

India: antique or archaic?

For decades and years, people all over have been celebrating India's varied and motley culture, singing and learning and drawing from the country's rich musical legacy, or the graceful, fierce dance hereditaments that have survived the test of time and still set the mind of the spectator reeling. And who can forget the majesty of the Taj Mahal once they have witnessed it? Or the grandeur of the Umaid Bhawan Palace in Jodhpur, showcasing such Indian royalty that even Windsor Castle can't match. Many wish they were born into a country so diverse that the language changes every hundred miles. But what about those who were? Here's an insight into India as seen by the young Indian.

We always like to put our best foot forward, don't we? When someone calls ahead of their arrival, we hurriedly polish the house as best we can: smoothing out bed covers, straightening cushions, placing scattered objects back in their proper places, and just dumping into any empty cupboard that which doesn't have a place to call its own. We like to look presentable. The guest arrives, and praises the immaculate beauty of the house. Does he know, perhaps, that the mahogany doors of that majestic closet also lock with them what we don't want him to see, to know of? Things we believe mar the pristineness of our place, yet we can't come to discard them because we deem them necessary.

So, does the India-impressed Italian Mr. Sieve know what we stow away when he comes to visit us? Does he know that we still believe our women should rather stay home than work her magic outside, lest she shine brighter than her brother, or her husband? Oh yes, we like to curb competition. Does he know our families choose our partners for us, because after all they are the ones who have to live with them for the next fifty years? I think not. In that case, it is my duty as an informed citizen to help him understand our country better.

Mr. Sieve, We like to point and scowl at couples holding hands or laughing merrily over brunch, because of course love and happiness are shameful emotions to exhibit; road rage and street fights? Now that's something to behold. Hate and anger! That's what we need more of in the world. We also love pelting stones on new, superfast, engineless trains, because how can our country run ahead of times and leave us behind? We'll just drag it back down and force it to walk at our leisurely pace since we don't feel like running right now. The government also gave us public toilets, though we can't understand why – isn't peeing in the open a marvelous feat? And, Mr. Sieve, did you know we've got a right to freedom of speech and expression in our 232-page constitution, and we like to exercise it time and again by chanting anti-national slogans – the best part is that our political leaders like to join in on the fun too! You must admit, there's no faster way into politics than starting a heated debate all over the nation and having a case filed against you as a bonus.

But you must not think badly of us at all, Mr. Sieve! We're good people essentially. We do what we do because we're dispirited, despondent, dejected people who believe the world will always push us back into dismal darkness because we never had the strength to get up again, and so we teach the next generation not to dream big, so that they won't have to feel disheartened when they fail. We also believe science is the next big thing, because that's how it was fifty years ago, and times have

hardly changed. Out of mediocrity but security and excellence but uncertainty, we chose the former because excellence is for the excellent, and that's never been us.

It's out of goodwill that we do this, though, sir – we're not against joy and excitement and passion; we just avoid sadness by not being happy at all! That's an effective remedy as it's better to be neutral than be unhappy. We also love our traditions and our respect in society so much that it often overshadows our love for dear ones. Not the cultural traditions, though, that is for artists; the family and household traditions, that's what matters to us common folks. Isn't societal acceptance more important than our own? For us, love is an appropriate trade-off for respect, Mr. Sieve, and we value our priorities. We often think about change, but that's so difficult – we like to do easy. We're sure our forefathers wouldn't have wanted us to change their ways, though they never said anything about that matter – we just know.

But – oh! Mr. Sieve just walked away. Maybe he had an appointment, though I don't understand why he was shaking his head and looked horrified. I think I gave him a pretty fine description of my country, and he did look amazed. To be honest, I didn't expect him to. I may have given him an accurate portrayal, but not one I agree with. I talked to him on behalf of the majority of my fellow countrymen, but I couldn't give him my personal opinion.

I told him what I'd learned, experienced and observed. I had always been proud of the ancient wisdom that has guided us throughout history, though I realized that times change and no wisdom can outlast it. Antique has become archaic: there's a thin line of distinction between them. We need to keep up, we need to change. We're actually very fond of institutions we've established, and the foundations are deep. In the act of conservation of our heritage, we became conservatives before we even realized it. I'm glad to say, though, that times have opened our eyes to this fact, and gradually there has come a change in how we look at life and this new world. I hope it only grows!

I believe it will, because I, and others of my generation, don't like describing our country this way, nor do we like putting details in the hidey-hole. So, we're going to change it – we've decided to call ourselves the new Indians, ready to propel forward into the future, hopefully, a new India.

Arnav Raman
