

MARK TULLY: A LOVER OF GOLDEN MEAN AND HINDU MODERATION

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ABSTRACT

Tully writes that forty years of living in India has changed him and his outlook. He states that one of the lessons he has learnt from India is to value humility, avoid thinking in black and white, to be suspicious of certainties, to search for the middle road and to acknowledge that there are many ways to God.

Being a lover of the golden mean and moderation Tully finds the same moderation, balance, harmony, and equilibrium in Indian society and admires it for all these qualities. Since, by disposition he is averse to violent social and political shake ups, he has developed a fondness for the people of India and their culture which regenerates itself after every devastation and this power of constant regeneration will sustain it in future also. I shall discuss Tully's perception of Indian society, his views on Indian way of thinking and living, his disgust of the Western imperialism, all inclusiveness of Hinduism and Indian thought, India's genius for absorption and adaptation, the Indian tendency for maintaining balance, harmony, and equilibrium in this chapter. I shall also try to analyze what he thinks is the guiding principle of Indian society and culture and afterwards I shall enumerate distortions brought into this culture through Western socio-cultural contact as mentioned by Tully in his books.

KEYWORDS: Humility, Regeneration, Hinduism, Imperialism, Absorption, Adaptation, Balance

INTRODUCTION

Tully: More Indian than Most Indians

Sir William Mark Tully is more of a media legend than an individual for most Indians living in the length and width of Indian sub-continent. His incisive and in-depth reportage as the BBC correspondent has had a particular fascination for generations of Indians. His almost native understanding of all the facets of Indian life has earned him great credibility with the ordinary people of this country and given him a unique insight into Indian life rarely found in foreign correspondents. He has often annoyed the state and central governments by his honest and humane coverage and as a result of this he was once expelled from India during the *Emergency* declared by the then Prime Minister of India Ms. Indira Gandhi in 1975. During Tully's tenure in the BBC the people of India trusted its broadcasts more than any other national or international broadcasting agency.

It is relevant to throw light on Tully's early life and his career as a journalist in order to understand how he assimilated *Indianness* and became popular with the people of India. He was born in Calcutta to British parents in 1935 and on his mother's side they were British in India as far back as his great-great-grand father. His father William Scarth Carlisle Tully worked for a managing agency Gillanders Arbuthnot which managed the investment and business interest in India of Britons living in England. His father was a "stern moralist" and was very critical of any hints at "Indianisation" or "going native" (Brenda 17). Tully thinks that his father was from a lower middle class family who always aspired to appear higher in the social scale and "one way that he and others attempted to move up socially was copying the behaviour of the

upper class” (18). In order to improve his social standing Tully’s father also maintained strict social separation from Indians. He was also eager to avoid social contacts of his children with the natives and hired a nanny from England to teach his children. He was sent to England at the age of nine for school and college education. There he attended Twyford School, Hampshire (My Father’s Raj 140) and later on went to Marlborough College. He was a religious man, though not an orthodox person. He also studied Theology at Lincoln Theological College. Soon he felt that his temperament did not suit to the vocation of a priest. “I just knew I could not trust my sexuality to behave as a Christian priest should,” (Walker) he later admitted. He was a big drink too. “And I didn’t want to be a cause of scandal” (Walker), he once admitted. Tully frankly confesses it in *India’s Unending Journey* also where he writes, “although at Lincoln it was sex rather than drink that caused me to doubt my ability to lead the life of a priest” (IUJ 37). He would regularly go to pubs also and as he admits in an interview “one day the bishop told me nicely that he thought my place was more in the pub than in the pulpit” (Tully. Interview by Malachi). He chose History for further studies at Trinity Hall, Cambridge for his BA and MA. He joined the BBC and returned to India in 1965 when he was thirty years old. He has been living in India since then and he feels at home in this country so much so that he appears more Indian than many other Indians. Thus, he can see India as an outsider and as an insider. He has picked up Hindi and speaks this language quite fluently. He can write with authenticity on Indian society, religion, culture, and politics. He has been awarded honours such as Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan by the Indian government. He has chosen to spend the rest of his life in this country and lives in Nizamuddin West in Delhi these days. He loves India for its spirit of moderation, balance, equilibrium and acceptance not only in its religions and philosophies but also in the psyche of the common man here.

A SEEKER OF MIDDLE PATH

Mark Tully is in constant search of a middle path as, for him, goodness consists in the mean between two extremes. It is moderation between deficiency and excess. Aristotle’s doctrine of the golden mean is not only an intellectual conviction for him; it is the very stuff his disposition is made of. His reason and intuition, his mind and heart, his intellect and emotion invariably lead him to moderation. For Aristotle all human virtues are in the middle of two extremes; for example, courage is a mean between foolhardiness and cowardice, modesty is a mean between bashfulness and impudence, liberality is a mean between extravagance and avarice. Tully is not led to the middle path by logic or philosophy. His mental makeup leads him to the middle path naturally and unobtrusively as he instinctively hates all sorts of extremes. He argues that what matters is the truth as people see it, not the truth itself. Whenever he expresses an opinion or makes a statement he is careful to mention with equal force the opposite view also. This is his way of reaching a comprehensive and moderate conclusion. Recognizing the partial truth in both rationalism and mysticism Tully says that we now live in, what too many seems, a rational world, a world it is possible to know and control, a world in which science has ousted the supernatural, in which magic and miracles are not possible. However, he soon begins to argue from the standpoint of mysticism to strike a balance:

What is postmodernism but a revolt against overweening rationalism? Scientific fundamentalists continue to claim they have dealt with God, but are they now anymore intellectually respectable than religious fundamentalists? Spaces are opening up again in which there is a room for the possibility of divine intervention. (India in Slow Motion 178)

In fact Tully does not waver between two extremes; he intuitively finds the middle space and sticks to it. He can observe the partial truth of the two extreme standpoints from his middle space and makes a complete view by choosing

them both. For him the truth of the body and the truth of the soul are of equal importance which neither the ascetic nor the hedonist can fully comprehend. He is a spiritualist and a materialist both. He is guided by reason and intuition at the same time. Regarding the future of mankind he is neither cynical nor unduly optimistic. On the one hand he doesn't approve of a stagnant society and on the other he doesn't like sudden, violent social upheavals overthrowing the whole old order. He hates regimentation and anarchy both. He is neither wholly for doubt nor entirely for the doctrine. He keeps equal distance from the fundamentalist and the radical revolutionist. He does not claim to have captured the truth; he reaches out to it gropingly.

It is natural for a man of his temperament to have distaste for political eruptions and social upheavals. He looks askance at JP's call of total revolution in 1975 and writes, "I have always believed in evolution rather than revolution and J P had certainly not spelt out what he would do with India once he'd swept Indira away" (ISM 217). Psychology and philosophy tell us that the world is the projection of the self. We project our own likes, dislikes, fears, and wishes to the outside reality howsoever objective we may try to be. Being a lover of the golden mean and moderation Tully finds the same moderation, balance, harmony, and equilibrium in Indian society and admires it for all these qualities. Since, by disposition he is averse to violent social and political shake ups, he has developed a fondness for the people of India and their culture as he feels that this society has been going on unruffled and unperturbed by historical catastrophes, overthrows of kingdoms, and falls of empires. It regenerates itself after every devastation and this power of constant regeneration will sustain it in future also. The only thing that has robbed it of this pristine vitality is the British colonial rule in Tully's opinion.

Tully writes that forty years of living in India has changed him and his outlook. He states that one of the lessons he has learnt from India is to value humility, avoid thinking in black and white, to be suspicious of certainties, to search for the middle road and to acknowledge that there are many ways to God. Explaining his idea of humility he writes:

What I have learnt from India might be summed up in that old fashioned word, 'humility'. Acknowledging the role of fate in our lives; accepting that our knowledge will always be limited; seeking to discuss rather than to dogmatise; appreciating that we need always to be examining ourselves if we are to maintain the desired balance – all these acts surely require humility. Humility, like fate, is a dangerous word in times when success is the prevalent religion and celebrities are its gods. (India's Unending Journey 18)

He realizes the importance of acknowledging the role of fate in our lives. Humility follows our belief that we live in a world full of uncertainties and our knowledge will always remain incomplete and partial. Tully believes that Hindus do not think of religious truth in dogmatic terms. The passion for dogmatic certainty has racked the religions of Semitic origin– Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Making fun of the Marxist certainty Tully says that the Western economists have made a 180 degree swing – from the certainty of Marxism as the absolute truth to market economy as the final answer to all questions. This is how, according to Tully, the sense of certainty leads us astray. Tully states:

Some might argue that the arrival of post-modernism has meant that the passion for dogmatic certainty and Descartes' method for discovering absolute certainty have gone out of the window. Post-modernists tell us we live in a world of uncertainty, in which it is accepted that nothing final can be said, no view can go unchallenged and all dogmas are up for grabs. (IUJ 11)

As India, in Tully's opinion, is always seeking balance there is a battle going on between "Western secularists and

those following an extreme and dogmatic form of Hinduism, a form that is quite contrary to Hinduism's traditional dismissive attitude towards dogmatic certainty" (IUJ 12).

UNCERTAINTY OF CERTAINTY

The greatest antidote to violence is conversation according to Tully. He writes, "Conversation is the integral part of the Indian tradition that has influenced me" (IUJ 13). He finds that in India everybody, from a small village to the metropolis of Delhi, is engaged in conversation. Even two strangers waiting for a bus do not take long to get into conversation. Sometimes it appears to him that in government offices conversation is "the only activity going on." Admiring this habit Tully goes on to say that those who are dogmatic and certain that they are right don't feel vulnerable and have no desire to have conversation. Such people have no spirit of give and take. They only want to convince. Since, as human beings, incomplete creatures as we are, we are always groping in the dark, never finding the final answer Tully suggests everybody to keep in mind the Upanishadic phrase *neti neti* i.e. it is not this alone. Tully interprets this word:

To me, the word implies that we should not go to extremes that we can reach conclusions but we should not claim our definition is absolute or final; the door for discussion must remain open but there can be sufficient grounds for taking positions. (IUJ 16)

The Indian tradition has come to imply balance in all physical and mental activities for Tully. This search for balance never ends as we are all like tight rope walkers. He advocates balancing between fate and free will because "we don't choose our parents, we don't even choose to be born." Keeping balance between fate and free will he says that what he has learnt in India is "relevant not only for our personal life but also for humans as a species." This search for balance which he learnt in India had an unsettling effect on him and many of his Christian beliefs were undermined in the process. Referring to certain modifications in his religious beliefs Tully says he "could not understand how, if Jesus was right in saying, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me,' that way was not always clear and that truth not certain" (IUJ 33). Tully writes that these religious certainties began to be suspected by scientists in 1950s. Since no statement is an absolute in Indian religious texts and popular beliefs and all statements are *neti-neti*, religion is never in danger. He writes:

It was India that truly opened my mind, that led me to value experience as well as reason, and that taught me the experience of God is so widespread I need not fear the death of religion. But above all it was India that taught me to see my failures and achievements in context, to value humility, to suspect certainties and to seek for the middle path. (IUJ 38)

In his book *India's Unending Journey* Tully emphatically and repeatedly asserts the liberality and pluralism of the Indian mind and admires the religion that such a mind has developed. Hinduism suits the agnostic traits of his theological concerns. Now, he does not feel threatened when his beliefs are challenged because India has taught him the 'uncertainty of certainty' and he is convinced that science, theology, philosophy or any other discipline does not have the final answers to questions about the meaning of life and the existence of God.

Tully finds fault with the extreme permissiveness and licentiousness in the West regarding sexual behavior in the name of liberating women. In the garb of women's liberation modern commercialism has been exploiting them as sex objects. Advertising is an obvious example of this exploitation. He asks: "for what is using women's bodies to sell goods ranging from cars to bars of soap other than making them into sex objects?" (156). Modern India, in Tully's opinion, has

also been infected with this rampant commercialism. Tully argues that while Western societies always tended to be ruled by one form or other of moral orthodoxy – either the repressive Victorian sexual morality or the modern day licentiousness, in India, on the other hand, “with its long tradition of heterodoxy, different understandings of sexuality have long lived side by side” (158). India has not been without its repressive sexual morality but this is also the country in which the *Kama Sutra* was written. He goes on to say that ancient Indians were concerned with the scientific study of human behavior and in their wisdom they formulated four main aims of life – *dharma* (virtue and the following of religious practices), *artha* (economic prosperity), *kama* (desire, pleasure and love including the erotic), and *moksha* (liberation). Referring to the Hindu tendency of combining the sacred and the sensual Tully writes about the myth of the union of Shiva and Parvati and the killing of Kama. The ability to combine the sacred and the sexual is often mistaken in the West for a license to practice free sex. Thus, the tantric sect of Hinduism is often misunderstood by Westerners. Tully ends the book IUJ with the last chapter “Varanasi: The Unity of Opposites”. He celebrates this destination of Hindu pilgrimage as a symbol of Hindu equilibrium. For Tully, “Varanasi symbolizes balanced life in which worship, work, and pleasure all play a role,” a holy city where God and Mammon are given their due for it is not only a place of pilgrimage but also a commercial centre. Also, “as the city of Shiva it acknowledges the pleasures offered by Kama.” In Varanasi Tully finds much that is essential to living a balanced life in which there is a place for transcendent and the ephemeral both. Despite communal hatred fomented by communal politics in the country Tully meets a Mahant and a Mufti who are calm, rational and positive in the midst of constant propaganda by communal parties to pull down a mosque that stands right next to an important Hindu temple (249).

CONCLUSIONS

In Varanasi Tully feels the marriage of East and West is possible if both are ready to learn from each other. For him “India acknowledges that we can never find absolute answers to the most important questions in life, but we must go on asking them” (IUJ 268).

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