

Cultural Problems of India

Or

Indian Culture and its Relevance

The culture of a country is the accumulated intellectual, emotional and spiritual wealth of that nation. As a mode of thought and action it evolves itself during the community life extending over centuries and embracing experiences, struggles, conflicts, failures and triumphs. In a way culture includes unconscious and sub-conscious mind of a nation that determines and governs the conscious efforts of the nation. It is the resultant of the wisdom and madness of the nation as a whole. Pastness of the present and the present of the past constitute the culture of a country. With the passage of time the grossness of the civilisation wears out and the core of it, which imperceptibly permeates into the current of the national life, becomes culture. Geographical conditions, historical forces, political experiments, intellectual achievements and emotional reactions combined together act and react to produce what may be called culture. Indian cultural heritage has lure for the West because materialism, scientific progress and earthly attraction have so much disenchanted them that they want to take refuge in spirituality. Max Muller, writes in his work *India: What can it Teach us* “that corrective which is most wanted in order to make our inner life more perfect, more comprehensive, more universal, in fact more truly human, a life not for this life only, but a transfigured and eternal life, again I should point to India.” In fact Indian culture does not limit itself to a race or a nation but embraces the whole humanity-it is cosmopolitan.

Our culture has been called human culture-*Manava Sanskriti*. It is oingrained in human aspirations, human ambitions and emotions, human reactions and human efforts. In this sense it is universal and human reactions and human efforts. In this sense it is universal and eternal and has never been localized and limited. Despite incessant attempts of barbarous invaders to root it out, it endured and persisted. That is why it is known as beginningless (*anadi*) and endless (*sanatan*). It has not been grafter because it takes within its fold the best of all the cultures. What Professor J.B. Pratt said of the “Vedic Way” (Hindu religion) is true of our culture-it “leads to life- which is self-perpetuating, self-renowing.....”. It has been adapting, evolving and regenerating itself.

Catholicity has given substance to Indian culture. There is liberal adjustment to other's opinion and views. In fact has our culture been religious it would have been unaccommodating because religions generate fanaticism; our culture is

philosophical. The ultimate reality is called *sunya* (nothing) by Nihilists, *Brahman* by the Vedantists, *Purnisa* by Sankhy philosophers, *Iswara* by the followers of the Yoga school, *Shiva* by the Shaivas, *Time* by those who believe in time and *Self* by those who take it to be self. Clearly it covers a wide range of philosophical concepts. So tolerance is not imposed it is inherent in the very nature of our culture. The philosophy of *Anekata* which advocates innumerable aspects of reality, the doctrine of *Syadavada*, which means the use of restraint in making judgements prove the catholicity of Indian culture. It became non-aggressive, non-violent, non-competitive, unsuspecting and even undefensive. In contrast to this, Western culture was based upon Man versus Nature and so it is violent, competitive and suspecting.

Every culture provides a pattern of life, affords and insight into man's life and to this extent every culture is spiritual. But the spirituality of Indian culture lies in its bowing introspective. It examines Nature and Universe as comprehended through the consciousness of the individual. Such apprehension makes the inexorable laws of Nature as a part of the self. Thus the same laws govern the world of phenomena and the consciousness of the individual. Many strive to discover balance between the consciousness of facts and the facts themselves. Thus synthesis between the self and the universe is not physical or material, it is spiritual and in a sense, moral. Man's primary function, as envisaged by such a concept, is the apprehension of the moral nature of the Universe. His knowledge lies in understanding the universe and Nature in terms of consciousness of the individual; his faith lies in this very knowledge. So knowledge to us is faith. This brings us to the "central truth of human personality which is love, virtue and peace". The human personality is "an individual's assets and liabilities on the reaction side" [J.B. Watson]. Science gives the knowledge of facts and ignores the moral consciousness and so the real nature of man and universe. The growing dissatisfaction and frustration of the modern world issues out from this ignorance. Hence persons like Alexis Carrol discover the remedy in "much more profound knowledge of ourselves."

The foregoing discussion gives the concept of man, as conceived by Indian culture. Man, according to our culture, is soul that transmigrates from one body to another for its evolution. Through the series of lives it is evolving itself of Godhood. It is striving to merge itself with the universal soul; it yearns for its fulfillment and for its development. This makes us other-worldly; we hate material pursuits and worldly attachments for the other life. Obviously life is an act of sacrifice, it is an offering or a 'Yagya'. An individual should dedicate his life to the service of God, and society at large. One should renounce personal considerations, material comforts and worldly desires for the sake of the other world and the other self that is society. One is to do one's duty without claiming

rights. On the other hand Western culture is acquisitive and self-assertive: it asserts individual rights as against the state and society. The commandments, which should guide the activities of the individuals are implied in *Dharma*. *Dharma* means *Dhriti* which further implies one that holds, supports and keeps everything in its proper place. It is a cementing force that binds together the divergent forces. The commandments are patience, perseverance, forgetfulness, self-control, cleanliness of mind, body and soul, reasonableness, mastery over anger, knowledge and truthfulness. *Dharma*, as enunciated by Manu, enables an individual to become a perfect being and a useful member of the society. The life of an Indian was divided into four Ashrams: *Brahmacharya*, which is the period of acquiring knowledge of this world and ultimate reality; *Grahasht* is meant to earn and feed the people and perpetuate his race; during *Vanaprasth* he renounces the world to attune himself to the Almighty; in *Sanyas* he is detached from his home, hearth and everything-he lives in the world but is not at all worldly and the whole earth is his home.

Man stands between animals and gods. It is through actions and conduct that he can rise higher to the level of gods and sink low to animals. Discipline or yoga is the way to achieve greatness-spiritual and moral. Human consciousness, according to Indian psychologists, has three aspects viz., awareness (*jnana*), desire (*ichchha*) and activity (*kriya*) corresponding to the modern concepts of *cognition*, *affection* and *conation*. *Jnana yoga* widens man's awareness, *bhakti yoga* helps in controlling his desires and emotions and *karma yoga* trains him in righteousness and disinterested performance of duty.

There are other yogas to control other factors of human personality. A yogi may not make devilish use of powers so he is supposed to observe certain moral principles called *Yama* and *Niyama*. The *Yamas* are (a) *Ahimsa* that is freedom from ill-will against at a times (b) *Satya* that is truthfulness (c) *Asteya* that is abstinence from misappropriation of other's property (d) *Brahmacharya* i.e., celibacy (e) *Aparigraha*-freedom from avarice. The *Niyamas* are (a) *Saucha*-cleanliness external as well as internal (b) *Santosha*-contentment (c) *Tapas*-austerity (d) *Swadhyaya* i.e., study and (e) *Ishwara pranidhana* i.e., surrender to God. These are the processes that will lead to the perfection of man which means elevation of man to godly heights.

The key-note of our culture is *Samanvaya*-a synthesis-an effort to combine the apparently discordant fragments of life and experience. According to Erich Fromm, Indian culture in its broader connotations includes all that has been achieved in the domain of thought and in the pursuit of the good life of people of India as a whole or in groups. It has a great capacity to assimilate and digest foreign cultures for its own growth. The assimilation started ever since the most important companion elements of the Indian people (the Austrie, the Dravidians

and the Aryan speaking groups) began to form in the upper Gangetic plains as single people having a single Aryan speech and sharing the same tradition, the same way of thought, the same attitude and the same life. This culture took its origin in 1000 B.C and took another 500 years to be fully characterised and another 500 years to expand from Gangetic valley to the whole of India. Thus it was a chemical compound of all diverse elements. Aryans, who worshiped Nature and believed in rituals came in contact with the people of Mohanjodaro and Harappa civilisation who worshipped images and brought about a synthesis of their ways of life and experience. With the coming of Islam it was enriched with mysticism giving rise to *bhakti* movement. The impact of the advent of European powers helped further, assimilation. Indian metaphysical thought has this very process of assimilation. Incidentally this accounts for the longevity of Indian culture.

The present day world is on the cross road. A step in the wrong direction might spell doom for the whole of humanity. The reasons for this crisis are moral lapses, unethical approach and selfish interests. The root causes are scientific materialism, detached outlook and matter of fact attitude. Community life demands concessions, sacrifices and an attitude, which does not reduce human beings to alphas, betas or gammas and social relations to a mathematical equation. The big powers are playing the game of chess with the nations as their stooges. The conscience of the nations has to be aroused and humanitarian feelings are to be developed. Geographical unity of the world is to synchronise with oneness of feelings, oneness of purpose and the realisation of the unity of life. Indian culture that embraces the whole of humanity has a mission in the present context of circumstances. It is to work for the good of humanity, remaining true to itself, and finding a forceful expression through one or the other person. A Gandhiji or a Nehru may give the lead in this direction-may become the unconscious builder of humanity or the man of Destiny. Walt Whitman's (the well-known American poet) discovery of the need for a '*Passage to India*' is real panacea for the ailing humanity. Indian culture is more relevant today than it has ever been.