origin; Keating and Emmet, for instance, were of Norman descent; but neither they nor their labours were on that account less a part or an expression of Irish national feeling and self-consciousness. Neither is a common and distinctive language an essential; Switzerland is divided among three languages and Ireland between two.

Two essentials of nationality there are,—a geographical unity, and a common historic evolution or culture. These two India possesses superabundantly, beside many lesser unities which strengthen the historical tradition.

The fact of India's geographical unity is apparent on the map, and is never, I think, disputed. The recognition of social unity is at least as evident to the student of Indian culture. The idea has been grasped more than once by individual rulers,—Asoka, Vikramaditya and Akbar. It was recognized before the Mahabharata was written; when Yudhishtira performed the Rajasuya sacrifice on the occasion of his inauguration as sovereign, a great assembly (*sabha*—simply the *gam-sabhava*, or village council on a larger scale) was held, and to this assembly came Bhima, Dhritarashtra and his hundred sons, Subala (King of Gandhara), etc. ... and others from the extreme south and north (Dravida, Ceylon and Kashmir). In legends, too, we meet with references to councils or moots of the gods, held in the Himalayas; whither they repaired to further common ends. No one can say that any such idea as that of a Federated States of India is altogether foreign to the Indian mind. But more than all this, there is evidence enough that the founders of Indian culture and civilization and religion (whether you call them rishis or men) had this unity in view; and the manner in which this idea pervades the whole of Indian culture is the explanation of the possibility of its rapid realisation now. Is it for nothing that India's sacred shrines are many and far apart; that one who would visit more than one or two of these must pass over hundreds of miles of Indian soil? Benares is the sacred city of Buddhist and Hindu alike; Samanala in Ceylon is a holy place for Buddhist, Hindu and Muhammadan. Is there no meaning in the sacred reverence for the Himalayas which every Indian feels? Is the *geis* altogether meaningless which forbids the orthodox Hindu to leave the Motherland and cross the seas? Is the passionate adoration of the Indian people for the Ganges thrown away? How much is involved in such phrases as 'The Seven Great Rivers' (of India)! The Hindu in the north repeats the mantram:

Om gange cha yamune chaiva godavari, sarasvati,
narmade, sindhu kaveri jale'smin sannidhim kuru.*

("Hail! O ye Ganges, Jamna, Godavari, Sarasvati, Narmada, Sindhu and Kaveri, come and approach these waters.")

When performing ceremonial ablutions; the Buddhist in Ceylon uses the same prayer on a similar occasion. Or take the epics, the foundation of Indian education and culture; or a poem like the Megha Duta, the best known and most read work of Kalidasa. Are not these expressive of love for and knowledge of the Motherland? The 'holy land' of the Indian is not a far-off Palestine but the Indian land itself.

The whole of Indian culture is so pervaded with this idea of India as THE LAND, that it has never been necessary to insist upon it overmuch, for no one could have supposed it otherwise. "Every province within the vast boundaries fulfills some necessary part in the completion of a nationality. No one place repeats the specialised functions of another." Take, for example, Ceylon (whose people are now the most denationalised of any in India); can we think of India as complete without Ceylon? Ceylon is unique as the home of Pali literature and Southern Buddhism, and in its possession of a continuous chronicle invaluable as a check upon some of the more uncertain data of Indian Chronology. Sinhalese art, Sinhalese religion, and the structure of Sinhalese society, bring most vividly before us certain aspects of early Hindu culture, which it would be hard to find so perfectly reflected in any other part of modern India. The noblest of Indian epics, the love-story of Rama and Sita, unites Ceylon and India in the mind of every Indian, nor is this more so in the south than in the north. In later times, the histories of northern India and Ceylon were linked in Vijaya's emigration, then by Asoka's missions (contemporaneous with earliest ripples of the wave of Hindu influence which passed beyond the Himalayas to impress its ideals on the Mongolian east); and later still a Sinhalese princess became a Rajput bride, to earn the perpetual love of her adopted people by her fiery death, the death which every Rajput woman would have preferred above dishonour. To this day her name is remembered by the peoples of northern India, as that of one who was the flower and crown of beauty and heroism. And just in such wise are all the different parts of India bound together by a common historical tradition and ties of spiritual kinship; none can be spared, nor can any live independent of the others.

The diverse peoples of India are like the parts of some magic puzzle, seemingly impossible to fit together, but falling easily into place when once the key is known ; and the key is that realization of the fact that the parts do fit together, which we call national self-consciousness. I am often reminded of the Cairene girl's lute, in the tale of Miriam and Ali Nur-al-Din. It was kept in a "green satin bag with slings of gold." She took the bag, "and opening it, shook it, whereupon there fell there out two-and-thirty pieces of wood, which she fitted one into other, male into female, and female into male, till they became a polished lute of Indian workmanship. Then she uncovered her wrists and laying the lute in her lap, bent over it with the bending of mother over babe, and swept the strings with her finger-tips; whereupon it moaned and resounded and after its olden home yearned; and it remembered the waters that gave it drink and the earth whence it

sprang and wherein it grew and it minded the carpenters who cut it and the polishers who polished it and the merchants who made it their merchandise and the ships that shipped it; and it cried and called aloud and moaned and groaned; and it was as if she asked it of all these things and it answered her with the tongue of the case." Just such an instrument is India, composed of many parts seemingly irreconcilable, but in reality each one cunningly designed towards a common end; so, too, when these parts are set together and attuned, will India tell of the earth from which she sprang, the waters that gave her drink, and the Shapers that have shaped her being; nor will she be then the idle singer of an empty day, but the giver of hope to all, when hope will most avail, and most be needed.

I have spoken so far only of Hindus and Hindu culture; and if so it is because Hindus form the main part of the population of India, and Hindu culture the main part of Indian culture: but the quotation just made from Arabian literature leads on to the consideration of the great part which Muhammadans, and Persi-Arabian culture have played in the historic evolution of India, as we know it to-day. It would hardly be possible to think of an India in which no Great Mughal had ruled, no Taj been built, or to which Persian art and literature were wholly foreign. Few great Indian rulers have displayed the genius for statesmanship which Akbar had, a greater religious toleration than he. On the very morrow of conquest he was able to dispose of what is now called the Hindu-Muhammadan difficulty very much more successfully than it is now met in Bengal; for he knew that there could be no real diversity of interest between Hindu and Muhammedan, and treated them with an impartiality which we suspect to be greater than that experienced in Bengal to-day. It was not his interest to divide and rule. Like most Eastern rulers (who can never be foreigners in the same way that a Western ruler necessarily must be) he identified himself with his kingdom, and had no interests that clashed with its interests. This has, until modern times, been always a characteristic of an invader's or usurper's rule in India, that the ruler has not attempted to remain in his own distant country and rule the conquered country from afar, farming it like an absentee landlord, but has identified himself with it. The beneficent rule of Elala, a Tamil usurper in Ceylon two centuries before Christ, was so notorious that deep respect was paid to the site of his tomb more than 2,000 years later; and to mention a more modern case, the 18th century Tamil (Hindu) ruler, Kirti Sri and his two brothers, so identified themselves with the Sinhalese (Buddhist) people as to have deserved the chronicler's remark that they were "one with the religion and the people." To show that such a situation is still possible, it will suffice to cite the States of Hyderabad, Baroda and Gwalior.

Even suppose the differences that separate the Indian communities to be twice as great as they are said to be, they are nothing compared with the difference between the Indian and the European. Western rule is inevitably alien rule, in a far deeper sense than the rule of Hindus by Muhammadans or the reverse could be. And what does alien rule mean? "The government of a people by itself," says John Stuart Mill, "has a meaning and a reality, but such a thing as the government of one people by another does not and cannot exist. One people may keep another as a warren or preserve for its own use, a place to make money in, a human farm to be worked for the profit of its own inhabitants." No cant of the "white man's burden" alters the stern logic of these facts; to us it

appears that the domination of the East by the West is a menace to the evolution of the noblest ideal of humanity; the "white man's burden" translated into the language of Asiatic thought becomes "the white peril;" and this is not because we despise the achievements of Western civilisation, or fail to appreciate the merits of Europeans as such, but because we think that a whole world of Europeans would be a poor place, quite as poor as a whole world of Indians or Chinamen. We feel it then our duty to realise our unity and national self-consciousness in concrete form, as much for the advantage of others as of ourselves; and this without any feeling of bitterness or exclusiveness towards other races, though perhaps for a time such feelings may be inevitable. And to show what spirit moves us we have such a statement of belief in the unity of the Indian people, as the credo of Shiv Narayen ; and the beautiful national song, called 'Bande Mataram' ('Hail! Motherland') which expresses the aims and the power of the awakened Indian nation, as the Marseillaise embodied the ideal of awakened France, or as those of Ireland are expressed in the songs of Ethna Carberry.

Their words are not the hysterical utterance of a people uncertain of their unity or doubtful of their future. They express the Indian recognition of the Motherland, their quiet but profound assurance of her greatness and beauty, and their consciousness of the high calling which is hers. They voice the hope of an INDIAN NATION, which shall not be disappointed.