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Returning to Canada -- and its bitter, foreboding winter - after four months of intense travel and explorations in India - I am naturally tempted to compare the life and experiences of two countries: India and Canada.

Many a long year ago, in my youth, when I came to study in Canada, I used to often wonder "Where is Home?" I used to ask, sometimes aching, about finding my roots in Canada, and feeling ever "at home" here. A haunting song from the Indian film "Kabuliwallah", "Ey mere vatan" About motherland and her memories, used to stir an excruciating yearning in me for the land and country I had left behind.

That was many years ago. Unlike me, however, millions others have left their motherlands, or have been taken away from them, under the most trying circumstances, as slaves, or indentured labour, or as refugees, sometimes escaping from religious or political persecutions.

And then there have been others who have left their cosy nests at home to explore other lands and people, or to do missionary work, to study and learn, to trade and to conquer.

For many such people, 'home' has always too confining, certainly not large enough; for

them the home imprisons the soaring ambition, or the exalted dream. That is how the great Jesuit missionary, St. Francis Xavier, arrived in Goa, then the capital of Portuguese India, on May 6, 1542.

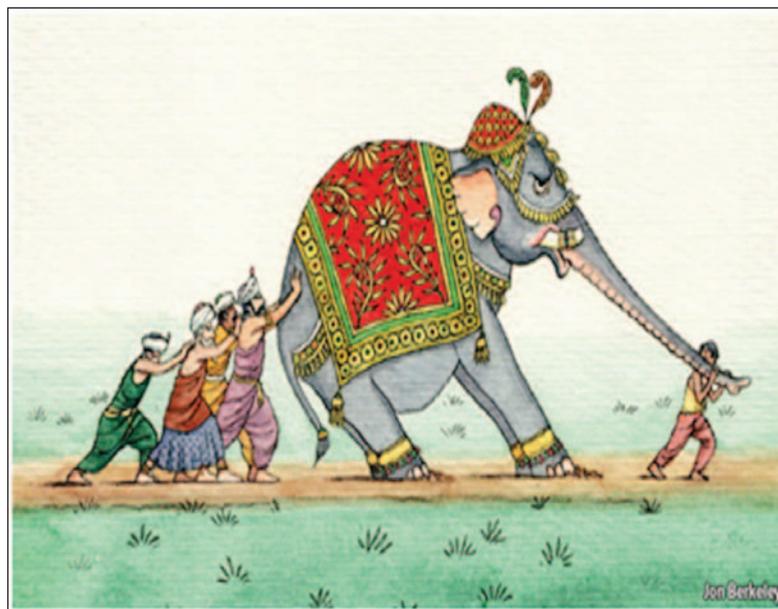
As a young missionary, imbued with the zeal of spreading Christianity to the Indies, Francis Xavier wrote to St. Ignatius of Loyola: "Lord, I am here! What do you want me to do? Send me anywhere you like -- even to India."

That is how, at the age of 23, young Charles Darwin left home and went as a 'naturalist' on the ship HMS Beagle to chart the South American coastline, and came back home five years later, as a transformed man, and with ideas that transformed our view of the world for all times to come.

It is in the same spirit that great explorers like Christopher Columbus, Ferdinand Magellan, and Marco Polo left their home and went far and wide, to unknown lands and uncharted seas, to redefine our 'home'.

As well, great spiritual teachers like Adi Shankara, Guru Nanak, Vivekananda and the Buddha made the whole world their home.

It is in this spirit, one can invoke the Urdu couplet: "Gumraha to voh hain, jo ghar se khabi nikle hi nahin". "Who



is truly lost? One who has never stepped out of his home."

Stepping out of one's home -- from one's comfort zone, from one's well-established ways of thinking and being, and from the world of the familiar and the known - is essential to discovering the power of our true home, and our roots in it. Thus what was disorienting and even disconcerting in Canada for me at the age of 21, has, now looking back, turned into a great adventure.

What created a sense of homelessness in me at one time now has given me a sense of belonging to at least to two countries, two cultures, two ways of being.

Canada and India are, of course, as distinct as two countries can possibly be. Compared to India's 1.25 billion people, Canada has only 35 million, a mere one-fortieth of India. Almost every state of India has bigger population than of Canada. Thus there are not only 40 Canadas in India, but the range of life, of culture, of traditions and life experiences are also at least forty times more.

India's civilization - as expressed in its experiments and achievements in science and technology, in architecture and structural engineering, in music and languages, in philosophical thought and literature, in political systems and institutions - goes back at least 4500 years.

'The Story of India', as Michael Wood so brilliantly tells in his six-part BBC documentaries, is rich and varied, and complex, and is filled with so many twists and turns that it overwhelms the senses and the mind.

In contrast, Canada's story is much shorter and much simpler. It is a story that is shaped far more by its grand and vast geography - almost three times the landmass of India - than by its people.

Vast range of castes and classes, and rural agrarian people that define India, and where over 70 percent of the population still lives in some 600,000 villages, are in sharp contrast with the largely urban population of Canada, and where less than three percent people are engaged in



agriculture.

The First Nations People constitute about two percent of the population of Canada; others have come here -- first from Britain and France, then from other parts of Europe, and then from China, and from Asian countries, and now from Africa, Latin America. Each new group has struggled to be accepted and to integrate into the mainstream. That struggles still continues, though with far more rights and opportunities for the newcomers than ever before.

Yet all groups of people who have made Canada their home have contributed to making Canada into a fair, decent and caring country. It is a welfare state with semi-socialist inclinations and institutions, and it endeavours to be fair and just towards all its citizens.

India, on the other hand, is a rather homogeneous country. Many ideas and influences have come to India from other lands, and the country has been invaded by the Turks, Mongols, the Persians, the Arabs, and the Europeans, but few people have come to India from outside of

its large, subcontinental borders to make it their home. There are no Europeans or Africans or Orientals living in India. Though India has more than 100 million tribal people, they too are part of the great Indian populace as a whole.

With its 22 major languages, vast diversity of cultures, religions and life experiences, contrasts in incomes, life styles and expectations, often there are far greater contrasts in India than one ever senses in Canada.

Yet despite all these differences, the human story is not all that different in different parts of the world: the need for material and social well-being; education and healthcare; fairness and justice; security and decency; freedom to be and belong; equal opportunities and equal dignity for all.

In the fulfillment of the human story, the struggles and experiments in India are much closer to the similar struggles and experiments in Canada than may seem on the surface.

We are brothers in arms together!!