

INDIA UNDERSTOOD IS INDIA LOVED

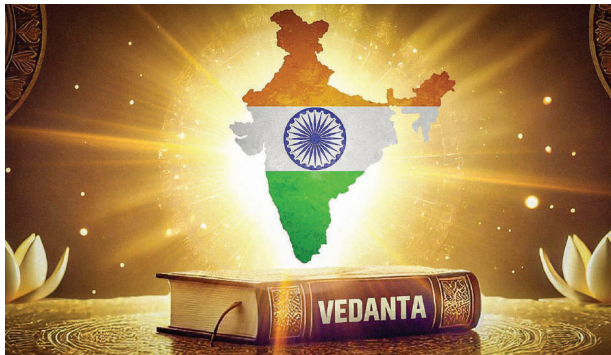


ACHARYA PRASHANT

nations whose unifying threads were as fragile as a shared language, ethnicity, or even food habits. History bears testimony to what happens to such nations. A nation, therefore, is not inherently lovable. We must investigate what lies at the foundation of the Indian nation: does it have something truly worth loving? And if so, have we educated our youth on what India is and what makes it truly lovable?

We must ask: what connects and unites Indians? Is it just political or geographical convenience? India, for many, is just a piece of land, but land can change hands. Cities like Karachi and Dhaka were once part of India. If our idea of India is limited to geographical boundaries, it remains fragile and temporary. Is India merely a territorial or temporal idea, or does something more subtle and timeless bind us together? These are questions we seldom ask. It is far easier to speak highly of India's diversity than to explore the underlying oneness that ties us together. Celebrating diversity is good, but if we are all diverse and different, what enables all of us to collectively call ourselves Indian? Or is being Indian just a label—a thing of convenience or accident of birth?

Without addressing the fundamental questions on the basis of Indian nationhood, how can we expect ourselves and especially the younger generations to have genuine love for the nation? Humans anyway unconsciously seek something to identify with. Even without understanding the roots



To truly love India, we must deeply refine what India means to us. India is not just its culinary culture, or military might, or historical structures. Nor is India merely the colours of Holi or lights of Diwali. India is far greater; India is the wisdom without which all human knowledge remains useless at best, and destructive at worst. India is the understanding of the self that guided humanity towards liberation from bondages within and without.

India is what gave the world its first light of self-knowledge.

of their nation, people will adopt a kind of surface-level patriotism. But shallow patriotism uplifts neither consciousness nor civilisation. We need a deeper appreciation of what it means to be Indian.

Imagine explaining India to someone from another country. How would you communicate what India truly stands for? Beyond its map, its cuisine, or its festivals, what defines India? Many would struggle to find

an answer. Love requires clarity. When someone says, "I love India," they should be able to answer: "What exactly do you love?" For most, India is just a piece of land, a political entity, a boundary on a global map. These are not things one can deeply love. India deserves better.

For something to be deeply lovable, it must have beauty, sacredness, and transcendence. These are qualities we associate with love. For India to inspire true love, it

must be much more than a political entity. It must embody values that are worth loving. And therein lies the problem: most people are unaware of the values that constitute the foundation of the Indian nation. Even more troubling is that these values are rarely presented to us in an accessible nor relatable manner. What makes India genuinely worth loving does very much exist, but it is seldom highlighted.

India is a nation on a foundation of ruthless enquiry, rigorous thought, and deep understanding, best represented in the philosophy of Vedanta. The process of India begins with a bold exploration of the self and the world, and culminates into a truth beyond the mind-material duality. This is not a theoretical ideal but a lived love that has informed India through the ages.

Lack of connection to India's essence explains why so many people often feel a shallow relationship with the nation. For practical purposes, many identify as Indian—they hold Indian passports, wear Indian jerseys, and celebrate Indian festivals. But when asked, "What does it mean to be Indian?", their answers are predictable and disappointing. Culture, languages, history, festivals—these are indeed vibrant aspects of Indian life, but they hardly

represent the deeper essence of the nation. That which is little understood will be little loved.

To truly love India, we must deeply refine what India means to us. India is not just its culinary culture, or military might, or historical structures. Nor is India merely the colors of Holi or lights of Diwali. India is far greater; India is the wisdom without which all human knowledge remains useless at best, and destructive at worst. India is the understanding of the self that guided humanity towards liberation from bondages within and without. India is what gave the world its first light of self-knowledge.

Being Indian is about embodying the values of enquiry, exploration, love, freedom and truth. If you live from your deepest understanding, you are an Indian. Those living shallow, unexamined lives—even within the territory of India—cannot truly aim to represent its spirit. True Indianness is not blind patriotism of the kind that flatters itself with just celebrating new missiles, or GDP growth or cricket wins. True Indianness is about aligning with the values of truth and liberation that India has eternally represented. India's true legacy lies in its discovery that all external progress is meaningful only in the context of the inner illumination and liberation it facilitates. To truly be Indian is to honour inquiry over belief, and to live surrendered to the truth.

If you ask me, "What is India?", I will wait to catch you in your deep moment of im-

ersion or love. I will wait to catch you looking deeply immersed towards a mountain, or a river or a butterfly, and then I will say, "That's what is just now happening to you is India".

Wordplay involving etymologies of 'India' or 'Bharat' hardly brings you closer to the spirit of the nation. If you ask me, "What is love?" It would be foolish of me to say, I means this, O means this, V means this, and E that. Rather I will wait for you to be captivated in love, and in your moment of deepest dissolution I will say, "That's That is love".

So, if you ask me, "What is Bharat?", I will wait for you to be charmed by the pristine snow-capped Himalayas. And then, when your eyes are lit with a wonderment beyond the thought of stone and snow and sun, I would say, "That is Bharat". Or when you are reading the Upanishads, and your mind is getting lighter and your face has an inner radiance, and you are beginning to see what it means to say: *Poonamidi Poonamidi* ("This is full. That is full" - prayer from Upanishads), that's when I will say, "That! That is Bharat."

Acharya Prashant is a Vedanta exegete, philosopher, social reformer, columnist and a national bestselling author. Besides being a prolific author of over 150 books, he is the world's most-followed spiritual leader with 54 million subscribers on YouTube. He is also an alumnus of IIT-D @ IIM-A and an Ex-Civil Services Officer. To read more thought-provoking articles by Acharya Prashant, visit askap.in