

# Man with a



# global spirit

**PARTHA S. GHOSH**, born in Calcutta, based in Boston, is a true global citizen. While he claims to be a humble student of life, who is trying to come to terms with Global issues, our research indicates that he enjoys special respect and affection in global leadership circles. He is known around the world as an inspiring personality and a creative problem solver. He has had advisory role with multiple organizations worldwide and currently Dr. Ghosh is a Senior Advisor to Schlumberger Business Consulting. He also teaches Leadership at MIT, Globalization, Strategy and New Economics at Tufts University. Earlier Mr. Ghosh was a partner at McKinsey & Company and is the founder/Managing director of Strategy/Policy advisory firm Partha S. Ghosh & Associates. He has helped more than a dozen start-ups around the world and chaired the boards of Global Online and Intersoft in Japan, and Access International and Boston Analytics, in the US. He is currently the Chairman of 'The Boston Pledge' an organization focused to serve the base of the pyramid to stimulate Entrepreneurship and leadership in under privileged environments around the world.

In the last thirty-seven years Dr. Ghosh as a renowned strategist and an innovator of business and Economic models, has been involved in a broad spectrum of engagements, primarily focusing on strategic and policy issues in technology based industries including upstream and downstream industries. While passionate about Energy, Ecology and Equity, his problem solving work has included innovation and change management, and re-structuring/re-engineering of major companies. He has also served heads of state in more than half a dozen countries on strategic and policy issues related to deregulation of industries, privatization, globalization, energy (Hydrocarbon and Renewable) and socio-economic advancement. As we became familiar with his work around the world, we were delighted to learn that many of his clients and senior colleagues view him as a "creative problem solver" and a "visionary leader." Several CEOs who have worked with him describe Dr. Ghosh as a leader who "inspires leaders to build lasting legacies."

In various leadership forums, he has chaired committees focused on state-of-the-art issues related to management and governance. On forward looking issues on strategic management/policy design and leadership he has been active at Tufts University, MIT and Harvard University.

**Project Management Today** had the privilege and honour to interview Dr. Ghosh in an honest, forthright and open discussion in which he expressed his ideas, thoughts and vision.



**PMT: Please tell something about yourself and your professional life as a Global Management consultant?**

**P.G:** Well, I view myself as a permanent student of economics, business, philosophy of thought processes, and life in general; professionally companies have been and are kind to view me as a strategic problem solver. In the last 35 years or so, across industries all over the world, that's what I have done in search of innovative path-ways for my clients. In that spirit, I will particularly like to emphasize that I try to be a good student. Industries are changing all the time, organizations are continually changing often sub consciously, unconsciously, and sometimes consciously, so for me to be more effective I must continually help my clients to explore new frontiers.

While I firmly believe being a good student is absolutely essential to be able to lead a problem solving process, to be an effective consultant for boards of companies and/or parliaments of countries, the profession should be able to genuinely connect with a problem with passion, with “*an insider's heart and outsider's eyes*”. When I serve a client, I treat the company as my own company - as the chairman or the owner of the company will do; - in that spirit for me, every penny, every idea and every emotion at play in my clients' organization count. Yet I keep my eyes and ears open as an outsider, so that I can be objective and not lose sight of the bigger picture outside the realm of day to day chores. The third aspect is the ability to connect the macro with the micro. Many times leaderships of companies and governments get bogged down with the nitty-gritty details, which are all important and essential for immediate survival, but do not allow one to think and observe the big picture, which in a high velocity environment could be fundamentally risky. In that spirit I help my clients to view and understand the big picture—how the big trends are transforming the economic landscape, in turn define how the nuts and bolts of their businesses have to be managed with a different perspective and observed through a different lens, or perhaps set of different lenses.

In a nutshell, as a trusted advisor one has to bring together several fundamental streams of thought processes together in a holistic fashion. Fortunately, as I had the privilege to serve companies in ASEAN, Australia, China, Japan, Korea, India, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Europe, North & South America and several countries in Africa, I indeed had the opportunity to sense the complexities of the world, and in turn learn how to connect with local problems with a global perspective. On one hand, as consultants we have to empathetic to local conditions and on the other hand examine those situations with a global mindset, in the global context. After all, we are all living in an inter-connected globe; requiring good problem solvers to be both local and global, have both macro and micro perspectives, above all not lose sight of emotions while being economically savvy.

**PMT: What about your childhood?**

**P.G:** I grew up in this great city of Calcutta which has been the work place of so many world class stars—from Rammohun Roy to Prafulla Chandra Ray to Satyajit Ray to

Jamini Roy, Tagore, Swami Vivekananda, Subhash Chandra Bose, Jagadish Chandra Bose, Satyendra Nath Bose and so many others. Like Boston, Paris or London, indeed in Calcutta there is no dearth of role models from whom one can draw inspiration. During my early formative years growing up in Calcutta, as an individual I consider myself lucky to connect with these individuals, - all of whom earned global stature, and are exemplary leadership models. Calcutta spirit helped me to find that pathway to explore my personal role. Bengal is one of the very few places in the world which has given birth to a galaxy of personalities with global spirit, intellectual courage, spiritual forthrightness, and genuineness to do good to society. When such streams of human spirit come alive in someone's personality he/she can serve the world humbly and firmly, - "with chest out and stomach in". He/she can have the self-confidence drawn from being genuine & honest, and yet have the humility of a student to celebrate the spirit of inquiry. So my childhood days were charged with such a vision of the past.

**PMT: As we know you have a Master's Degree in Chemical Engineering and Business Administration with concentrations in Finance, Information Technology, and International Business. After, this why strategic management?**

**P.G:** Well, Strategic Management requires the ability to sense the future with creative eyes and in turn help organizations find interesting pathways to engage with transformational opportunities. Now the chemical industry or chemical engineering teaches us the arts and science to filter and refine, distil and crystallize, absorb and diffuse, catalyze and control, accelerate and activate. That's the discipline of thought processes we practice in developing and deploying strategies. In the universe of strategic management where I live, we work with lot of data, study facts and forces at work, then think through the possibilities of threats and opportunities, pick out the most important drivers of change, and crystallize a few thoughts that influence decisions and trigger actions. Thought processes that one goes through are very similar to the processes in a refinery or a petrochemical plant. In the same spirit, Information management at the most fundamental level is all about the flow of information, that help to track flow of value addition process and flow of funds. You have to bridge these two fundamental flows to evolve and execute strategies.

**PMT: You are a well known and a respected name in the world of Economic management, Strategic and Innovation management, particularly in the Energy and Chemical industries; Who or what inspired you and who are your role models or inspiration?**

**P.G:** Thank you for the qualifiers. I have enjoyed a lot of privileges, affection, good wishes and good-will of many people. I have worked in 24 plus countries around the world and for some reason I was always at ease wherever I worked. So in short I have had many global gurus, multinational teams of teachers and well wishers, who challenged me and shaped by problem solving and leadership skills.

However three individuals have had a tremendous influence in my life. Unfortunately none of them are living now. One was Swami Vivekananda. I have been reading about him since my early school years and not too infrequently my parents used to talk about him— particularly how his speech in September of 1983 at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago shook up the audience only in five minutes. It is a very high benchmark to aspire for, but why not?

The second person is a man whom I had the privilege to come in touch with and work with. He is Mr. Martin Bower who built up McKinsey and Company single-handedly (after Mr. James O. McKinsey the founder passed away at a young age when his firm was still in startup mode) into becoming one of the most prestigious consulting firms. I learnt from him what it takes to be an ethical and enlightened consultant. He taught

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me, and I am sure many, why it is important to have a missionary, intellectual and spiritual zeal in engaging with problems, in turn how to build a leadership charisma. I truly believe in his ways of being a professional and being client focused. The third person who inspired me a lot was a Japanese businessman Mr. Kazuma Tateishi who was the founder of Omron Electronics, today a multi-billion dollar company. He started his company from zero in 1950 when he was fifty years old. I met him in 1982 and served him as a Management Consultant for 3-4 years. He respected my thoughts, though he was much senior to me. He brought out the best in me to serve him in helping Omron build global foot-print. We had a perfect relationship with each other in spite of language barriers. We truly connected. Because of my interactions with him, I developed intuitive thinking capability—*being able to see what was coming what others may not see, being able to sense the environment that others are yet to realize.*

**PMT: How would you describe yourself—a self-made man, or one whose aspirations and future was shaped by “destiny”? The question is, are you the type who used to make things happen or the other way round?**

**P.G:** Life is interesting; it unfolds in mysterious ways. I believe in God or a supernatural force which takes you from one shore to another shore and through many ups and downs. I don't think anyone is self-made. I truly believe the term 'self-made' definitely does not apply to me. A lot of people in society contributes to your development, - both positively and negatively. I do believe we are all shaped and made by our environment. You have to choose from different kinds of forces and voices that work on you, listen to everyone carefully and then distill the messages for yourself. I lost my father who was a barrister, when I was 14 years old. So many people think I am self-made. I was taken care of by Mother Nature, my relatives, my teachers and my professors. I went to Hindi High School in Calcutta, which offered me a brilliant symphony of Indian and Western culture. After school, I went to I.I.T, M.I.T/Harvard and then I joined McKinsey. I always looked at every engagement with a positive spirit.

Life should be treated with respect. You must respect everything that is presented to you positively, even if it may not be conducive in terms of what you might expect. I truly believe God sends signals to how you should behave and respond in different situations. If you listen to your own inner voice and correct yourself in accordance, it helps you to navigate through the ups and downs of life smoothly. We make choices; those choices are shaped by your inner-self, which is also influenced by people and processes around you.

**PMT: Do you think a proper strategic management policy can help a project to complete on time? How?**

**P.G:** Absolutely. Every project has a beginning and an end. If the beginning is weak it will continue to struggle, and if the end is weak it never ends. A good project has to be based on sound strategic thought process. When you spend 20 million/billion dollars on a project, you better have a very clear view why this project is important, it's purpose and in what time it should be finished to be effective. If you cannot finish an undertaking on time however big or small, it loses its relevancy. If you are strategically focused on a project, that is you have a clear view of all the key elements(hard and soft), time required for the different steps, understand the risks for each step, and as a result you know the buffers that might be needed to built in, etc., etc. you could now develop what I call “a zero default Project management eco-system”; an ecosystem that spells out how the various working relationships with various suppliers, with partners irrespective where they are from will be structured, so that the project manager does not give anyone a chance to make an error, - then the probability of finishing the project within time with desired quality standards significantly increases.

In Japan for example, projects are structured differently. Most often they finish projects

within time frame, and they are known to exceed quality expectations. Specific tasks are always structured and sequenced by all the key players in the ecosystem (with every one's involvement) with an end-to-end view, with all the important details in perspective. Planning begins from the end date so that tasks are crowded close to the start point. By front loading or crowding most of the tasks upfront, and by keeping the back-end cushioned, a project manager in turn ensures that a project can finish on time. When we are undertaking a task in which multiple companies are involved, it is important for the project manager to keep track of what we are learning in each step, so that the lessons learnt today, can be applied tomorrow. As we begin working on a project we start learning about the people, their attitudes and values, their skill base, which must be reflected in structuring the subsequent steps. A good project manager must be able to create a symphony not only between the assigned tasks, between the various players taking into account the abilities and attitudes of the persons involved, but also ensure the learning's that occur and the social intelligence that is secured, is built into the next steps on a continuous and harmonious fashion.

**PMT: In Project Management where is the difference in UK/South-East Asia and in India?**

**P.G:** In the UK, the British discipline, the sense of trust and honour, are all very evident in terms of how projects are managed. As project managers British companies are in the top quartile. But do they perform as well as Japan? The answer is probably no. But they perform significantly better than Indian companies.

Southeast Asia is a broad term comprising of several countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Philippines, Vietnam etc. These countries have been influenced by the Japanese culture, while they have also have many of the elements of the British culture. The additional dimension of emotional commitment and not being limited only by transactional commitment, enable project managers in some of the South East Asian companies inspire various parties to put their heart and soul in their work. For example many projects in Singapore, Malaysia which I have been exposed to, they were very well executed.

In India unfortunately discipline, compliance, honour and trust, emotional and spiritual factors are missing. People are least concerned about discipline. People/companies have developed the habits of getting away by making excuses rapidly. I personally feel that in India a lot of rethinking has to be done about projects. Most of the projects with a few exceptions like the famous Delhi metro, that I know of, - were delayed, were over budget, short on quality, and plagued with high dosage of corruption. However when the Japanese companies do the same projects in India, they are relatively faster though they have to deal with the same infrastructural and social factors. I can only say that India before committing dear resources to large-scale projects should do some fundamental rethinking in terms of how to fix essential factors that define a successful project.

**PMT: According to you what are the most important qualities of a good Project Manager?**

**P.G:** The first and foremost thing is the ability to develop a thorough understanding of the full picture. Not only the tasks, but everything else—suppliers, partners, interfaces with government agencies, local unions, all the individuals who are playing important roles etc. As we discussed earlier, all the key elements, - hard and soft have to be kept in mind with a holistic perspective, yet in a detailed fashion. All the tasks should be so sequenced and structured so that there are built in buffers to offset risks; so if something goes wrong, it cannot upset the project. Moreover, the project manager has to be very inspirational because he/she is dealing with people of different emotional and intellectual capabilities. Every person has to be inspired differently. He should also have the ability

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and the persona to connect in a truly humble way with various stakeholders, unions and partners, yet be firm to ensure discipline and timeliness.

**PMT: How do you motivate a team? Tell us about your management style.**

**P.G:** I believe in being transparent, non-hierarchical, and intellectually honest; always well meaning to everyone, - to serve the mission, the bigger purpose. I lead with one agenda, in making the project successful as a project manager, I view my role as to help everyone involved to win in his or her own ways. On one hand, when required I am very detailed oriented but at the same time I work from a vision plane. Sometimes I revise the vision and sometimes I revise the specific tasks. This interplay between the both must go on in the conduct of an undertaking, particularly in a high frequency environment. I treat the individuals with love and care, help in the creation of emotional bonding with them.

**PMT: In your total professional career you have handled so many projects. How did you handle difficult and complicated projects?**

**P.G:** One difficult undertaking that comes to my mind is “developing country strategy for an East-European country” in the early nineties. We worked closely with the leadership of the country as well as the Confederation of Industries, which is the apex body of industries. We created a committee of 30 members including government leaders and industrial leaders. The project took 3 years and was quite successful. No project could be more complex in my profession, as it included the analyses of 58 industries from the oil and gas sector, petrochemical sector, cars & automobiles, textiles, fashion, services etc. as well as it involved examining the social and educational infrastructure requirements of the nation. I think as project leader perhaps five factors helped: (i) from the “get go”, I had a view of what might be the likely answers to the difficult issues we were working on. So we had a clearly articulated structure of what I call “hypotheses tree of possibilities” (ii) given the hypotheses tree everyone had a very clear picture of where their work will fit in. I ensured everyone knew and were comfortable with the quality standards of the analytical rigor that was expected of each member (iii) Regular reviews with the industry and government leaders to shape the recommendations, - as a result the work was viewed as the work of the national leaders and everyone felt responsible and accountable. (iv) I believe I was also able to sense where things might go wrong and I was proactive about in addressing the issues. (v) I also helped people to make tough choices in developing their analyses plan. All these contributed to the success of the project. When all the pieces of the work came together, we indeed had a very powerful set of recommendations.

**PMT: How do you assert leadership qualities? We believe you have a leadership model which many look upto?**

**P.G:** I personally believe, Leadership is about being able to inspire people to perform well when they are in your presence, as well as in your absence. I particularly believe a great leader in his absence must be able to inspire imagination in people’s minds to reach and exceed the benchmark the leader has set. In other words you have to be unlimited in your presence within the limits of physical constraints. Or to simplify I believe “Leadership is making others better in your presence, ensuring it lasts if not exceed in your absence”.

### HIS LEADERSHIP MODEL

#### THE THREE I’S

- 1) The power of INTELLECT
- 2) The power of INTUITION
- 3) The power of INTERCONNECTIVITY

**PMT: Where is India today in the context of global economy?**

**P.G:** What I will share with you is my very personal and a candid view, not influenced

by various organizations that I work with. I did have the opportunity to interact with Industry, Political and Government leaders since early 1986 on strategic issues of the nation, and I will reflect on my personal observations and the discussions that I have had in the past 25 years. I believe India has gone through a very difficult period in the last 30 years. The idealism, patriotism and the consciousness to uplift the poverty stricken people that existed in the fifties and sixties, seem to have disappeared. Malls, colorful cars, mobile phones, upscale real estate enclaves and a few modern airports have consumed the intelligentsia of the country in a complacent and comfortable state. The economy has basically catered to the top 10-15 percent people of the country, making life style of the top 5 % totally disconnected from the bottom 70%. The gap between the rich and poor has increased. Trade deficits and budget deficits have sky rocketed and corruption level has increased. The social infrastructure for water, sanitation, health and education for the common people has remained highly inadequate. As a result the fundamentals of the Indian economy are indeed fragile.

While In the last 30 years in fact the whole process of nation building has gotten diluted in the name of modernization, Today we are in a situation where we have inherited an hotchpotch of the mixed economy and added colorful financial consumerism and entertainment, which has destroyed the intellectual and spiritual depth of the country. India's stature in the global economy has decreased. India is wrapped up by several fundamental drawbacks. But not to worry! India is a great country and this greatness can be revived if it could draw strength from and build on its diversity, unified together with a well defined bottom up vision of the future. Perhaps the new Government should try to find that new inspiring path that Indians have been waiting for.

**PMT: How favourable is the business environment in Bengal?**

**P.G:** The business environment in Bengal is mediocre. But you can also look at it differently. If you look at the people in Bengal and the day to day life that they pursue a lot of work is being done at the base of the pyramid. Especially after the big industries have closed down, it has given birth to a lot of small businesses. All that we have to do is to make them more organized and provide an environment where work can be done cheerfully and honestly. I have a dream of Bengal for that matter for every state, being like a garden with a variety of flowers and bees humming around them. This dream could spread across the nation giving birth to bottom up enterprising.

**PMT: How can a Project Management company or SME's contribute in the progress of a developing country?**

**P.G:** Today, the capital efficiency of India is approximately 30 to 40% lower than China. When China builds a plant say for 500 million dollars, India builds the same plant for 650 million dollars. That 150 million dollars gap is because of poor discipline in project management, corruption, poor infrastructure, and most importantly lack of attention to details. Proper project management would immediately reduce the gap and as a result the economic output per dollar investment would increase. The likely macro effect can create significant opportunities for India's growth path.

**PMT: What according to you should be the single greatest motivation for one to become an entrepreneur? And what is the single biggest problem, the stumbling block, that de-motivates one from the idea of becoming an entrepreneur?**

**P.G:** The single most important motivation is people's desire to express their talent. When that force within is uncovered, it creates the entrepreneurial spirit in the individual. The likely stumbling block is in the mind. People focus too much on the constraints, instead of removing them and creating new opportunities, they get bogged down to view them as limits. If one is truly passionate about what he/she does, the risks don't look very big.

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**PMT: How serious is the current global melt down and how these are affecting both developed and developing countries?**

**P.G:** The meltdown is very serious, much more than people can comprehend. I was at the centre of the meltdown so I saw the struggles of the big financial institutions like Bank of America Citi-Bank, Goldman Sachs etc. as Lehman and several FIs collapsed. The US financial system is so big and complex, when the US struggles, rest of the world experience earth-quakes. As a result the west, which has been the model for the developing countries, has lost its credibility and no longer trusted as a economic system from where other countries could draw inspiration from.

Developing countries used to look up to the USA, the UK, Japan, - to learn principles and processes of economic and corporate governance, but that spirit, that confidence to learn from the advanced economies have considerably been diminished. Today we don't have a model to emulate. China is perhaps building a model which could be exciting, - capitalism embedded within socialism or communism embedded in socialistic capitalism. We have to wait and see whether China can sustain its evolution trajectory. Perhaps a new economic system could be developed around the essentials of Vedic Philosophy which I understand is based on three essential principles—Know thyself, Harmony with nature, and Serve society as if there is God in everyone. These three principles can create a socialistic and capitalistic symphony in the economy, which India could perhaps experiment with.

**PMT: What kind of development do you see in India's industrial & infrastructural projects in the next 3 to 5 years?**

**P.G:** I think to break away from the past seventy years of lack luster mediocre performance, the fundamental focus of India's socio economic development should be on the building an intelligent infrastructure for economically challenged people, - who constitute close to 75 to 78 percent of the population. India has to build the infrastructure for water and sanitation, health-care, logistics for rural output and inputs, education, and common person's transportation etc. In order to serve 850 million, it is indeed people is a huge task. So far there has not been any creative and substantive effort to build common persons infrastructure. I think the current infrastructure for the top 20% of the society has to be streamlined and simplified, but for the bottom 80% it has to be developed ground up, with future-in perspective. Industry would automatically follow. Socio-economic initiatives and development programs have to be shaped with a clear vision, with a perspective that is economically feasible, practical, yet transformable.

**PMT: Do you think in the coming 5 years time India and China will become Super Powers?**

**P.G:** China is already a superpower. India has not shown any signs what so ever to qualify for that term - superpower. With multi-dimensional deficits - budget, trade, trust, patriotism and idealism, I don't know why people even talk about it. India needs to first fix the fundamentals, similar to what China did in the fifties through the mid eighties.

**PMT: In most of the cases startup companies or small companies struggle for their existence and are finally forced to wind up. What is your view on that?**

**P.G:** Starting up a company is not easy anywhere in the world. However it is significantly more difficult in India where start-ups have to struggle against too many odds – many visible and several invisible. However, there are many start-ups, which have succeeded a like Infosys, Wipro, HCL, Nirma etc. So for Indian start-ups, I suspect there are enough examples from where one could draw inspiration from. The key challenge is

how to keep the dream in focus, so the dream can energize the entrepreneur in times when odds are against you. Team building is the most important requirement for a startup company. How one mobilizes his/her team to deal with and overcome the challenges, how he/she keeps his/her vision alive in everyone, and how one addresses each constraint with a positive attitude, all together defines the success recipe. You must have a clear understanding of your budget and don't overspend or overstretch yourself. Companies like Microsoft and HP started with very limited capital but managed their growth process very strategically. An entrepreneur has to treat capital with highest level of respect.

**PMT: In today's date the industrial development scenario of India is not very bright. In what way we can confront the situation?**

**P.G:** In contrast to the popular optimism in India, I am glad you realize it is not very bright. Firstly we have to build competitive agricultural and manufacturing platforms. The first step would be to instill in our fields and factories the culture of discipline, honest work ethics and true respect for labour, - top down and bottom up.

In most countries particularly the ones who have developed a strong manufacturing base like Germany, Japan, China, South Korea etc. It is not uncommon to observe the founders or the owners/CEOs of companies work side by side with labour, all being a part of the same community bonded together toward a common purpose. In the work environment they use the same canteens, same toilets and same recreation rooms or gyms. I am afraid India has not been to overcome the feudal system yet.

**PMT: What silver linings do you see in this cloud of global industrial & economic meltdown?**

**P.G:** I do see the silver linings. There is a fundamental thinking going on in many schools of economics on how to structure the future economic system. I firmly believe beyond capitalism and socialism we need a system in which people should have the freedom to pursue their own dreams and yet everyone is a socially conscious, and the system prepares everyone with equal level of commitment, so that everyone can get equal opportunity and everyone's dignity is protected secured through a social safety-net so that minimum standards of livelihood is available to all. I believe in the next 30 to 50 years a more advanced economic system would evolve, which is more robust and enlightened, more equitable and compassionate, yet offers everyone the freedom the pursue their dreams.

**PMT: What is your idea of a proper finishing and leadership management school in West Bengal?**

**P.G:** I think it is very much required. Leadership is about influencing positive outcome. I would love to develop such an institute. I have a leadership model based on the fusion of Vedic and Western philosophy which we could set up in place like Shantinektan, Darjeeling or Kharagpur. Do we have someone to sponsor the cause?

**PMT: Why do you think the projects are not getting completed on time? What are the reasons behind it?**

**P.G:** Lack of strategic and detailed planning, lack of discipline and lack of mutual respect between various team members, often effected by the undertone of too much of greed, corrodes the system and diminishes the quality of commitment.

**PMT: If you had to give your advice to youngsters about becoming entrepreneurs, what would it be?**

**P.G:** Discovery of self, and its expression to society in a disciplined and sincere way are the two necessary factors, - so that his/her value proposition becomes evident, and naturally accepted by the bigger global community. It is a continual process of discovery and refinement to stay relevant, in turn build distinctive brand equity. **PMT**

**Vedic  
Philosophy**  
which I  
understand  
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three essential  
principles—Know  
thyself, Harmony  
with nature, and  
Serve society as  
if there is God  
in everyone

