

Bharat Utsav
By Yuva Sweden
Stockholm
6 April 2024

REMARKS
Ambassador Tanmaya Lal

Thank you for inviting me here today.

I am very impressed by this interesting initiative. It is wonderful to see the young generation showcasing various aspects of Indian culture. They have done good research and it is impressive to see how they have tried to make this exercise interactive using digital tools. This positive outreach should excite curiosity among visitors.

India is no ordinary land. Indian heritage is unique and extraordinary in a global context.

The sheer size of India makes it a sub-continent and the diversity of landscapes is unlike most other places on earth. You have snow-capped peaks of the highest mountain range in the world, 7500 kms long coastline, large desert, tropical forests, a number of rivers and fertile & rich soil.

Nature's bounty has led to a high population density in this region with a unique diversity of flora & fauna and peoples, cultures and languages. This mega diversity is not common in any other part of the world.

Despite this mega diversity there is an intrinsic unity in India.

From pre-historic times, India has been on the route of human migration dating back to 60 thousand years. India itself has been moving! It separated from Gondwanaland a 100 million years ago, travelling north it pressed the Asian plate raising up Himalaya range 50 million years ago.

Some of the oldest rocks in the world and youngest mountain peaks are found in India. For instance, in Odisha or Madhya Pradesh or Karnataka. India is a land of ancient and young rivers. Dinosaurs lived in the Narmada region before they went extinct 65 million years ago.

I was happy to see a poster about Bhimbetka that shows pre-historic rock art dating back to at least 30 thousand years. It is a UNESCO Heritage site and I would recommend a visit to Bhimbetka to all of you.

Ideas, philosophical systems faiths, culture and scientific thought originating in India have had relevance across the globe throughout history.

From earliest examples of meticulous urban planning, water harvesting, waste management, toilets, standardized weights to medieval magnificent temples, stepwells, astronomical observatories. From metallurgy and special wootz steel for swords to strong

tradition of ship-building and maritime trade. An unbroken strong tradition of mathematics, not only the earliest use of zero and decimal system but of calculus and other concepts, astronomy, medicine, surgery all have long traditions in India. Architecture using local materials. Living roots bridges to exquisite sculpture.

Continuing tradition of classical music and dance deeply founded in mathematics, beautiful metaphors representing mythology and sculptures such as Nataraj. Livey folk traditions and festivals closely tied to nature.

I very much liked the display about Indian food. There is a bewildering variety of cuisines that have origins in ancient times but have also evolved absorbing a number of influences. Indians have used millets, the climate smart super-food for centuries. Both rice and wheat traditions exist in India. Today Indian food from various regions in India is becoming ever more popular across the world.

Several global faiths – Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism – have origins in India. Holistic systems such as Yoga and Ayurveda not only remain relevant but are growing in popularity globally.

Indian thought is marked by curiosity, skepticism, openness and a sophistication that is unparalleled. Indians have always tried to understand the nature of self and cosmos. There is a long tradition of debate in India.

Another unique aspect is women deities, saints, thought-leaders and warriors in India.

India has always been an open society. One that has traded with far of lands to its east and west. Embassies were sent to other ancient empires and kingdoms. India has been a sought-after place throughout millennia for its ideas and goods.

Since we are in Sweden, I may mention that Indian coins dating back to 2,000 years from Kushan period have been found near Stockholm in Vallentuna. 1300 years old bronze statuette of Buddha originating from Kashmir was found on an island called Helgö not far from here. Beads from India have been found on a Viking settlement on the island of Birka 1,000 years old. There is an inscription in Sanskrit of a verse from Mahabharata on a rock in Uppsala. This was inscribed 200 years ago by a young scholar who later founded Indology studies at Uppsala University. Spices from India such as Cinnamon and cardamom have defined favorite Swedish dishes for centuries.

Spices, linen and gems from India have been sought-after from ancient times, in fact, spices became the basis from colonial conquest.

Foreign travelers, invaders, traders, missionaries and scholars have all travelled to India from far-off lands and written about their experience.

Much before the prominent Western universities, 1,500 years ago ancient Indian residential universities such as Nalanda and Takshila offered multi-disciplinary studies that attracted scholars from far and wide.

Indian traditions, cultures and architectures travelled to China, Japan, Korea, Thailand, Indonesia, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Afghanistan and Mongolia among other places. Hindu and Buddhist traditions and epics like Ramayana travelled with Indian and foreign scholars. In Thailand, even today the King takes the name after Rama. There is an Ayodhya city in Thailand and in Bali there are daily performances of Ramayana and Mahabharata.

If we look at science, Indian scientists were engaged in cutting edge contemporary research even a hundred years ago and made advances in radio transmission, electricity, waves scattering, mathematics and quantum physics. Leading quantum physicists of the West drew inspiration from ancient Indian texts even a century ago. There were several outstanding Indian scientists. At least one of them Prof. C.V. Raman received Nobel Prize long before India became an independent country although some others may also have been very deserving.

Top western musicians, entrepreneurs travelled to India in search of spiritual advancement.

It was good to see the display about games and sports originating in India, especially Chess and Kabaddi. As you may know, right now 5 out of 16 players contesting in FIDE Candidate Championship in men and women categories are from India.

Today, Indians are known for their expertise in mathematics, computer & IT and now AI & robotics.

Several words from India languages are now commonly used in foreign languages, especially in English. For instance, Karma, Nirvana, Avatar, Guru, Pandit and Catamaran. Buddha, Gandhi and Vivekananda have inspired people across the world.

Indian cinema and cuisine remain popular across continents.

Today, India is also making waves in areas such as space research and exploration. The location where India landed on the Moon recently has been named as Shivashakti Point. Chandrayaan Mission will now be followed by Gaganyaan, human space mission. India remains known for its innovation.

The Indian heritage is certainly unique in so many ways. It is a heritage to be proud of and to build upon, in a spirit of openness and holistic thought.

India has the largest diaspora globally. Indians are present everywhere in the world. A very large percentage of the CEOs of leading global firms are from India. There are an estimated 30 million persons of Indian origin living outside India. Leaders in a number of countries across continents are of Indian origin.

All of you are ambassadors of Bharat. Keep up this good work of building bridges through your outreach both by discovering your own roots, remaining curious and engaging with others.

I compliment you on this wonderful initiative.
