

## AMERICAN IMPRESSIONS OF A HINDU STUDENT

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**T**HE word America has a strange fascination for the young Indian. American ideals of liberty and the fullness of American opportunities exercise a mysterious spell over his vivid, Oriental imagination. Indeed, to an Indian youth America stands as the gateway to the richest possibilities of life.

No one knows definitely when the first Hindu student came to this country. It was about twelve years ago, however, that Indian students in any considerable number began to enter American colleges. At that time they came mostly from the provinces of Bengal and Bombay. To-day there are in American colleges and universities over two hundred Hindus, representing nearly every section of Hindustan. The majority of these students have come of their own accord and at their own expense, but not a few have been sent by various patriotic societies intent upon introducing Western science and Western methods into their native country.

From the day the Indian student sets his feet upon American soil, he endeavors to adapt himself as quickly as possible to his new environment. Naturally modest and at times awkward, he finds it no easy thing to gain access to American society. But the Indian is a good "mixer." He abominates clannishness and exclusiveness, and he cordially hates the idea of keeping himself to himself. Time and again, I have noticed Indian students, to the number of ten or twelve, refuse to club together for fear they would not get to know as much of American life and thought as they would if they were to live apart from their fellows and mingle with the Americans. Indeed, his extreme eagerness to become rapidly Americanized gives the Hindu unequalled opportunity to study America at first-hand.

The first person that the Hindu student thinks of seriously is, naturally enough, his teacher. The American university professor has fine force and personality. He enters into the very life of his students. He teaches not only by precepts and

ideals, but also by his own example. He never despairs of his students—not even the stupidest. He will turn the intellectual pockets of his pupils inside out, and if by chance he gets anything at all, his joy knows no bounds. The striking thing about him is not his ability to impart information, which is sometimes remarkable, but his innate capacity to draw out and develop the latent faculties of his students.

The American college professor is also very human. He does not stand on dignity—a quality which we Orientals through centuries of venerable tradition have come to regard as a necessary mental equipment for all great teachers. The American usually throws ceremony and reserve to the winds and meets his students on an equal footing. This is a new experience for the Hindu, who is accustomed to look upon his teacher with reverence, if not awe.

The life of the average American student appeals to his Hindu brother as being very happy and hopeful. These American youths seem to be possessed of incurable optimism. To be sure, at times their philosophy is of the ostrich kind; but it serves their purpose well. The American student is absolutely certain of himself. He sees no lion in his path; he knows no defeat. A chief trait of his character is his habit of ultra independence; authority, tradition, and precedence are alike meaningless to him. He thinks and acts for himself. He is his own lord and master.

Although the American student is intelligent, keen, and alert, he is none too industrious. When he is told that college students in India study from ten to fourteen hours a day outside their regular class work, he looks puzzled and incredulous.

Another peculiarity in the make-up of the American undergraduate is that, with all his abounding intellectual vigor, he is not thorough. He is like the Indian swallows at the temple eaves who only half build their nests. A probable explanation of this is his practice of taking too many subjects in too short a time. As he drifts from one subject to another, obtaining only a bird's-eye view of each, he never realizes the joy of dipping beneath the surface. His diversity of interests breeds superficiality and inaccuracy, and makes him content with mere

smatterings. If I were asked to compare the American with the Indian student, I should say that in point of capacity and natural ability the American ranks with the Hindu; in originality and energy the American is the superior; but in application and thoroughness he is inferior.

The average American student is a healthy animal, who likes out-of-door sports. But athletics, as carried on in this country, seem to be meant only for the chosen few, the picked minority. In contests the object is too often the victory, and not the game. Indeed, the whole system seems to be designed especially to develop "stars" and "record-breakers." The vast majority of the students cannot participate in the game; they are forced to sit back on the bleachers and "root." American football calls to my mind visions of Roman gladiatorial contests and Spanish bull fights. It is the most muscle-wrenching, bone-breaking game that I have ever heard of. In India athletics are placed on a different plane. The football played there is not dangerous, and injuries are very infrequent. Moreover, the professional element is lacking. We hear nothing of football coaches receiving higher salaries than college presidents.

Is there any social discrimination against the Hindus in America? Do they suffer any embarrassment on account of race or color? These are some of the questions which are frequently put to us. Before answering them I wish to bear personal testimony to the warm hospitality and to the many courtesies with which I have been treated everywhere. I count among my friends professors, statesmen, authors, journalists, university presidents—men and women who are more than passing figures in contemporary American history. They have received me with cordiality, and have admitted me to their friendship and to their homes without reserve. My countrymen are of the opinion, however, that my own personal experiences have been particularly fortunate, and that they furnish no adequate basis for critical judgment on questions of racial discrimination. They insist that the Americans are colorphobe. That they are somewhat prejudiced against the Hindu on account of his race (although he is of their own Aryan descent) is unhappily true. The notorious fact that such a prejudice

exists against all other Asian peoples does not in any degree extenuate the circumstances of the case. The pity of the situation is that such an unsympathetic attitude should be found in university circles. While occasionally Hindu students have been elected to offices of trust and responsibility, and a few have even been admitted to the close preserves of Greek-letter societies, it is nevertheless true that such fortunate ones are comparatively few. To ascribe this unsympathetic attitude of mind to poor scholarship or lack of administrative ability among Indian students is to do violence to truth and fact. The only plausible explanation is that they are discriminated against on account of their nationality.

There are also some Hindu students who think that because of their religious views they are given the cold shoulder. It is hard to understand why the Indians should be so treated in a land consecrated to absolute freedom of conscience in matters of religion. As a rule, Indian students keep their Hinduism, Mohammedanism, or Buddhism to themselves. At the same time, with characteristic Oriental broad-mindedness and liberality, they show great eagerness to learn the truth concerning the various religions of America. I happen to know of seven Indian students who are now attending a State university in the Middle-West. Although not one of the number is a Christian, yet every one goes to church on Sunday, and every one is a member of either the Christian Endeavor, the Epworth League, or some other form of young people's religious union.

It is odd that some church members look askance at the Hindu students when they undertake to express their convictions on any Indian topic from the Indian point of view. Last summer while I was touring through one of the States in the North-West a minister invited me to speak before his congregation on present-day social and political conditions in India. It was such a kindly offer that I accepted the invitation with thanks. Announcement was then made of the lecture in the local press, and all other arrangements completed. Shortly before the lecture, the minister called me to his parsonage and wanted to know if I belonged to his church. Having been answered in the negative, he looked anything but pleased. He

then urged me to make a strong plea on behalf of the missionary efforts of his denomination. As that was a subject I had never studied, I expressed my regret at not being able to comply with his request. Then came a sudden and awkward pause in the conversation. A cloud seemed to pass over his face. "I guess we will call your lecture off," at last broke in the minister. "If you do not belong to our church and subscribe to our views, we simply have to cancel the engagement." Since I preferred truth and sincerity to the privilege of addressing an audience, I rejoiced at his decision and went my way cheerily. Later in the same evening I met the minister and one of his deacons. "This is the young man who was to speak in our church," he said in introducing me to his church dignitary; "but since he is in a hurry to get back to his college, I have been forced to cancel the date for his speech. We must hear him some other time."

Although a stranger may not find perfect equality of social status in America, there is, so far as I can judge, unmistakable evidence of the equality of opportunity and education. Here the son of the President of the United States has as much of a chance to get a good education as the son of any ditcher in the city of Washington. I have seen needy students, who have been working their way through college as janitors, gardeners, and table waiters, stand at the head of the class and carry off every important prize. To my mind the world does not afford another instance of such a land of noble opportunity.

The American is always a very pleasant person to meet. His frank attitude of I-am-as-good-as-you instead of ruffling me, as it does the Europeans, puts me at my ease. I feel I am dealing with my equals. These free, hearty ways of the Americans are appreciated all the more when they are contrasted with the cold, reserved manners of the English with whom we come in contact in India. The titled Englishman who holds official position in India gives himself airs of being different from other men—a bit "superior," don't you know. In calling upon him one is expected to make a low bow, and remain standing at a respectful distance. How different in America! Here no one thinks of assuming airs of importance, even though he may be holding

a high Government position. I recall that shortly after my arrival in the United States, I had occasion to call on a federal officer—a man well known throughout the country. Anxious to show proper respect for authority, I remained standing at his desk. "Sit down," he courteously requested; "drop into a chair. Make yourself at home."

With all his virtues, and he has many, the American is frequently regarded by the Hindu as an uncompromising individualist. He is self-complacent, self-sufficient. He is so wrapped up in his own affairs that he sometimes shows little or no interest in others. When we meet an American we pelt him with a rapid fire of questions regarding the standards, customs, and institutions of his country, and invite him to a friendly discussion concerning our own; but he seldom, if ever, returns the fire. He is satisfied with such news as is filtered through the Associated Press. Needless to say, the great bulk of this news deals with the odd, the extravagant, and the ridiculous; it rarely touches upon the best side of our national life.

Thus it has come to pass that Hindu students, desirous of enlightening those who are willing to learn the better truths about India, have recently started the Hindustan Association of America. This Association is a national organization with a branch in every important centre of Hindu students in America. It seeks to promote better and more sympathetic understanding between the United States and India. This it aims to accomplish through the medium of lectures, exhibitions, dinners, and other forms of entertainment. Last year the Iowa chapter of the Hindustan Association gave a Hindu play, which portrayed Hindu social life. In order to bring to the occasion an atmosphere of Indian life, the stage setting and the costuming were made entirely Indian. There is reason to believe that the audience which attended this play went away with a better insight into the Hindu literature and the Hindu social problems than could have been obtained by wading through several ponderous tomes on India.

In the long list of the activities of the Hindustan Association, mention may be made of its publications. At present, it issues, from time to time, a *Bulletin*, which gives information

concerning American educational opportunities for the stay-at-homes. It also publishes a quarterly magazine called *The Hindustan Student*. This periodical deals with Indian educational and social problems in the light of American experience. Both these publications command a large circulation in India and among the Hindu students in the United States and Europe. Indeed, the Association, by bringing America and India closer together, is rendering a most valuable service. It not only affords us an opportunity to discuss questions of Indian interest with our American friends and sympathizers, but it becomes a sort of clearing-house for the exchange of American notes and impressions.

To conclude, the Indian student before he arrives in this country entertains a highly extravagant view of American ideals. As a matter of fact the experiences which follow actual residence tend to wear off the poetry and the glamour of American life. But it is a fact that he never loses faith in the ultimate triumph of the vitalizing influences of American democracy. He is glad that he came to this land, and feels that because of his coming his life will be deeper, richer, and more fruitful.

## THE UNCOMMERCIAL DRAMATIST: FRANÇOIS DE CUREL

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C RITICISM has been unusually benevolent toward François de Curel, in spite of the fact that he has run counter to many of the most cherished traditions of the French theatre, and violated all the conventions of dramatic writing in the process. It is not the least of his distinctions that, while he was at once recognized by the critics as a writer of unusual merit, he has since failed to establish himself in their favor. Certain of these critics rapidly modified the praises with which they greeted his early work. M. Doumic, for instance, warns de Curel that he must no longer expect the tender encouragement with which his efforts as a beginner were received, and calls upon him to write a play! Since that exhortation de Curel has shown no signs of penitence, but has rather accentuated the faults to which M. Doumic and the conventional critics objected. He is determined, it seems, to disappoint the hopes which were entertained of him, and to miss the fame which was at one time within his grasp. In the course of twenty years he has only written nine plays, of which five belong to the period of his début. The production of a new play by François de Curel, *La Danse devant le Miroir*, after a silence of seven years, serves to focus attention once more upon a writer known only to those who wander in the bypaths of contemporary French literature.

In the year 1891 the *Théâtre Libre* enjoyed a unique position as the centre of modern drama in France. Antoine had shown his appreciation of new talent by producing the work of men like Brieux, Jean Jullien and Porto-Riche; and François de Curel was also amongst those who made their appearance under the same ægis. Under different names he sent *L'Amour brode*, *L'Envers d'une Sainte* and *La Figurante* to Antoine, who accepted all three, and produced the first in conjunction with Brieux's *Blanchette*, on the 2nd of February, 1892. Thus, by a peculiar coincidence, the two chief exponents of the French "drama of ideas" were both introduced to the public on the same night. De Curel, how-