Shri Ram, Indian history and the principles of a world order

Praveen Kumar*

Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, the 19th-century Indian thinker, believed that a nation 'existed in its history'. It is our history that instills a sense of realisation in our values, culture, passions, and aspirations. Our self-awareness and self-realisation are due to our history. A nation that is denied its hi7uuustory is denied the cap7uuacity tuuuu77uuu77uuuu7uuuuuuupo make choices. History is about the recouuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu77uuu7uu7yuuiyuuuuuuuu7u7j7uuu7uuu7yuuuuuu7uuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu7uuuuuu7uuuuuuuuuuu7u7uu7juuuuu7uu7uuuuuuuuuuuuurds of tuuuuuuu7uuuu7uuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu77uuuuubu7uuyuuu7uuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu7uuuuuuuuuuuuuyuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu7uuuuuuuuuuuu7uuuuuuu7uuuuuuuuuuuuuhe achievements of a nation. The achievements that are made despite the sufferings, hardships, and conflicts in the life of the nation. Thus, history is not simply about the joyous and comfortable periods in the progress of a nation. Also, a nation muuuuuuay have its own traditions for keeping its history. India's history, for instance, in its earliest times, was preserved through its oral traditions. History did not mean simply celebrating landmark developments in the process; it was understood as a sensible project that should be handled with the utmost care. This was because the generations to come would not inherit the chronology of events alone, but the whole value system that gradually evolved with time. Hence, along with the emphasis on oral tradition, the Indian system understood that the beholder of knowledge should also be the most suitable one to hold that knowledge. Thus, the Itihas, or 'thus it happened' are enshrined in treatises like the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and various Puranas, among others. Things started coming in written form only with the changes in time and the larger emphasis that the knowledge system should only be democratised because those who really knew were not at the same time the most honest ones, and the knowledge that they claimed to hold was not only distorted but also used for partisan purposes.India has given people personalities that symbolise history. They happen to be the central figures in the collective psyche of the people. Around them, history is constructed, and people identify them as the symbol of the former's identity. Shri Ram, or Lord Rama, is one such central figure in Indian history. The personality of Lord Rama brings to the Indian psyche an ideal person, who is the ideal son, ideal brother, ideal husband, and, above all, an ideal king or ruler. While the personality of Lord Rama represents the ideals, it was indeed a reality because he lived those ideals. The closer we come to our ideals, the more real they are. Thus, Lord Rama has lived in the Indian collective consciousness as a symbol of that era in Indian history when the Rajya or Polity did not require any coercive intervention of the state. It was a perfect example of just ordering, where one got what was due. In addition, the ruler was sensible towards people's sentiments and opinions. Thus, this was a value-based system where people were concerned with their duties, performed their roles for which they were the most suitable, and enjoyed the amenities provided by the state. The governance was not ruler-centric but people-centric. The king, on the other hand, was obligated to maintain the

conditions for a just and peaceful order. This idea or concept of just order, or what the Indian system calls Dharma-based order, was not confined to domestic affairs alone. The King, in fact, followed this ideal in dealings with his contemporary states as well.The larger goal of politics was only ethical, where the people, while satisfying their material desires, never looked at the same as the sole objective of life. This helped the people follow an order where, beyond living, they always looked at life after. This was precisely the reason that a Dharma-based order would have little space for conflict and a sense of hierarchical superiority. The knowledge shall reign supreme, but that was not for the purpose of creating class hegemony or dominance, but to create an order where everyone shall have a role, and everyone's role shall be deemed to be significant, too. Meaning, even the class engaged in manual labour shall be seen to be performing a role, and the role per se that the person was performing shall not make the person inferior or his functions would not be a source of his discrimination or exploitation in society.If one looks at contemporary world politics in its historical context, then it would be realised that world history has witnessed conflicts throughout in some form or another. Conflicts in world politics have largely happened due to differences rooted in conflicting ideals. The world order that the global north, or the so-called developed nations of the world, intended to create was largely exploitative and discriminatory. That aimed at creating a hierarchy of cultures or civilisations where some claimed to be superior to others. This is clearly visible in the approach of western nations, or even China, for instance, towards the problem of global climate change. The effects of global climate change leading to global warming and rising sea levels, shrinking of ice cover, decreasing forest cover across the world, among others, are going to affect the world community as a whole. However, here, too, nations bring in their differences, blaming others for the problem and not realising that the whole earth has one shared future. This can be better explained by looking at their collective psyche, whereby their approach is always influenced by the image of the other. India's approach in its place shall be to prescribe a Dharma-based order wherein the larger guiding principle shall be the Upanishadic ideal of वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्, that is, one earth, one family, and one future. The latter was also the theme that was prescribed by the Indian Prime Minister, Mr. Narendra Modi, while India was assuming the presidency of the G-20. The moto is very clear in its spirit and intent. This does not see the world as divided but affirms that the whole earth is a family and there is one shared future, whatever one's national identity may be.This is significant because India, as a rising power and largely now seen in the leadership role in world affairs, has not taken an arrogant stand but only prescribed what the Indian Dharma shall teach. The Indian position underlines very clearly that the future goal of the world community is sustainable development, but that is enshrined in Indian culture and traditions. Thus, if one looks at the value system inherited from the past, the larger take for the world is that our role should be to realise the ideal of sustainable development as one family. In conclusion, we can concur with the Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. Antonio Guterres, who remarked that the ideal of one earth, one family, and one future should not be taken only as a fabulous idea but as a principle that the world should endeavour to realise.

***Dr. Praveen Kumar is Associate Professor at the Department of Political Studies, Central University of South Bihar, Gaya.**