Editor's Note

Revitalising India's Knowledge System

There is a new awakening in the nation today about the need to rediscover and nurture India's rich intellectual and cultural heritage. This is not about the past but the present and preparing for the future. Amidst the ongoing Westernisation of the urban elites that began under the British and has continued through the post-Independence years, an increasing urge among segments of the literati and a new generation of political elites is discernible to build an authentic national identity rooted in heritage, and knowledge about the nation's civilisational identity. There is a recognition that an increasingly globally connected Indian youth needs an alternative cosmopolitan identity rooted in our languages, culture and high civilisational values even as we remain connected to the outside world in work, exchange of ideas, knowledge creation, technology and commerce. Indeed the expanding access to global cultures and values through the social media and internet necessitates deeper awareness of the nation's historical evolution, intellectual and philosophical traditions, and the people's aspirations and needs.

Construction of a new 'Bharat-India' identity that is nationally rooted but has an internationalist vision, necessitates the recognition that India is a unique civilisational state and that our languages, cultural practices, knowledge systems, philosophies, world views shaped over many millennia have immense contemporary cultural, intellectual and political value that needs nurturing. The systematic attempt by the British colonial rulers — since Macaulay's 1835 Minutes on Education —to transplant Western linguistic, cultural, philosophical, scientific and social systems to India and create a new class of people 'English in taste and thought' had a deep impact on India that are still relevant. Spurious theories of Aryan invasion were invented to divide India civilisationally between the so-called 'Dravidians' and 'Aryans', and credit the so called 'foreign Aryans'—the Indo-Europeans— with the Vedic cultural achievements. These ideas are still perpetuated in text books and have been given racial identity twists by Western and left-liberal scholars in the country. These interpretations and ideological perspectives have become potent political instruments of divisive mobilisation in contemporary India.

The spread of Westernisation has taken new forms with globalisation. The deepening economic and corporate contacts with the West, the pull of employment, and the significant influence of left-liberal values among the English speaking elites in recent decades, are among the visible effects. The ties with the West are important in multiple ways— strategic, diplomatic, economic, technological, diaspora. But they also throw up complex challenges. Among them are the onslaughts on culture and values, political ideologies and political parties, along with a steady loss of scientific talent, especially to the US, as a result of globalisation and migration. Western and Indian left-liberal narratives and academic theories on Indian history, society, democracy, and economy are increasingly aligned. They are deeply ideological, partisan and problematic, and often designed to advance specific political and ideological interests. There is a marked antipathy in such narratives towards nationalism and even democratically elected nationalist governments, whom they constantly seek to embarrass and undermine. The anti-Hindu ill-informed caste campaigns by Western academia, media and social media have global reach, and shape their negative assessment of democracy and human rights in India. Many see these as unacceptable and of deep concern, which demand a proper national response.

Need for a National Response

The securing of India's political and cultural identity, and interests, however, need a much broader and deeper national response. That's because the West's influence on India runs across many fields —education, medicine, culture, lifestyle, media and social media, entertainment, political ideologies, industrial and economic models, the legal and social systems, NGOs, religion and values. An appropriate response would mean revamping them—specifically, the knowledge system and ideas that underpin them and shape minds, perspectives, narratives, cultures, values and education policies. The traditional Indian knowledge system was disrupted and relegated to a corner under British rule. This did not change significantly in the post-Independence phase. As India laid the framework of its new Constitution and a democratic state, the government's principal focus was to meet immediate needs and overcome the enormous internal problems in a nation severely weakened and ravaged by British colonialism. British rule, and the Partition of the country it crafted, had rendered the nation weak, conflicted, with millions of refugees, a war, and short of resources to meet multiple needs—of mass education, industrialisation, welfare of the poor and building the institutional

structures of a modern democracy. It also needed to engage the world in a meaningful, constructive manner so as to ensure peace necessary for development, and raise necessary finances and technology for industrialisation. The tasks of national awakening and rebuilding the knowledge system in tune with India's rich cultural heritage, scientific and educational traditions, were kept aside as the country set about to rebuild itself. The national educational system was left in the hands of Western trained liberal and Marxist scholars critical of a nationalist narrative. Many of the institutions, systems, laws, and approaches of the colonial period, were retained so as to avoid international and domestic criticisms. The British legacy in education, laws, and a liberal-left ideology remained entrenched among the ruling elites.

Much has changed since then. In the post-Cold War phase, India's engagement with the world has expanded. The country has grown. It is now a major world economy and an influential power. Simultaneously, the economic, political and security challenges have become more complex. As India moves to become the third largest economy in the world over the next few years, there is a growing need for policy changes to bring about national rejuvenation, build a stronger, advanced and confident country rooted in its culture and civilisation.

The Legacy of Bharat's Knowledge System

Knowledge and understanding of the nation's historical foundations, achievements and challenges are essential for further advancement. The new identity formation requires the people to know and understand who they are; what were the profound ideas that have led to our advancement; who were the great thinkers and leaders; what were the rationale for their religio-cultural and social practices, rituals and traditions. They also need to know the social, intellectual, and political systems in which the civilisation evolved. There is also a need for greater clarity on social structures and practices that later deformed, causing harm and divisions— such as the Varna and Jaati systems, the designation of high and low, untouchability, etc. The youth need more information and better understanding of the reasons for India's inability to resist the terrible onslaughts by Central Asian and British invaders. For a civilisation which gave birth to pioneering philosophical and scientific discoveries from ancient times, profound grand ideas, and enlightened rulers and empires, the historical setbacks, lack of united action against foreign invasions, the politico-military weaknesses to confront the colonial

forces remain inexplicable. Close observation of nature and the universe, and deep thinking on all aspects of life have characterised India's distinct civilisational identity. However, the failure to secure the land and the people against foreign hordes from the l3th to the 19th century indicates a significant political and strategic weakness that needs to be understood so that it is never repeated again.

The recognition of India's great intellectual and material achievements till the imperial onslaught in the 18th century and its continuation even under foreign rule, is essential for the rise of a new civilisational consciousness in the country. It is akin to a Second Awakening. The first began in the 19th century as a reaction to British colonial expansion, plunder, exploitation and divide-and-rule policy that had turned the world's largest and wealthiest economy to a poor and famine stricken nation, and enslaved its people. It was an assertion of national pride against the denigration of Indian culture and civilisational achievements, and the attempt to trample all honour and national pride. The war for Independence by the Princely states in 1857 did not finally succeed. But it was followed by the intellectual, cultural and political renaissance pioneered by towering figures such as Tagore, Vivekananda, Tilak, Gandhi, Subhash Chandra Bose, Sardar Patel and many great nationalist writers, scientists, historians, reformers and artistes, among others. They laid the foundations of the national awakening, the Swadeshi movement and Independence from British colonial rule in 1947. The call for freedom was made possible by the awakening of the people to their past glory, the nation's rich and ancient history, and its enormous contributions to the progress of the world and its pool of knowledge. This rediscovery of the past was essential for building a nation confident of its history, extraordinary achievements, and contributions to human knowledge. For a people repeatedly ravaged by foreign invaders since the late 12th century, nationalism, unity and pride were essential to recover their honour, overthrow foreign rule and take up the task of national rejuvenation and reconstruction.

Despite the destructions as a result of invasions, over 10 million ancient manuscripts—more than all the other civilisations put together —survived and constitute the largest body of knowledge from ancient times available to the world, according to eminent scholar Kapil Kapur. Indian seers and sages were the pioneers in astronomy, the invention of the numerals and zero, all branches of mathematics, metallurgy, surgery, Ayurveda, meditation and Yoga. They wrote the world's first manuscript on philosophy—

the *Rig Veda*, followed by three other Vedas, the *Upanishads* and the *Gita*, the epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, the first book on music and dance —the *Natyashastra*, the first treatise on political economy, statecraft and strategy—the *Arthashastra*, the first treatises on medicine and surgery, and many others. The sage Panini codified the first grammar and the principles of Sanskrit grammar deeply influenced many other languages and grammar, including those of Europe.

Moreover, though severely disrupted by invasions from Central and Western Asia that caused the destruction of the largest centres of learning and Universities of ancient India, such as Takshasheela, Nalanda, Vikramsheela, thousands of Gurukulas across villages and towns continued to teach the Vedas, Upanishads, philosophy, science, mathematics, the epics, and Indian art and culture in Sanskrit and the local languages. Till the 1820s literacy in India in the vernacular and in Sanskrit was widespread. There were more literates and educated in India than in Britain, according to British records, as a result of the access students of all jaatis had to the Gurukulas. The 11th to 14th century was a period of major works on mathematics despite the invasions and destructions.

A New Knowledge System

The 2020 decision to implement a New Education Policy (NEP), is, therefore, a historic step—an essential step to bury the legacy of Macaulay. Under it, school education to all children would finally be in the mother tongue, i.e., the 22 recognised provincial languages, with Hindi and English as the additional compulsory languages. This marks a significant break with the past when English played a major role as the medium of instruction at the school and University levels. English had immense influence on India's culture, history, identity, and in perpetuating elite dominance. The NEP seeks to democratise the system, reach quality education to all, and reorient it towards the nation's needs. The introduction of studies on Indian Knowledge Systems in schools and Universities, in time, will ensure the youth becomes conscious and rooted in India's cultural traditions, languages, philosophical and scientific achievements, its rich literature and ideas so that they can confidently face the world and shape their future.

The new political awareness, the emerging intellectual discourse that questions established interpretations and perspectives with new information and knowledge, and the NEP have the potential to harbinger a new Indian renaissance. In an increasingly

interconnected and yet fragmented world, this reawakening is essential if India is to find its rightful place.

In This Issue

The essays, articles and reviews in this issue of the journal explore the different dimensions of India's traditional knowledge system—Ayurveda and Education and their contemporary relevance, the 19th century debate on ethics between Christian Missionaries and Vivekananda, India's contributions to world civilisation, and Sanskrit and Science.

Ayurvedic physician Prasad M in his lead essay explains why Ayurveda is becoming the most valued traditional system of medicine in the world today. He elucidates the basic principles of Ayurveda, its various branches, and its value system that highlights a holistic lifestyle. The essay is a significant introductory guide to the world of Ayurveda.

In keeping with her past incisive analysis of the Big Tech sector, Devsena Mishra in her essay explores the debate around Data, Privacy, and Protection. She emphasises the serious problems that India faces because of the control over data exercised by the large Western tech companies, including the influence they have over regulations. She argues that when it comes to the Virtual World, the Bharatiya approach is starkly different from the Western. Hence, the coming Indian techade, when technology is being designed to serve humanity and human welfare, is critical not just for the country but for the global good.

T. V. Muralivallabhan in his thoughtful article underlines the significance of the holistic model of traditional education in India and its significance for today's educational systems in the world. He argues that ancient India was the mother of many branches of knowledge because the social system that existed was helpful in attaining information, knowledge, wisdom and enlightenment. The four stages of life and four levels of education, in Indian conception, were interconnected to frame a sustainable social system. Secular scientific and spiritual education in India were holistic and multi-disciplinary in nature. Contemporary problems, he argues, can be mitigated by using the spirit of the ancient Indian system. The Western system of education has been able to make life fast and easy with the help of science and technology. However, modern science has kept nature and environment at a distance, while India has always treated humans as a part of nature. India is where spiritual and secular thoughts simultaneously

flourished without any clash or frictions. Science and spirituality in this culture were regarded as the two sides of the coin of Truth— of the intrinsic oneness of the universe.

Scholar Harshvardhan Tripathy in his article explores the debate over the relative place of social ethics in Hindu dharma and Christianity that took place in the 19th century. He emphasises Swami Vivekananda's vital role in establishing the centrality of social ethics in Indian philosophy, religion and social practices. He describes the 19th-century attacks on Hindu dharma by the colonial elite and Christian missionaries for lacking social ethics and morality, with an understanding that Christianity had an 'inherent and timeless' social ethics and was concerned with the upliftment of the poor. This criticism was extended to those intellectuals, especially Swami Vivekananda, who were engaged on the question of ethics and morality, intending to make Hindu Dharma an agent of social reform. Tripathy dismisses the propaganda that concern for the poor and the marginalised was an 'inherent and timeless' feature of Christianity. He shows that Christianity faced an acute crisis of faith as a result of scientific developments following the industrial revolution that questioned many of its fundamental assumptions on rational grounds. It was in the backdrop of these challenges and to maintain the relevance of Christianity as a social force that the concept of 'Christian Social ethics' began to be developed and articulated in the nineteenth century. The Hindu sages and thinkers on the other hand had a long tradition of dealing with poverty and such other social issues. In the 19th century, Vivekananda and others were deeply engaged with the issues raised by science, just as the Christians were.

Historian Arpita Mitra, writes an excellent review essay on the outstanding set of studies and surveys by eminent historians and Indologists in the abridged new edition of *India's Contribution to World Thought and Culture.* First published on the occasion of the inauguration of the Vivekananda Rock Memorial in Kanyakumari in 1970, the new shorter edition, she says, will be an invaluable resource that would help in reinforcing "our knowledge and understanding about the sphere of influence that India has exerted since time immemorial." Finally, Arvind Gupta reviews the recently published book, *Science in Sanskrit Scriptures*. The book brings to life the numerous discussions and description of scientific themes in Sanskrit texts from ancient times.

Prof. Sujit Dutta
Editor, *National Security*