

What does it really mean to be Indian, Times of India, 17 October 2017



There is, now more than ever, a need for Indians to reflect on their identity and redefine themselves instead of continuing to emulate only western thoughts and behaviours. Indian languages, literature, spiritual and cultural heritage are all second to none. Indian heritage is indeed a strong confluence of Hindu, Islamic, Buddhist, Zoroastrian and many other thoughts. Even though our heritage is a rich mix, we cannot ignore the fact that the roots of our spirituality come from refined philosophical thoughts we have inherited, mostly from Vedic traditions.

Advaita philosophy, through its rigorous inquiry into reality, shows that all that is here is one. Everything that we see in this creation is manifestation of one reality which appears in different names and forms. What is known as 'Hindu' culture is deeply rooted in the Vedic vision of oneness which makes us revere rivers, Sun, Moon, trees, animals and accept people of all the different faiths and cultures.

The loss of knowledge of our spiritual and cultural heritage originating from Vedas, in the name of secularism, has resulted in intolerance, and spread of narrow views that have increased division and dissatisfaction amongst different ethnic and religious groups within the country. Most intellectuals seem to think that Hindu identity needs to be curbed in order for India to move forward. Whereas, proponents of Hindutva, in their desperate attempt to save Hindu culture, are spreading the message of hatred that actually does not represent the true, all-encompassing nature of Hinduism.

In my view, both the intelligentsia and proponents of Hindutva need to revisit their beliefs. The answer lies in reviving our Vedic spiritual heritage, inherent in which is the vision of oneness. Reviving such thoughts, taking ownership and acknowledging their profundity would naturally lead to tolerance and celebration of diversity. India has the potential of being a thought leader and change-maker, who shows the world that there is one country and culture in which people of different religions, cultures, languages and customs can live in harmony, because of its underlying philosophical and cultural values.

For this to materialise, we need a new set of intelligentsia who build a new identity of Indians based on acknowledging inherent depth and profundity of Indian thoughts and traditions which include Vedic vision. Only when persons of high calibre put forward refined thoughts to demonstrate the value of Indian literature, music, philosophy and culture, can India get free of decades of conditioning that makes some of us believe in only western superiority, which makes us curb any expression of pride in our heritage.

India is at a crossroads. We can use our creativity and reshape our identity based on deep strengths of our traditions and thoughts that promote tolerance and acceptance. If we don't, we would continue embracing alien cultures and values only, while rejecting everything Indian as being orthodox and superstitious.

I believe, that Vedic spiritual heritage has its intrinsic value. If we don't recognise and own up its value, it will eventually come back to us via the west, as has happened in the case of yoga and Ayurveda. Sanskrit is being taught in some European schools and meditation is being practised in some top Silicon Valley companies, whereas introducing these practices could be opposed by the Indian intelligentsia as being expressions of 'Hindutva'!