

Dear friends, Hope you are all well. It has been more than five months since I last wrote one of these. Time flies indeed! I thought, after the first year of Prashant being born, things would get a little easier. It only seems to get busier. A friend talking to me about children joked that after the first 40 years it gets easier. Perhaps that is true. We'll find out. Besides teaching and research and taking care of Prashant I seem to have little time for anything else. Well, almost. We did get to go on a weekend trip to the beach and a week's vacation to San Diego. Pictures are on my flickr page. I am preparing to run a marathon in October. I might bug you all soon to donate. I have written about all of these on my blog. Both my blog and flickr page can be reached through nature-lover.net.

Talking about more serious matters it does seem these days that the problems are multiplying and threatening to overwhelm us. I find that trying to simply focus on the moment and finding peace and love within is the best way to live in such a time. I am also very grateful to your friendship and hope that you will keep in touch!

Yours, Sankar

Random Thoughts 112

7/24/2016

1. (2/21)Two observations about India:

a) So many eerie similarities between India and the US. A secular intellectual class fighting with a business class allied with religious conservatives while the silent majority of hard working less politically minded people go back and forth between the two. Majority with a minority complex, using fear of minorities, terrorism, Islam and loss of religious traditions and power to rally the masses who are really only concerned about making ends meet and building a better life for future. So many more if you keep thinking about it.

b) I was driving at night last night listening to jazz on WAMU. (Haven't done that in a while, very nice!). On the radio the singer was talking in a way that reminded me of people from the fifties. There is a certain pleasure in nostalgia, in reliving those memories. Then suddenly it hit me – this is exactly what led to the stagnation of Asian cultures. We decided not only to cherish the memories, which is what tradition really is about, but to nurture them for posterity by

making them the bedrock of our lives! It is one thing to keep alive memories of beautiful things from the past, but it is another to base one's entire life on them.

2. (2/25) The Republican party has only itself to blame for the sad spectacle that Trump has made of it. They could have chosen to take the high road and disavow the thinly veiled racist attacks against Obama. They could have accepted his high minded gestures and worked to make a better world. Instead they chose to exploit the anger and the fear and stoke divisions and hatred. Now they are paying the price.

3. (3/13) One day last week as I was walking to my office along the MacMillan reservoir after dropping off Prashant I watched an ambulance drive into the hospital with its sirens blaring. This is not an unusual sight, of course, but suddenly it hit me that perhaps there is someone facing a life threatening injury or illness in it and I said a prayer for them. I enjoy walking by the hospital complex with its constant buzz of activity and highly accomplished professionals. I also have a special fondness for this place because this is where Prashant was born and this is where he comes to play everyday at the daycare facility. Yet this

is also the place of sorrow and suffering for many people. I have not reached the stage where I can look at life and death as part of the same cosmic dance. I have heard that Native Americans would pray to the spirit of the animals they hunt and kill before eating them. Perhaps you can think of the animals as living through you. One life dies and gives rise or provides sustenance to another. Yet for me the suffering and death of any living being is a cause of anguish.

4. (3/13) I can feel the presence of my ancestors in me all the time. I can feel the depth of heart and breadth of intellect that allowed them to create the Vedas, the Upanishads, countless epics and the systems of grammar, Yoga, astrology and astronomy as well as mathematics and medicine. Yet I am sure that the very creative energy that drove them to develop new theories and philosophies is also driving me to learn the science and sociology of today and try to integrate that with whatever little knowledge I have of our traditions. I think that is exactly what they would have done. They would have laughed (or cried with sorrow) at those who try to prove that all of knowledge is contained in the Vedas or that we should follow our traditions and rituals exactly as they were laid down, without trying to analyze or improve on them.

5. (3/24/2016) Three thoughts on today's America:

1. Perhaps the dysfunction in the Republican party is due to their worship of Ayn Rand. If it is all for oneself, then why would the candidates care about the party or the country?
2. Perversely, all the mass shootings might have desensitized Americans to terrorism and stopped another senseless invasion, perhaps in Syria.
3. Hopefully out of their current despair the white working class will emerge stronger. As the cosmopolises spread and more of them interact with other groups the more prosperous and happier they tend to be, as I can see from my travels in the DC exurbs.

6. (4/19/2016) Keeping track of the NY primary. I think politics is a reflection of our own egos. Political groups are a collective ego, if you will. The various factions represent different aspects of ego. Sometimes our ego is less active, content to enjoy life and stay within our comfort zone. Sometimes our ego is more active, and tries to express itself and attain some kind of prominence. The means of doing that may vary - - sometimes it is through material progress, sometimes it is through spiritual progress. The right wing and left wing may represent these more active egos. What we need to remember is

that ultimately politics is about power and ego. However noble our intentions and approach, if we equate our cause with some kind of moral virtue we are in danger of entering the zone of ideological purity. History is replete with examples of such puritanism run amok, whether it be right wing dictators, left wing purges, or religious fundamentalists.

7. (5/4/2016)

Running has been a great blessing for me. Throughout the ups and downs of life it has helped me maintain some kind of balance. For that I have to thank my childhood friend [Sundaresh Ramakrishnan](#) for organizing a bunch of us boys to get up at dawn and exercise and go running. I fondly remember running through the sleepy streets of Coimbatore dodging the stray mongrels and the myriad things you find on Indian streets. Do you remember the short, big bellied guy running slowly around Nehru stadium every morning with his dog? I admired his doggedness!

8. (5/20) If we promote the least common denominator in our culture, then we shouldn't surprised if we get the LCD in our politics.

9. (5/31) Watching "Roots" with [Nicole](#). Seems to me that the basic system behind slavery is also

what many other societies use in which a small group of people control the wealth. The plantation owners exploited the white working class as well using racial superiority to keep them on their side. They used religion also as a tool. The British used the same system in India and the current ruling class uses it as well. A small group of the wealthy uses religion and patriotism and the collaboration of the upper middle class to exploit the masses. They evoke patriotism by inciting hatred of the "other." Same trick has been used by the Republicans including Trump now. Here the "other" are the non-white and Muslims. In India it is the Muslims, and past atrocities by Muslim invaders and current terrorism by a few are used to incite hatred against all Muslims.

10. (6/16). These days I feel good if another day passes without a mass shooting. Yet I also know that hundreds of people die every day due to bombings and shootings in various corners of the world. The quest for peace in the world will never end, I suppose, although it is a fact that overall violence has been going down during past few decades.

11. (6/16). There good and honest people in every community.

Yet some societies are on the whole more corrupt than others. Some Asian countries, notably India, as well as many African and Central American countries are high on the list. There are many reasons, of course. But I would add one that might be overlooked. There is a societal emphasis in many of these countries on one's duty to his or her family that often takes precedence over one's commitment to truth or the greater good. People justify it by saying that everybody does it, and it is the only way they could get ahead and support their family.

12. (6/26) Westerners got their kicks from conquering the external world. Easterners got theirs from conquering the internal world. Both require conquering one's fears first. But ultimately true happiness comes from knowing that one doesn't need to conquer anything. Yet, it doesn't mean inaction. As the Gita says, inaction is a kind of action as well. We have no choice but to act, and it is better to act wisely.

13. (7/20) On the last day of our trip to San Diego we visited Deer Park Monastery. Established by followers of Thich Nhat Hanh, it sits in the mountains near the small town of Escondido about 30 miles northeast of La Jolla, where we were staying. On the last day of our

trip we drove to the monastery. It was a bit of an adventure because you have to go up a steep, narrow and winding mountain road. We felt a bit nervous, to be honest, driving on that road and for a moment it seemed like it was going nowhere. Finally we reached the monastery and walked around the hilly campus. We only had permission to walk the grounds and visit the main meditation hall and that is what we did. Save for a couple of monks and laypeople we had the place all to ourselves. The absolute stillness of the place was transformational. Perhaps all that running had prepared me for that moment but I felt the turbulence, the conflicts, and the endless chatter of thoughts within my mind simply disappear momentarily. It was as if I had been walking in the fog and suddenly the fog lifted and all I could see was clear skies.

----- Be humble for you are made of Earth.
Be noble for you are made of stars. -Serbian
proverb