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Telephonic Interview with Gurcharan Das

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Gurcharan Das graduated from Harvard University where he studied philosophy with John Rawls and Sanskrit under Daniel Ingalls. He later became CEO of Procter and Gamble but now he has taken voluntary retirement to become a full time author. Telephonic interview is conducted with Gurcharan Das on Sunday, 15th March 2015 at 3:47 p.m. This telephonic interview reveals new information related to the narratives of Gurcharan Das. Below is the full transcript of the telephonic interview.

Researcher: Good afternoon sir, thank you for giving an opportunity to speak with you. I am doing my research on the topic India in the Selected Narratives of Gurcharan Das: A Critical Study. Sir, I have gone through all your works. I watch your interviews and read your blog. After reading your works I got answers to most of the questions I had. Yet there are some questions which need answers from you. So, I request you to answer these questions. With your permission, I would like to start the telephonic interview.

Q: What are your views regarding utility of literature and literary research?

Gurcharan Das: I am very fond of literature. I think literature opens up new dimensions in our life. It allows us to experience in our imagination. Literature also tells what happened to other people. Very often we don't make some of the same mistakes that people make if we read literature. Of course human beings are always making mistakes so literature is not always helpful in that regard. There are certain moral truths which literature can capture far better than say Philosophy can, and so that is why I turned to the *Mahabharata*. The *Mahabharata* is the epic work which is helpful to understand the notion of *dharma*. In *The Difficulty of Being Good*, I have examined many moral emotions such as envy, status anxiety, courage, remorse, revenge and so on. I have given examples from other literary sources to understand these moral emotions. I personally think that literature is very useful. Everyone should read it. You may become richer in thoughts by reading literature. After reading literature you may realize that some thoughts and feelings you have, are not only yours but of others' experience also.

Q: Is India diverted from spiritualism?

Gurcharan Das: India seems to be diverted from spiritualism. Indians have many more outlets now for their attention. In the past we lived simpler lives. But today there are a lot of stimuli from T.V., Internets and other sources. I am surprised that many people I know who are successful from both government and business still retain a spiritual life. My father was a successful engineer. He was a mystic. He used to meditate for two hours in the morning and one hour in the evening throughout his life. Similarly I know some business people who are extremely spiritual, so it is hard to generalize. For spiritual meditation a person needs a degree of material comfort because if a person who is always thinking about, where the next meal is going to come from, such a person is always distracted. Such person won't have the calmness of mind and freedom of the mind to sit down and to meditate. I would say now that India is transforming in to middle class society. The worry about daily food is reduced. Of course other demands come in the life. I would say that as India becomes more prosperous, people will become richer. They will return to their roots.

Q: Is the novel *A Fine Family* an autobiographical one?

Gurcharan Das: Yes, it is quite an autobiographical. But it is autobiographical in the physical terms of the location, the time, the place. The places mentioned in the novel reflect my growing up and birth place, Lyallpur. Novel is mainly based on my own family and my own experiences. This is true for many first novels, that they are often autobiographical. Let me also say that the characters are not completely auto-biographical, for example Bauji, the character from the novel *A Fine Family*, is more nuanced and a richer kind of human being than my own grandfather was. Bauji has more dimensions to him. Similarly the young boy Karan is more a creation of my imagination than any single person. But Arjun is modelled after me. There are aspects of me in Karan's character. Arjun also has superficial resemblance. Anees and Karan are fictional characters. Tara is modelled after my mother. Seva Ram is also modelled after my father.

Q: To what extent your vision of the developed India expressed in the book *India Unbound* has fulfilled?

Gurcharan Das: Certainly after 1991, prosperity has begun to spread in India. The percentage of people below the poverty line is reducing. This is all a result of the reforms we have been doing. So in *India Unbound*, I have thought that India would raise with the growth rate 7.5 % per year. Even I did not predict that in fact India would grow for five to six years with 8.5%

growth rate. I am the first person who has predicted the economic rise. And India has arisen economically. In the future India would get back to 8% growth rate. We will keep doubling per capita income per ten years with this growth rate. India will become slowly middle income country. India to become a high income country; she will have to reform its Governance. My biggest anguish is that Governance is poor in India. India needs institutional reforms such as you need to speed up the judiciary. Until we will fix Governance, we will not fix corruption. The answer to corruption is actually institutional reforms to some extent. We are doing it slowly. For example the auction we recently had for coal and for the telecom spectrum these have been transparent.

Q: Are you going to write plays like *The Three Plays* by you, because Post- Modern English literature needs such plays?

Gurcharan Das: I will tell you very honestly that I am scared of writing play now. I wrote *Three English Plays*. The reason is that, when you are in twenties, your confidence is more and you have strength. When you become older you realize your limitations. Secondly, the reason why I have moved from fiction to non-fiction is that, in *India Unbound* I finally found the voice of my own. It is very lucky when the writer finds such voice. Then writer writes naturally. This book is a favourite book of mine. The book *A Fine Family* also is written naturally. I may actually be returning to new fiction which is on the subject *Kama* means desire, one of the four *pursharthas*. Each of my books is the process of self understanding and self cultivation. I thought it best to do it with a story. It is a story of old man. The old man narrates that story at different places and happenings. He shares his wisdom regarding the way *Kama* was understood in ancient, medieval and modern times in India.

Q: How to enhance employability of women in India as women are fifty percent of the human resource?

Gurcharan Das: Only one third of the Indian women work whereas more than two third of Chinese women do work. This is more than double of Indian women. It is very sad that Indian women do not work. Communism in China says that women must work. In India even though we have more and more people who are becoming middle class, the participation of women in empowerment has not increased. It is very important for women to work because it empowers them. They become more independent. I think education will help them. If more and more girls go to school they won't drop out and they will want to work. Women in India

need more security to stand up and to say the elders often that, I want to work. Now lots of Indian bridegrooms want a girl who will be able to work. This may be an incentive.

Q: Is it possible for India to be a nation of middle class people with uncontrolled increase in population?

Gurcharan Das: India is populated. It has only 2% land of total land of the world. 16% of world's population lives in India. We can't undo the past. But with prosperity and education many states have improved. Now the number of children, the family has is decreasing in the states like Kerala, Tamilnadu and Karnataka. The population has stopped growing. But in the northern states like Bihar, Zarkhand and Orissa growing population is still a problem. Gradually the Indian families would become more prosperous. Automatically number of children in a family would come down. So I don't worry too much about this problem anymore. The Chinese tried one child policy. That policy has failed because it created other problems in the Chinese society. The Chinese society now is aging very fast. India is still a young country. So the young Indian country has got a better chance to get ahead than the old one. With better situation due to science now there are so many ways to stop growth of population. Population was growing 2.2% up to the year 1990. The population itself is declining. It has gone down to 1.5% a year. Really education and prosperity will bring it to normal level.

Q: How to overcome the problem of addiction specially growing in youths of India?

Gurcharan Das: It is a problem everywhere. In America these things are not so cheap. They are considered as illegal and law has strong control on it. In India these things should not be so cheap and law should have more control on such things.