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'India and Europe: A Mutual Rediscovery'

by

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Sixty years ago, Jawaharlal Nehru published his landmark 'Discovery of India', which was a fascinating attempt to explain the relationship between India and the rest of the world, over the ages. Simultaneously, he defined for the world what he understood to be the core and the essence of India. Today, in the context of a changing global matrix, we witness what may be termed a Rediscovery of India, in Europe as elsewhere in the world. As Europe looks at India in new ways, India in turn reassesses its past relationships and looks to Europe for thinking the present differently, for visualising the future differently.

On the cultural plane, India recognises in Europe an old partner in a continuing dialogue spanning centuries, in which there are many points of convergence in terms of shared values and concerns as well as significant ruptures. The experience of colonisation weighs heavily in the balance, and brings in its wake its own share of distorting mirrors.

The problems of a multilingual and multicultural polity of continental dimensions are challenging indeed, and here too we have perhaps something to gain from looking at our two initiatives in which multiple identities coexist in a single polity, or attempt to do so. The goal in both cases is to attain the minimum degree of uniformity necessary to achieve and preserve the union, without sacrificing in any way the richness of the pluralism and diversity which are precious facets of our civilizational heritage.

What does Europe represent for India? Among other things, it represents a different tradition of conceptualising the social, in terms of solidarity, equity and justice. Arising from these concepts are distinct conceptions of the role of the State, and the notion of public service. This is particularly valuable in a global context increasingly in search of market - supporting political structures. In this context, the European tradition of the State as a protector and promoter of the public good has perhaps not lost its relevance. It offers an alternative vision of economic growth with social cohesion in which the public sphere and the public good are strong values.

The rediscovery of Europe for India began soon after decolonisation and brought with it surprises of different kinds. Europe had previously been seen almost exclusively through the prism of the English language and, more importantly, through English eyes. Reputations of other European nations arrived on Indian shores much before they themselves actually landed in independent India. This was largely through the writings of English authors, through a carefully cultivated pathway which reflected the tangled relationships and historical animosities between European nations. On the other hand, India, which had engaged the attention of serious European scholars in the early 20th century, slowly slipped off the radar of scholarly concern and drowned in a sea of clichés. Europe ceased to grapple with the richness of the Indian cultural heritage and succumbed to the facility of ready-made characterisations.

In the realm of sharing experiences and perceptions, the European and Indian Unions are uniquely placed, in a situation which is both peculiar and promising. India has many partners in Europe, but does not as yet have Europe as a significant partner. From the vantage point of Brussels, the laboratory of European construction, one can identify at least three areas in the political sphere where joint reflection could be mutually rewarding:

- Whereas Europe has successfully negotiated a common market and subsequently an economic union, India has yet to achieve the goal of a seamless common market. On the other hand, a political union was crafted in India sixty years ago that enables it to stand tall amongst the world's robust democracies, a vibrant yet diverse polity.
- The distribution of powers and finances, of functions and functionaries, is a challenging task in any union with multiple levels of government. Weaving together a range of diversities is an exercise which demands innovative political leadership. A look at the techniques and best practices in this area can be rewarding.
- Finally, the problem of regional disparities arising from inequalities in resource endowment and pace of development is a source of discontent in most asymmetrical unions. Here too, the experience with special status arrangements and differential treatment could be shared to mutual benefit.

Mutual knowledge is thus also mutual rediscovery, and the transcultural methodology of reciprocal knowledge through the examination of key concepts and the focus on key questions is most aptly suited as a tool for this rediscovery. Many questions arise in the mind of Indians engaged in this exercise of rediscovery. Two key questions that could trigger this mutual rediscovery are:

- (a) What do Indians and Europeans look for in each other?
- (b) How do India and Europe recognise and relate to each other?

However, these questions need to be rooted in the context of our overarching concerns, of order and disorder, and the interrelated concept of harmony, as an alternative to disharmony, even clash.

In a world where differences are easily demonised for narrow political gain and the forces of homogenising authoritarianism represent an ever present danger, this exercise in mutual rediscovery can take us through a fascinating journey through different disciplinary landscapes.

Order and Disorder: Some Preliminary Thoughts

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01. The overarching theme of Order and Disorder is particularly promising. The Greek City-State was one of the earliest attempts to order this relationship. The establishment of an ordered polis has been at the core of the preoccupations of political thinkers right from Plato and Aristotle. Demos represented the potential for disorder if not integrated in the polis in an orderly manner. The grant of right to space and voice in the polis was partially guided by the need to insulate it from those with a potential for injecting disorder in the polis. The fear of disorder was thus a core concern and the polity opened up progressively to new elements and segments of the demos when it was confident that it could absorb their potential for disorder. In other contexts, revolutions forced the pace.

02. The relationship between polis and power is umbilical. Political power in the ancient world used a variety of methods to organize the relationship between polis and demos. Political counsel invariably had two components: how to deal with stakeholders in the power structure of the polis, and how to treat the demos (the *praja*). The relationship between *raja* and *praja*, between the established order and the populace, is thus central to the concerns of political philosophy, and the history of political ideas bears testimony to this perennial concern.

03. The defence of the established order, or the order as established by law in systems which recognize the supremacy of the rule of law, is considered a legitimate concern of the polity, to ensure order in the polis. Thus the political constitution of modern states has invariably an underlying concern for the defence of the sovereignty and integrity of the state. This justifies in law the maintenance and utilization of the coercive apparatus of the state, as also laws for the protection of official secrets, the use of intelligence apparatus for maintenance of internal security and similar restrictions covered under the omnibus and ubiquitous 'Raison d'Etat'. National Security is, in India for example, a primary concern justifying emergency and exceptional powers.

04. Underlying the values enshrined in the political constitution is a set of values which regulate the economic activity of the demos, and very often these values are at variance with the norms and standards for the polis. Thus the values of the market economy, which, for example, consider perfectly normal and legitimate the inheritance of economic power, or the right to secrecy of corporations in the planning and execution of their schemes, are not the same as those considered normal for the polity, namely equal opportunity, transparency, accountability to the people. The accountability norms of corporations make them answerable only to their share-holders, whereas accountability in the polis is to the demos at large.

05. The existence of distinctive identities in the polis gives rise to the need to accommodate the varying and often competing claims of different *demoi*, distinct peoples who compose the polis, who keep their distinctive identities while being integrated in a single polity. A federal polity is thus a composite entity which recognizes the right to self rule of different *demoi*, while encompassing them in an order which enjoins on them a system of shared sovereignties. This combination of self-rule and shared-rule, which is the essence of a federal arrangement and at the core of the federal principle, conceives of an order in which power is dispersed.

06. The dispersal of power is seen all too often as a source of potential threat to the unity and integrity of the polity. Thus the federal principle is often feared because of its inherent potential for disorder. In the debate on the ordering of India's polity after independence from colonial rule, the federal idea was resisted by an influential segment because they feared the disorder that this idea may bring about. They cited the history of India, which was replete with examples of empires which had risen and then fallen due to the emergence of centrifugal forces. Thus the requirements of maintaining order and preventing disorder were carefully weighed and balanced before a federal arrangement with a strong Union was created.

07. Finally, the relationship between the polis and the market has always been problematic. One of the primary functions of the polity was seen as providing an orderly framework for the conduct of trade and commerce. The relationship between states and markets has evolved over time and the extent to which the market enjoyed freedom has varied from regime to regime. From total regulation to mixed economy models, the political constitutions of states have always found space for structuring the market, notably with reference to one of its essential components, namely the right to property. Thus in India, this right was initially a fundamental right in the constitution, but was subsequently shifted out of that chapter and made an ordinary right. Today, polities are often classified in terms of whether they are market-friendly or not. The extent to which the order the market seeks to establish, where economic might is right and the survival of the fittest is the norm, is compatible with the ideals of the political order, of equality and social justice, is becoming a matter of growing relevance in the relationship of the demos to a polis which must weigh its friendliness to the market with its commitment to social cohesion and justice.

Summary Curriculum Vitae of
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Professor Balveer Arora joined the Jawaharlal Nehru University in 1973 and is currently Professor of Government and Politics at the Centre for Political Studies in the School of Social Sciences. He is a former Rector and Pro Vice - Chancellor of the University (2002-05) and was earlier Chairperson of the Centre for Political Studies. He has also been Honorary Director of the Northern Regional Centre of the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR)

Born at Lahore on 4th August 1945, Professor Arora has had a distinguished academic and research career spanning four decades. Having graduated in 1964 with honours in History from St. Stephen's College, University of Delhi, he pursued his higher studies in Paris, France, where he obtained an Advanced Degree in French Language and Civilisation Studies from the Sorbonne, Paris and a Masters degree in Politics, Sociology and Public Law from the Institute of Political Studies, (Sciences-Po) University of Paris. He was awarded a French Government Research Fellowship and conferred a Doctorate in Political Science by the University of Paris I Pantheon - Sorbonne in 1972.

His current appointments and affiliations include:

- Chairman of the ICSSR Fifth Review Committee on research institutions in South India.
- Member of the Consultative Group on Intergovernmental Relations, Inter-State Council, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India and Theme Coordinator for the Fourth International Conference on Federalism (New Delhi 2007).
- Member of the Indo-French Forum, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.
- Member of the Steering Committee and the Scientific Council of the *Institut International Transculturata*, Paris.
- Member of the Academic Council and of the University Court of Jawaharlal Nehru University.
- Member of the Governing Council of the *Alliance Francaise de Delhi* and of the Monitoring Committee for French Research Institutes in India, the *Centre de Sciences Humaines* (CSH) New Delhi and the *Institut Francais de Pondicherry* (IFP), Pondicherry.
- Member of the Board of Management of the Academy of Third World Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia University, New Delhi
- Coordinator of the UGC Special Assistance Programme at the Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University

Dr. Arora has published extensively on Indian government and politics, especially on India's federal democracy, its party system and Union-State relations. He has notably co-authored *Transforming India: Socio-Political*

Dynamics of a Democracy; The Changing Role of the All-India Services; Multiple Identities in a Single State: Indian Federalism in Comparative Perspective, and Federalism in India: Origins and Development.

Professor Arora has travelled widely during the course of his rich and varied career as an academic and educationist. He has been invited to deliver lectures and make seminar presentations at several prestigious universities and institutions in India as well as in France, UK, USA, Canada, USSR, Italy, Belgium, Netherlands, Egypt, Sri Lanka, Japan and Thailand. He has been a Visiting Professor / Fellow at the Maison des Sciences de l' Homme, Paris, *Institut d' Etudes Politiques*, Sciences - Po, Paris and the University of Pennsylvania Centre for the Advanced Study of India (CASI), Philadelphia (USA).

He is a member of the editorial board of several academic journals and publications including the *Indian Journal of Federal Studies* (Jamia Hamdard, New Delhi), *International Relations in a Globalising World* (Sage, New Delhi/Colombo) and *Transcontinentales* (Armand Colin, Paris). He is on the guest faculty panel of the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration, Mussoorie; the Foreign Service Institute, Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi; the Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi. He is also a member of the UGC Expert Committees on Political Science and Public Administration and the Academic Committee of the National Defence Academy, Khadakwasla. He is on the panel of experts on current affairs of All India Radio and several news papers / agencies.

In recognition of his outstanding academic achievements, Professor Arora was conferred the title of *Officier* in the Order of the *Palmes Academiques* in 2003 by the Government of the French Republic.

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